



project.org

STUDENT HANDOUT

RED LEVEL
GO DEEPER

Voice, Body, Story

Grades 5–8 · Theater

ADMIT ONE

NAME

DATE

CLASS

Dramaturgical frame: The actor and playwright Anna Deavere Smith, builds her plays from interviews and testimony. When you step into a historical character with full commitment — their fears, their hopes, their specific historical context — you gain a form of knowledge that reading alone cannot provide. This is the unique power of theater.

STEP 1

Character development: build your character with historical precision

Choose a character: historical figure, fictional voice, or a scene for two voices:

Character name and role:

Specific historical moment (year, location, what is happening in the world that week):

Status: What power does this character have — and what power are they denied? How does that show in their body?

Subtext: What does this character want to say but cannot — or will not? Why?

STEP 2

Write your performance (90–120 seconds)

Mark in the script: one moment of **STATUS** shift (character gains or loses power), one moment of **SUBTEXT** (what is said vs what is meant), and one **SPECIFIC HISTORICAL DETAIL** woven naturally into the speech.

MORE PERFORMANCE SPACE

STEP 3

Dramaturgical note

A dramaturgical note explains the research and choices behind a performance. Write yours (5–7 sentences): what historical sources did you draw on? What choices did you make about status, subtext, and voice — and why? What does your performance argue about this character or this moment in history?

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Anna Deavere Smith performs real people in their own words. **What did you discover about the Harlem Renaissance — or about yourself — through performing this character that you could not have found through reading? What are the limits of this kind of historical performance? What risks does it carry?**

MINI MUSEUM DEEP DIVE

The **Harlem in Words** section includes actual language from Harlem Renaissance texts. Use three words or phrases from the exhibition in your performance — not as quotation, but woven naturally into your character’s speech. After performing, reflect: how did using authentic language change the quality of the performance?

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/harlem-renaissance

RESEARCH EXTENSION

Find and read one scene from a Zora Neale Hurston play (*Color Struck*, 1926, is freely available online). Analyze: how does Hurston use dialect, rhythm, and silence? How do those choices serve her characters?