



JAJA'S AFRICAN HAIR BRAIDING

WRITTEN BY JOCELYN BIOH

DIRECTED BY DONNA BRADBY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

A RESOURCE GUIDE FOR THE PLAY
GUIDE CREATED BY TIFFANY BRYANT-JACKSON AND BRIANNA
HAWKINS

"What kind of perfect immigrant are they looking for, eh? When it comes to us, the rules are alllllways changing!"

-JaJa

- What spaces or environments in your life act as safe havens where you feel seen and supported?
- How can you build more meaningful connections with people whose experiences differ from your own?
- Are there cultural traditions or practices in your life that you hold onto, even when adapting to new environments or challenges?
- What can you do to support individuals or communities who are navigating dual cultural identities or facing discrimination based on their appearance or heritage?

EMBRACING ROOTS: MY JOURNEY THROUGH HAIR CARE, HERITAGE, AND COMMUNITY

by DEBORAH WHITAKER

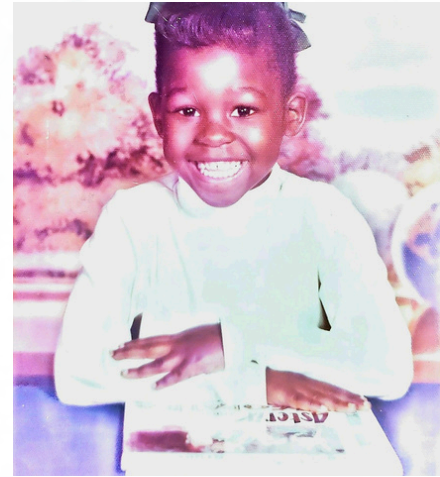
My journey into hair care has been a blend of personal passion and cultural heritage. Growing up in Greensboro, NC, I first discovered my love for hairstyling in my teens when my mother gifted me a Barbie doll head to practice on. I spent countless weekends perfecting roller sets and trying new styles on that little doll head, laying the foundation for what would become a lifelong pursuit.

In my twenties, I made a pivotal decision: I stopped using hair relaxers and chose to embrace my natural texture, a choice that resonated with the broader movement within the African American community to reconnect with our roots. Learning to braid my own hair was challenging at first, but each attempt brought me closer to mastering my craft and sharing those skills with others in my community.

As I developed my expertise, I faced regulatory challenges that many hair braiders encounter. These challenges have shown me just how essential it is to fight for cultural recognition and the preservation of traditional practices. For us, braiding and styles like locs are more than just techniques—they are powerful symbols of self-expression and a direct connection to our ancestral heritage. I continued to build my knowledge through hair shows and networking with stylists and product creators, finding inspiration and learning new techniques along the way.

Throughout my career, I've found that hairstyling isn't just about transforming hair; it's about forming deep connections with people. Many of my clients have come to see me not just as their stylist but as a confidante. In each session, we share stories, struggles, and laughs, underscoring the intimate role hairstylists play in the lives of others.

My journey in hair care reflects resilience, growth, and the joy of preserving and sharing our culture. It's a story of self-discovery and community building, and through it all, I'm reminded of the profound role that hairstyling plays in expressing identity and honoring heritage.



Deborah Whitaker served as our Hair Designer for this production.

Additional Resources

To Watch

BEAUTY SHOP

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0388500/>

THE VISITOR

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0857191/>

BLACK POWER IN HAIR | BABYBANGZ | THE NEW YORKER DOCUMENTARY

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?
v=vtaV6dhVrUg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtaV6dhVrUg)

LOST BOYS OF SUDAN

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0383475/>

Book Corner

BEHOLD THE DREAMERS BYIMBOLO MBUE

<https://tinyurl.com/3r24aanb>

HAIR STORY: UNTANGLING THE ROOTS OF BLACK HAIR IN AMERICA

BY AYANA BYRD AND LORI
THARPS

<https://tinyurl.com/yk8sem7n>

AMERICANAH

BY CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

<https://tinyurl.com/4fyd7wv>

WE NEED NEW NAMES BY NOVIOLET BULAWAYO

<https://tinyurl.com/2nr6b88c>



Move the Mission Forward

Our mission is to create a performing arts experience that is socially engaged, professionally managed, and creatively inspired.

Now that we've introduced you to JaJa's African Hair Braiding, we encourage you to join us in fostering meaningful conversations within your family and your community. Share your reflections on the play's themes, engage with others to deepen your understanding, and consider how you can contribute to creating a more inclusive and empathetic society.