Teaching material

**Recommended level:** Year 9, year 10 and upper secondary (gymnasiale uddannelser)

**Subject:** English

**Cross-curricular work:** Danish (and other languages), history, social studies, media studies and art
**Table of contents**

**FOR THE TEACHER**

- About the material ................................................................. 4

**SYNOPSIS – PRECIOUS /CHARACTERS** ............................................. 6

- Glossary and things you might want to know ................................. 8

**HARLEM** ................................................................................................. 9

- For the teacher .................................................................................... 9
  - Pre-teaching - before you watch the movie ....................................... 9
  - Pre-activity ....................................................................................... 9
  - While-activity .................................................................................. 9
  - Core-activities .................................................................................. 10
  - Post-activity ..................................................................................... 10
- Pre-teaching - history, facts and statistics ...................................... 11
  - Pre-activity ..................................................................................... 16
  - While-viewing activity ..................................................................... 17
  - Analyzing and noticing activity ..................................................... 21
    - Picture #1 ................................................................................... 22
    - Picture #2 ................................................................................... 23
    - Picture #3 ................................................................................... 24
- Discovering Harlem ........................................................................... 25
  - Postcard template .......................................................................... 28
  - Post-activity ..................................................................................... 29
- Worksheet 1 ....................................................................................... 30
- Worksheet 2 ....................................................................................... 32
- Worksheet 3 ....................................................................................... 34
- Worksheet 4 ....................................................................................... 36

**EDUCATION** ............................................................................................. 40

- For the teacher .................................................................................... 40
- Before watching Precious .................................................................. 41
  - Aim ................................................................................................. 41
  - Activity .......................................................................................... 41
  - Follow-up activity .......................................................................... 41
  - Extra ideas or activities .................................................................. 41
  - While viewing Precious ................................................................... 44
DOMESTIC ABUSE .................................................................................. 50
Definition of abuse ............................................................................. 50
For further DK information ................................................................. 50
For further US information ................................................................. 50
How to use the material ...................................................................... 51
Pre-viewing activity ........................................................................... 52
While viewing the movie “Precious” .................................................. 53
Core activities ..................................................................................... 56
Produce a folder .................................................................................. 56
Newspaper article ............................................................................... 56
Annual day for “Stop Domestic Abuse” .............................................. 56
Write a letter to .................................................................................. 57
Interview with Jackie Fernandez ......................................................... 58
LINKS AND REFERENCES ...................................................................... 65

Credits:
Original title: ‘Precious’, USA, 2009
Director: Lee Daniels
Writer: Geoffrey Fletcher,
Based on the ovel ‘Push’ by Sapphire
Length: 100 minutes
Awards: 2 Oscars, 70 more wins and 54 nominations
Rated:

Cast:
Claireece Precious Jones: Gabourey Sidibe
Mary Lee Johnston: Mo’Nique
Miss Blu Rain: Paula Patton
Mrs Weiss: Mariah Carey
Nurse John McFadden: Lenny Kravitz
FOR THE TEACHER

This teaching material was produced in spring 2010 by student teachers from the International Programme at University College UCC, School of Teacher Education Blaagaard-KDAS. You are welcome to contact one of us for further information on how to approach the various sections.

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About the material
The movie Precious addresses a variety of issues, too many to include in our teaching material. With reference to the National Curriculum for English we have chosen culture as the main topic. The material is divided into three sub-themes; Harlem, Education, Abuse. The content was developed so that you may choose to either work with all the material from one sub-theme, select single activities from the sub-theme, or choose individual activities from all three sections. We recommend that you turn to the Harlem section for background information, where you will find an extensive description of the neighborhood and a PowerPoint presentation to use as a short introduction for the students. A short introduction to each sub-theme follows:

**Harlem:** (ctrl + click on title for hyperlink to the topic)
In order to understand the life Precious lives, it is important to have some knowledge about Harlem, NY, where she was born and raised. It is a very tough neighborhood afflicted by violence and crime, and it is therefore important to start with pre-teaching activities, which will the pupils with background knowledge on Harlem. In this section the focus is on language, culture and environment in Harlem.
Suggestion for cross-curricular work:
Social studies, history and Danish.

**Education:** (ctrl + click on title for hyperlink to the topic)
The activities in this section aim for students to learn more about the American school system both in general, in relation to their own school system and very much as it is portrayed in Precious. The students will get tools for producing material to take an active stand on the problems Precious faces in her school life and in her future studies.
Suggestion for cross-curricular work:
Social studies, languages (if you choose to work with educational systems in other countries) and media studies.
Domestic Abuse: (ctrl + click on title for hyperlink to the topic)
The final area we have chosen for you to work with is domestic abuse. As it is a very delicate subject to go into, it should be approached carefully. We have considered written assignments the best choice for working on various kinds of abuse. For pre-activity there is a brainstorm on abuse after having seen the short film 'Break the Chain'. The core activities are making a leaflet, writing a newspaper article, products for a 'Stop Domestic Abuse-campaign and a letter writing activity. As for the other areas there are templates for a while viewing activity, which may help the students remember the plot of the film. Suggestion for cross-curricular work:
Danish, social studies and art.
SYNOPSIS – PRECIOUS /CHARACTERS

The year is 1987. We’re in Harlem and Claireece Precious Jones is the name of the 16-year-old girl who is the main character in the movie Precious based on the book Push by Sapphire.

Precious faces many problems - obesity, illiteracy and being pregnant for the second time after being sexually abused by her father.

At home in the ghetto of Harlem her dysfunctional and abusive mother has been mentally, physically and often also sexually abusing her for her whole life. The family subsists on welfare benefits, and the mother does nothing but smoke all day. Precious’ first child, Lil Mongo has Down syndrome and lives with Precious' grandmother who takes care of her well.

At school Precious is being bullied in and out of class and when the principal discovers her pregnancy, she is expelled but referred to an alternative school, Each OneTeach One. With the help of her new teacher at this school, Miss Rain, Precious gradually learns to read and write. Slowly she gains enough strength to change her poor existence and in spite of the mother’s destructive behavior towards her, she manages to come to school and to write the essays which help her come to terms with the dark sides of her life.

Whenever Precious is sexually abused by her father, she looks into the ceiling and escapes into a dream world where she is a celebrity. Her imagination is an important part of her life. Whenever facing her reflections in the mirror she pretends to be blond, white, pretty and thin, in other words a girl, who is appreciated exactly the way she is.

She gives birth to her second child Abdul. At the hospital she experiences kindness from the male nurse and her classmates but when she returns home, her mother deliberately drops her baby and starts hitting Precious. Precious then grabs her baby and flees from the apartment. After having roamed the streets of Harlem for hours with nowhere to go, she decides to break into the Each OneTeach One school and stay the night.

During the next few days her teacher, Miss Rain, succeeds in arranging a room at a halfway house for Precious and her baby. In the halfway house she gets assistance to care for her baby while attending school.

Precious meets with her social worker Miss Weiss regularly and she helps her confront her mother.
Claireece Precious Jones (Precious) is 16 years old and lives with her abusive mother in Harlem. She has difficulties at school and at home. In the beginning of the movie she gets kicked out of Junior High School for being pregnant with her second child.

Mary Jones (Mother “Muffa”) lives with her only child, Precious, in Harlem. She lives from welfare benefits provided for taking care of Precious and Precious’ daughter. She is abusive towards Precious and seems mainly concerned with getting the welfare cheque.

Mr. Westchester is Precious’ math teacher from Junior High School. He helps Precious get into an alternative school. He says she is one of his best students.

Mrs. Paula Lichtenstein (Ms. Westchester or Ms. Fuckface) is the principal at the Junior High School that Precious attends at the beginning of the movie. She expels Precious and helps her get into an alternative Junior High *Each One Teach One*.

Mrs. Blu Rain (Ms. Rain) is Precious’ teacher at the alternative school *Each One Teach One*. She helps Precious with her education as well as her personal life.

Mrs. Weiss (Mrs. Wiss) is Precious’ social worker. Precious has to speak to her every week to get the welfare cheque. Mrs. Weiss wants Precious to tell her the truth about what is going on at home and she even confronts Precious’ mother.

Nurse John McFadden (Nurse John) is Precious’ nurse at the hospital where she gives birth to her son. He takes very good care of Precious.
Glossary and things you might want to know

- **Muver = mother**
- **crackers = crack addicts**
- **buzzer = doorbell**
- **AFDC = allowance from the municipality/state**
- **pan a pit = painting a picture**
- **go’baut = is called / known as**
- **mungo = mongolism / Down’s Syndrom**
- **down sinder = Down’s Syndrom**
- **nuffin’ = nothing**
- **stiped = scholarship**
- **fly = cool**
- **tesses = tests**
- **bresses = breasts**
- **aks/ax = ask**
- **smirk = a smile that shows you know something others don’t.**
- **Notice the grammatical forms that are incorrect in standard English e.g. you is, they is, we is, you was, I ain’t nothing like, I won’t have nothing, I didn’t need no more, she didn’t say nothing, you ain’t gonna see me no more, don’t nobody etc.**
- **Notice the use of profane language**
- **Junior High School: Students attending Junior High School are 10-14 years old (it varies from one state to another).**
- **TAB test: A score of 8,0 or higher gives you admission to High School, where you get your GED degree.**
- **General Educational Development (or GED) tests are a group of five subject tests which, when passed, certify that the taker has American or Canadian high school-level academic skills.**
- **Welfare: Financial aid provided by the public sector to individuals in need, help to improve their employment chances and many other aspects of their lives including sometimes their mental health.**
- **Halfway house: A house where people in need (often abused women) can stay for 1-6 months, while they are trying to establish their personal life. They get help on a physical and mental level as well as help to find a job and a permanent place to live.**
HARLEM

For the teacher

Pre-teaching - before you watch the movie
In order to understand the life Precious lives, it is important to have some knowledge about New York, and especially Harlem, where she was born and raised. It is a very tough neighborhood afflicted by violence and crime, and it is therefore important to start with pre-teaching activities, which will provide students with background knowledge on Harlem. There is a copy for the teacher to give you extra information on the history and current situation in Harlem. There is also a PowerPoint presentation with the most important facts and relevant statistics.

Learning outcomes for the pre-teaching stage is:
Students will become familiar with Harlem and understand Precious' life, background and environment. Students will understand the historical development of Harlem including cultural differences over time, social structures and demographical differences.

After you have completed the pre-teaching activities, there are pre-, while-, core-, and post activities to work with.

Pre-activity
The task in the pre-activity is: An observation and analysis of the environment of the students’ own school and display of posters as their final products.
(Group work)

Materials
The students will need at least one cell phone with a camera in each group, a printer and posters to glue their pictures on.

Learning outcome
Students will be aware of their own surroundings
Students will be more aware of the defining characters of the background, environment, and surroundings in the movie.
Students will increase their vocabulary through description
Students will be able to focus on important fix points to look for in the movie when working on the while-activity.

While-activity
The task in the while-activity is: To notice special elements/contrasts and various defining features of the area in Harlem and Precious' environment as depicted in the movie.
(Individual/group work)

Materials
'Things That Make You Wonder'-worksheet.

Learning outcome
Students will be more aware of certain fix points in the movie. The activities aim to scaffold students in such a way that they are able to notice cultural signs in their assignments. The activities further aim to match students' individual learning zone by not giving specific requirements for noticing.

Core-activities

Core activity #1: Analyzing & Noticing
Written task of between a half and a whole page. The writing can be done individually by the students or as pair work. Organize the students in groups of four. The students then exchange ideas and thoughts from their 'Things That Make You Wonder' lists and discuss their observations. They compare lists and try to find differences and similarities in what they have found. Then they team up with their shoulder partner and choose one of the three pictures in the activity to write about. They have to agree on which picture to choose and whether there are any elements from their lists they would want to include. They finish off by presenting their work to the other shoulder pair students in the group, discuss their final work, give feedback and display their texts in class.

Activity #2: Discovering Harlem
The students team up in groups of four. They read the interview Discovering Harlem and discuss the differences between East and West Harlem. They make a list of five to ten areas with similarities between the two depictions of Harlem (from the movie and the interview). Then they pair up with their shoulder partner and write a postcard for someone back home in Denmark, pretending to be tourists in Harlem. They have to decide on which unique features in Harlem they want to include in their postcard. They finish off by presenting their postcards to the other shoulder pair students in the group, discuss their final work, give feedback and display the postcards in class.

Materials
Worksheet with the three pictures from the movie and the interview 'Discovering Harlem'. Postcard template, scissors, internet access (for printing of pictures to decorate the front of the postcard).

Learning outcome
Students will gain enhanced intercultural competence. By including their previous knowledge from the pre- and-while activities students get an overall understanding and also get a chance to move into a 3rd person perspective on culture. Students further train their vocabulary and language skills. If the activities are carried out in groups, students will increase their cooperative skills.

Post-activity
The tasks in the post-activity are: Role play, where the students have to portray Ms. Weiss and Precious, a language focus where the students will work with sociolects, and writing a feedback letter to Rita (one of Precious’ classmates).

Materials
Worksheets 1-4.

Learning outcome
The students will have an understanding of unfamiliar sociolects, especially in Harlem. They will have an understanding of Precious’ life and will be able to put themselves in her/Ms. Weiss’ position. Students will get increased problem-solving skills regarding issues of relevance in the film.
The students will train their grammar and syntax skills by finding and correcting grammar and spelling mistakes.

Suggestions for further activities and reading:

- Field trip sto Nørrebøro or Vesterbro in Copenhagen, Gjellerup Parken in Århus or Volsmose in Odense (or other areas that you find might provide interesting opportunities for students to focus on cultural influences, environments and cultural signs in an area)
- Look for similarities between the different cultural areas. An analysis/observation of the areas.

Literature references:

- *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker
- *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

Pre-teaching - history, facts and statistics

Harlem was originally a farming village founded by Dutch settlers.

The original village of Harlem was established in 1658 by Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant and named Nieuw Haarlem after the Dutch city of Haarlem.

With the arrival of the English in 1664, the name of Nieuw Haarlem was changed to Harlem.

Harlem was independent of New York City until 1873.

In 1837 the New York and Harlem Railroad was built along Park Avenue. During 1878-1881 the elevated railroads reached into Harlem.

After the village was incorporated into New York City and after the construction of the New York and Harlem Railroad the population of Harlem increased.

From the 1870s Harlem was the site of a massive wave of speculative development, which resulted in the construction of numerous new single-family row houses, tenements, and luxury apartment housings. Religious, educational and cultural institutions as well as large commercial companies were established in Harlem to serve the expanding population.

In the late 19th century (1800s) immigrants and their descendants such as Jews (mainly), Italians, Germans and Brits as well as other ethnic groups moved into the neighborhood in large numbers.

A collapse of the real estate market hit Harlem in 1904.

After 1904, black residents arrived en masse, with numbers fed by the Great Migration.

The Afro-American Realty Company was founded in 1904 and it played a major role in the development of
Harlem as an African-American community.

In 1907 black churches began to move uptown into Harlem.

The migration to Harlem continued up until and during the 1920s as people came to New York in record numbers from the American South and the West Indies.

In the 1920s and 1930s the neighborhood was the locus of the 'Harlem Renaissance'. At the time this was also known as the New Negro Movement.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s (The Harlem Renaissance) Harlem served as the home and key inspiration to generations of novelists, poets, musicians and actors. The pace of New York City, the blend of backgrounds of the people who settled in Harlem and the difficulties associated with living in Harlem were among the experiences that found expression in theater, fiction and music among other art forms.

In 1920 Harlem was 32.43% black. The 1930 census revealed that 70.18% of the residents in Central Harlem were black and lived as far south as Central Park at 110th Street.

As the black population moved in, white residents left Harlem; between 1920 and 1930 more than 118,000 white people moved out of the neighborhood and 87,417 African-Americans settled.

The population boom allowed landlords to charge more for accommodation in Harlem while also providing minimal maintenance, ultimately leading to the deterioration of many residential buildings in the Harlem neighborhood.

In the late 1920s a typical white working-class family in New York paid $6.67 per month per room, while blacks in Harlem paid $9.50 for the same space.

The high cost of accommodation forced many African-Americans to live in close proximity.

The population density in 1920 was about 215,000 residents per square mile. (In 2000 Manhattan as a whole had a population density of less than 70,000 residents per square mile.)

From 1910–1945 Harlem became the capital of black America.

The percentage of African-American residents peaked in 1950.

Inadequate housing contributed to racial unrest and health problems by the late 1940s and 1950s.

In 1960 51% of all residential buildings in Harlem were below acceptable standards. The New York City Buildings Department received more than 500 complaints daily of rats in the buildings, crumbling plaster, lack of heat and unsanitary plumbing.

By 1987 65% of all buildings in Harlem were owned by the City of New York and many had been abandoned. These buildings eventually became convenient places for drug dealing and other antisocial and criminal activity.
The lack of habitable buildings and falling population reduced tax rolls and made the neighborhood much less attractive for residential and retail investments.

**Change in demographics**

After four decades of decline Harlem’s population bottomed out in 1990 at 101,026 residents. It had decreased by 57% from its peak of 237,468 in 1950. Between 1990 and 2006 Harlem population grew by 16.9% due to an influx of whites and minorities of Hispanic and Asian descent.

The neighborhood remains a predominantly African-American area, data with estimating about 72% of the population in 2005 to be African-American. The number of white residents has increased from only 672 people in 1980, about 0.5% of the population, to some 5000 people, or 4.3% of the population, in 2005.

As of September 2008 the number of white residents is estimated to have tripled from 2005.

**Culture**

The Apollo Theater (as it is known today) opened on 125th Street on January 26, 1934.

In the 1920s and 1930s, between Lenox and Seventh Avenue in central Harlem more than 125 entertainment venues were in operation, including speakeasies, cellars, lounges, cafes, taverns, supper clubs, rib joints, theaters, dance halls, bars and grills.

Black Harlem has always been religious and the area is home to more than 400 churches.

The Manhattan contribution to hip-hop stems largely from artists with Harlem roots, including Kurtis Blow and P. Diddy. Harlem is also the birthplace of popular hip-hop dances such as the Harlem shake, Toe Wap, and Chicken Noodle Soup.

**Crime**

Harlem has been associated with crime for a long time.

In the 1920s, the Jewish and Italian mafia played a major role in running the whites-only nightclubs in the neighborhood and the speakeasies that also catered to a white audience.

Rather than compete with the established mobs, African-American gangsters concentrated on the “policy racket,” also called the Numbers Game, or “bolita” in Spanish Harlem. This was an illegal gambling scheme similar to a lottery that could be played at countless locations around Harlem.

By 1925 there were thirty black "policy banks" in Harlem, with several of them large enough to collect bets in an area covering twenty city blocks and three or four avenues.

By the early 1950s, the total money involved amounted to billions of dollars, and the police force had been thoroughly corrupted by bribes from numbers bosses. These bosses became financial powerhouses providing capital for loans to people unable to obtain loans from legitimate financial institutions. Such loans were subsequently invested in legitimate businesses and real estate.

**Politics (The Civil Rights Movement)**
In the late 1950s and early 1960s Harlem was the scene of a series of rent strikes by neighborhood tenants, led by local activist Jesse Gray, together with the Congress of Racial Equality, Harlem Youth Opportunities Unlimited and other groups. These groups wanted the city authorities to force landlords to improve the quality of housing by bringing them up to specified standards, to take action against rats and cockroaches, to provide heat during the winter and to keep prices in line with contemporary rent control regulations.

In the mid-1960s, according to the Metropolitan Council on Housing, about 25% of the city landlords charged more for rent than regulations allowed.

Many groups mobilized in Harlem in the 1960s, fighting for better schools, jobs and housing. Some were peaceful while others promoted violence. By the early 1960s the Congress of Racial Equality had offices on 125th Street and acted as a negotiator for the community with the city, especially in times of racial tension. They pressed for civilian review boards to hear complaints of police abuse, a demand that was ultimately met. Adam Clayton Powell Jr. had become chairman of the House Committee of Education and Labor at the start of the 1960s and was able to use this position to direct federal funds to development projects.

The influence of the southern nonviolent protest movement was muted in Harlem. Martin Luther King, Jr. was the black leader most respected in Harlem, but at least two dozen groups of black nationalists also operated in New York. The most important of these by far was the Nation of Islam, headed by Malcolm X from 1952 – 1963. Malcolm X was assassinated in the Audubon Ballroom in Washington Heights in 1965, and the neighborhood remains an important center for the Nation of Islam.

The largest public works project in Harlem during this period was the construction of public housing, with the largest concentration in East Harlem. As a rule existing structures were torn down and replaced with city-designed and managed properties that would, in theory, present a safer and more pleasant environment than those available from private landlords. Ultimately protests from the community halted the construction of new projects.

From the mid-20th century the unacceptable quality of local schools has been a source of distress. In the 1960s about 75% of Harlem students tested below the grade levels in reading skills, and 80% tested below grade level in math. In 1964 residents of Harlem staged two school boycotts to call attention to the problem. In central Harlem 92% of students stayed at home. In 1977 Isiah Robinson, president of the New York City Board of Education, was quoted, “the quality of education in Harlem has degenerated to the level of a custodial service.” As of May 2006, Harlem is the heart of the charter schools movement in Manhattan.

Of the 25 charter schools operating in Manhattan today, 18 are in Harlem.

Politics 1970–1989
In many ways, the 1970s were the worst period in the history of Harlem. Many Harlem residents who were able to escape from poverty left the neighborhood in search of safer streets, better schools and homes. Those who remained were the poorest and least skilled with the fewest opportunities for success. Though the federal government Model Cities Program spent $100 million on job training, health care, education, public safety, sanitation, housing and other projects over a ten-year period, Harlem showed no improvement.

The deterioration of Harlem is clearly shown in the statistics of the period. In 1968 the infant mortality rate
in Harlem had been 37 for each 1000 live births, as compared to 23.1 in the city as a whole. Over the next eight years, infant mortality for the city as whole improved to 19, while the rate in Harlem more than doubled to 42.8. Statistics describing illness, drug addiction, housing quality and education are similarly appalling and show the rapid deterioration of Harlem in the 1970s. Between 1976 and 1978 alone central Harlem lost almost a third of its total population and East Harlem lost about 27%. The neighborhood no longer had a functioning economy, stores were shut and in 1971 60% of the economic life depended exclusively on the cash flow from the illegal numbers game.

The worst part of Harlem was the **Bradhurst Section** between Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Boulevard and Edgecombe, from 139th Street through 155th. In 1991 this region was described in the New York Times (daily newspaper):

> “Since 1970, an exodus of residents has left behind the poor, the uneducated, the unemployed. Nearly two-thirds of the households have incomes below $10,000 a year. In a community with one of the highest crime rates in the city, garbage-strewn vacant lots and tumbledown tenements, many of them abandoned and sealed, contribute to the sense of danger and desolation that pervades much of the area.”

Harlem began to see rapid gentrification in the late 1990s.

**Map of Harlem/Geography**

Harlem stretches from the East River, to the Hudson River (West). Central Harlem begins at 110th Street, at the northern boundary of Central Park. Spanish Harlem extends further South, to 96th Street. To the west Harlem begins north of Upper West Side, which gives an irregular border west of Morningside Avenue.

The boundaries of Harlem have changed over the years. These are the different areas of Harlem:

- **West Harlem** (west of St. Nicholas Avenue and north of 123rd Street)
  - Harlem Community
  - Hamilton Heights, around the Hamilton Grange
  - Sugar Hill
  - Manhattenville, north of Morningside Heights
  - Central Harlem
  - Mount Morris, extending west from Marcus Garvey Park
  - Strivers’ Row, centered on 139th Street
  - Astor Row, centered on 130th Street
  - Spanish Harlem, also known as East Harlem or El Barrio (east of Fifth Avenue)

The East Harlem/El Barrio (Spanish Harlem) community stretches from First Avenue to Fifth Avenue and from East 96th Street to East 125th Street. Central Harlem stretches from Central Park North to the Harlem River and from Fifth Avenue to St. Nicholas Avenue. West Harlem, including Hamilton Heights and Sugar Hill, stretches from 123rd to 155th Streets and from St. Nicholas Avenue to the Hudson River.

**Famous Harlem Landmarks**

- 125th Street
- Abyssinian Baptist Church
- Apollo Theater
Arthur Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture
Astor Row
City College of New York
First Corinthian Baptist Church
Hamilton Heights
Harbor Conservatory for the Performing Arts
Harlem Hospital Center
The Harlem School of the Arts
Harlem Stage
Harlem YMCA
Hotel Theresa
James Bailey House
Lenox Lounge
Minton’s Playhouse
Morningside Park
Mount Morris Park Historic District
El Museo Del Barrio
Museum of the City of New York
National Black Theater
Rucker Park
St. Martin’s Episcopal Church [6] (formerly Trinity Church) designed by William Appleton Potter
Strivers’ Row
Studio Museum in Harlem
Sylvia’s Soul Food

Pre-activity

Tasks
In this assignment the students should investigate the positive and negative aspects of their own area. Divide the class into two groups: One group investigates the positive aspects of the area, while the other group investigates negative aspects. Each student has to take 5 photographs using their cell phones to make a show-and-tell presentation in groups at the end.

The points they should include:
• The environment of the school/neighborhood. Observe and find characteristics: Social background of the students - are there groups of different ethnic backgrounds?
• The physical structure of the school (the building, facilities, surroundings, interior, etc). How is the neighborhood? Try to get the students to notice as many details as possible and get them to describe the school with as many words as possible.

When they have made their investigations, each group returns to class and prints out 5 pictures to illustrate their observations, and to make a poster. Each picture should have a description. After presenting and discussing the posters in class, posters could be displayed around the school to make other students aware of their local environment.
Things That Make You Wonder

While-viewing activity
The movie takes place in Harlem, NY in the late 1980s. Precious lives in the West Harlem area which was an area with a negative balance of Afro-American people living on welfare back then. Precious’ personal background has a special impact on her as a person and defines her choices and possibilities in life.

When watching the movie, try to notice special elements of Precious and her surroundings that YOU think are important to include when thinking of Harlem and Precious’ environment.

Maybe you notice certain places in the movie where you think that the area of Harlem is being depicted in a special way. Or maybe you notice a certain detail or situation that you think says a lot about the environment and Precious' background. Try to scribble down any words you can think to describe those scenes.

Things that make you think, and things that make you wonder...

**Fix points like these could be:**

* Specific features of: her home, the streets, her neighborhood, the buildings, people of the area, the school

* A special scene that shows the possibilities and choices she has or a certain situation she encounters that is pivotal to her and her life

* Part of a dialogue or her inner speech that says a lot about her surroundings, environment or background

* A relationship between her and another character

* How the camera angles work in particular scenes

* How the pictures work with the soundtrack (does the music support certain scenes in terms of highlighting the mood or emotions of the situation)

* The use of light and colors in certain scenes
Things That Make You Wonder

1st part of the movie:
I noticed these special details:

Key words that will make me remember them later:
Things That Make You Wonder

2nd part of the movie:

I noticed these special details:

Key words that will make me remember them later:
Things That Make You Wonder

3rd part of the movie:

I noticed these special details:

Key words that will make me remember them later:
Analyzing and noticing activity

Once you have seen the movie, get together in groups of four.

Spend 10 minutes comparing your 'Things That Make You Wonder' notes.

Check if you noticed some of the same things and details or if you all noticed completely different things.

Try to explain to the other people in the group why you actually made a note of these particular things and how you think that they are important to the story in the movie.

After comparing your notes team up with your shoulder partner.

Have a look at pictures 1-3. Decide with your shoulder partner which of the pictures you would like to write about. Write about one of the pictures together and keep your 'Things That Make You Wonder' notes in mind – you might want to include some of these fix points or observations in your assignment.

You will have to agree on what to write and what to include. The assignment should not be longer than between a half and a whole page.

* Once you have finished writing your assignments, you read them out loud to the other shoulder pair in the group. Explain to them why you chose to write about your picture and how you interpreted your task. Tell them if you chose to include some aspects of your 'Things That Make You Wonder' notes and if so, why.

* The listening pair will have to give some feedback to the presenting pair. Explain what you liked about their presentation and stories and what you liked less. Try to think about whether there is any need for improvements or if the stories are ready as they are.

* Finish off by displaying your stories in class (find an available area and stick them up using tape, pins, etc.) where your teacher and class mates are able to read and learn from them.
Look at the picture taken from a scene in the movie. Try to imagine what goes on in Precious’ mind at this very moment. In the movie she has a lot of internal dialogue going on and she is very aware of her surroundings. Try to get as many details from the picture into her observations and thoughts as possible.

Points to consider when writing your story:

* Is Precious feeling relaxed with the situation?
* How is her attitude: the way she walks, how she looks at people, her facial expression?
* Is she in an area that she’s familiar with or is it somewhere in town she usually never visits?
* Does she make a note of her surroundings, any special features that she notices?
* How is her mood? Is she: positive, negative, happy, sad?
* What is her relationship to the boys sitting at the left? Does she know them or are they strangers?
* Does she feel like talking to them or just ignoring them?
Look at the picture taken from a scene in the movie. Try to imagine that you are present in the room with Precious, her mom and Little Mongo, just the four of you. You are sitting in a chair, facing them directly. Try to describe the room and the atmosphere. Notice every little detail in the living room and feeling you register. Remember: No conversation takes place during your observation.

Points to consider when writing your story:

* How is the atmosphere in the room? Happy, friendly, pleasant, tense, awful, awkward?
* Are there any sounds coming from the living room? From any other rooms in the apartment? From the outside?
* Are there any particular smells to notice? And if so, are they nice or foul?
* How is the furniture? Old, tarnished, comfortable, new?
* How is the décor in the room? How about wallpaper, pictures, colours?
* How is the light in the room? Is it dark and gloomy or brightly lit?
Look at the picture taken from a scene in the movie. Try to imagine the conversation that Ms. Weiss and Precious are having. You might want to consider the situation before starting. Don’t focus on details in the office, just purely on their conversation, the words that they are exchanging.

Start the story by Ms. Weiss saying, “Well, Precious, the reason why I wanted to see you here today is…”

Points to consider when writing the dialogue:

*What is the situation and what is the conversation about?*
*Is it a friendly conversation or is it serious?*
*How is the language? Is it formal or informal?*
*How is the dialogue structured with turn-taking? Do they finish off their sentences or do they interrupt each other?*
*Are they agitated and emotional at times or are they completely calm in the way they speak?*
*Do they treat each other with mutual respect or are they picking on each other?*
*Do they finish their conversation feeling happy or frustrated?*
Discovering Harlem

Get together in groups of four. Read the extract from the interview with Danish nurse Jackie Fernandez who lived in East Harlem for four months. When you have finished reading the interview sit together for 10 to 15 minutes and discuss the following:

* How does she describe the area?

* What does she tell us about the area?

* What kinds of special features does she mention?

Make a list of 5 to 10 key words that you think are relevant in portraying East Harlem. Compare the list with the impression of West Harlem that you saw in Precious. Can you find any similarities or differences between the two areas of Harlem?

Team up with your shoulder partner.
Now, try to imagine that you’re both tourists visiting Harlem and discovering the city for the first time. You are so full of impressions that you decide to write a postcard together for someone back in Denmark. It could be to your best friend, boy/girlfriend, mom, sister, grandparents, teacher, pet...

You write about what you have seen and mention the most interesting aspects of Harlem that you want to share. You should agree on the most interesting things to include before writing the postcard. You also have to explain to the receiver of the postcard why you chose to write about these things. What made such an impression on you that you chose to write about them?

When writing your postcard you can use the template further down and cut it out - OR design your own. Whether you chose to decorate the front of the postcard with your own drawings or real pictures taken from Harlem that you find online, is up to you.

Once you have finished writing and designing your postcard, get up and do a walk and share exercise. Find another pair in class who has completed the task and share your postcards. Read them through and remember to give some feedback on them. Explain what you liked about their postcards and, perhaps, what you would have done differently. Try to think about whether there is any need for improvement or if the postcards are ready as they are. Then you move on to find a new pair.

Finish off by displaying your postcards in class (find an available area and stick them up using tape, pins, etc.), where your teacher and class mates are able to read and learn from them.
Discovering Harlem

The following account is an extract from an interview with the Danish 34-year-old nurse Jackie Fernandez who lived for a period of four months in Harlem, New York during her professional training to become a nurse:

“East Harlem, where I lived, was very ethnic. The Puerto Ricans dominate the area and you see their presence all over. On the street corners, the shops, the selection of food in the supermarkets, everywhere you moved you could feel and see the Puerto Rican influence. The area was a low income area and people didn’t have a high standard of living. There weren’t any fancy shops with designer brands or any franchise places like Starbucks (American international coffee shop chain, red), There were a lot of fast food chains like McDonalds, Burger King, Dunkin’ Doughnuts, etc.

There was also an area dominated by tenements like the ones you see in Precious – also known as the Projects. ‘The Projects’ is a common name for places, ghettos if you like, for people with a minimal income and quite often they are on welfare and depend on whatever benefits they can get from the State, just as you see in the movie with Precious and her mom.

The different areas in New York have a concentration of particular ethnic groups dominating that area and in East Harlem the Latin American influence was present all over. East Harlem is a vast area and is actually the place in New York with the largest Latin American population. There are barely any blacks living there, they primarily reside in West Harlem. So I was living in an area predominantly occupied by Puerto Ricans/Latin-Americans.

Every single billboard you saw was in Spanish and a lot of the advertisements you’d see in the streets were in Spanish.

Commercials around town were exclusively in Spanish and information from the Government regarding public services were only in Spanish. Even the signs in the shops were in Spanish and people automatically spoke Spanish to me thinking that I might be of Latin American origin. I’m half Philippine (on my mother’s side) so I can understand why some might have mistaken me for a Latin American. But I don’t know a word of Spanish and even in places like McDonald’s they addressed me by saying: “Hey, Mami” (a nickname in many Latin American countries for “little mama”).

If you entered an official post office they only spoke Spanish to me, leaving me somewhat confused.

And the street vendors selling their goods didn’t speak one word of English.

The shops were playing Latin American music all the time.
On the streets you constantly came across all these little stands with people selling Latin American foods. Like takeaways in a street miniature version. The food was most often very unhealthy and not very nutritious; deep fried vegetables, wraps with meat or sweet crepes (pancakes) that the children usually bought for breakfast in the morning on their way to school. The fast food diners were open 24/7 (meaning, all hours) so you could always buy yourself a cheap, but also very greasy, unhealthy meal at any time and at any place in the area. There was a high concentration of obese people in that area. I’d say that the Puerto Ricans that I met were generally very overweight and had an unhealthy diet. Actually, figures for East Harlem have exploded when it comes to having the highest percentage of obese people living in one area in the entire state of New York. Diseases like diabetes, vascular problems (leading to heart failure) and premature death have skyrocketed in recent years. Government officials are trying to campaign for people to go to their local community center to get checked for blood pressure, insulin in the blood, and to have information on the right kind of nutrition and how to become physically active. Changing to the right kind of nutrition is hard. East Harlem has no grocery shops to offer, only convenience stores offering really crappy processed food. Kind of like the bargain stores like Aldi that we know in Denmark. No shops offering fresh vegetables and fruits, only fast food stores. And it’s hard to motivate people to live healthy lives if they can’t buy any healthy food in their neighborhood. And if people are poor, like they are in East Harlem, they don’t think about what kind of food they put into their mouths as long as they’re able to buy any food at all and get something to eat.

I live in an area in downtown Copenhagen with a vast variety of different cultures and ethnicities. So I am no stranger to multicultural surroundings. What I really thought was different from what I’m used to at home was the way that a culture gets mixed with the society people live in. The Puerto Ricans have adapted to American society and values while also maintaining strong links with their background. Like the term 'Latin-American'. They can be Americans and be proud of American values and society and be extremely patriotic about their country. But they also remember their Latin inheritance and kind of mix big chunks of that culture into their newly adapted American culture. Many Puerto Ricans don’t venture much outside their own community, though. They stay in their local community and go to work, school, and do their daily business inside the perimeter of East Harlem. And another aspect of their culture was spending much of their free time in the streets. You’d encounter heaps of people standing outside residential buildings just talking, or sitting on the pavement or staircase, debating, shouting, laughing, and commenting on by-passers. I’m not used to this kind of active engagement in the local community. There is a lot of hustle and bustle all the time. Maybe it’s due to the fact that the Puerto Ricans are very sociable and like to get together. And the apartments are often very small and overcrowded so they gather in the streets where they can keep an eye on what’s going on in the neighborhood. This also causes a lot of traffic and pollution. People litter all over. The garbage cans are lined up on the sidewalks for collection from the renovation companies”.

If you feel like reading the entire interview with Jackie Fernandez, please go to the additional material section and look for ‘Discovering Harlem’. 
Post-activity

Tasks
Role Play - worksheet 1 – to the teacher
Let students pair up two and two. One plays the role of Precious and the other one plays the role of the social worker, Ms. Weiss. Remind students to think back to the scene where Precious is sitting in Ms Weiss’ office. Students are asked to portray their character as seen in the movie and to consider the relationship between the two characters.
What would they say and do if they were Precious/Ms Weiss?

Suggestion: If you want to expand the role play, you can include an extra person portraying the mother.
Worksheet 1

Role play
Pair up, two and two. One plays the role of Precious and the other plays the role of the social worker, Ms. Weiss. Think back to the scene where they meet and portray them as you saw them in the movie. Think about the relationship between Precious and Ms. Weiss in the movie. Ms Weiss as a social worker really wants to help Precious, but in order to do that she needs to know more about Precious’ life.

- Ms. Weiss: What will you say to Precious? What kind of questions would you ask her? Would you ask her about school, her skills, home, her parents, her children, her friends? Try to get her to talk about her background and tell you as many details as possible. Try to ask her about what she wants.
- Precious: What will you tell Ms. Weiss? How can she help you? Consider whether your attitude towards Ms. Weiss is friendly and open or reserved and negative. Do you trust Ms. Weiss and her intentions to help you?
In this part we see some of the words Precious uses. She has a strong Harlem sociolect, so she pronounces and spells a lot of words according to the rules of the sociolects rather than standard American English. The students should guess what the words mean and write them in the standard form. The students should also try to figure out why she talks like that, and think about if they have heard or used some kind of sociolects themselves.

Glossary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nuffin’</td>
<td>nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muver</td>
<td>mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wanna</td>
<td>want to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya</td>
<td>you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holla</td>
<td>holler</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedda</td>
<td>better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I ain’</td>
<td>I am not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fahver</td>
<td>father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ax</td>
<td>ask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bizness</td>
<td>business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Worksheet 2

Sociolects
In the movie we hear Precious’ language. She has a strong sociolect, and uses some words which are not standard English.
Here are some examples. Write what the words mean in standard American English.

Nuffin’ ___________________ Muver ______________________
Wanna ___________________ Ya _________________________
Holla ___________________ Bedda ______________________
I ain’ ___________________ Fahver _____________________
Ax ______________________ Bizness ____________________

Which other words did you notice from the movie?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Why do you think she talks like this?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Compare to your own life. Do you use any kind of sociolect? Have you heard anyone else using sociolects? Do you write or speak different sociolects with different people, e.g. friends vs.family, language for text messages, words like ‘nederen’?
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
Language focus
What ya talkin’ ‘bout? - worksheet 3 – to the teacher
Precious is also illiterate and makes a lot of errors. In this activity students should re-write parts from the novel *Push*, where they correct her errors.

Glossary:

I still don’t say nothing (anything). This hoe is keeping me from math class. I like math class. Mr. Westchester likes me in there, needs me to keep those rowdy niggers in line. He is nice, wears a dope suit every day. He does not come to school looking...

I have been in school for one year. I love my teacher. I learn a lot. Books I have read, child care, work, reports. Ms Rain I would like to get a good job, learn to work with computers, get an apartment me and little Mongo and Abdul. Ms Rain I ask you why me.

I am stupid. I have not got an education even though I do not miss any days of school. I talk funny. The air floats like water with pictures around me sometimes.

Attached - extract of Rita Romero’s life (one of Precious’ classmates)
Worksheet 3

What ya talkin’ ‘bout?
Re-write this part in standard English. Notice the grammar, spelling errors and missing words.

“I still don’t say nuffin’. This hoe is keeping me from maff class. I like maff class. Mr Wicher like me in there, need me to keep those rowdy niggers in line. He nice, wear a dope suit every day. He do not come to school looking... “

“One yr I ben scool I love my techr lot I lern. Books I read, chile care work comports. Ms Rain I wood like to get a gud job lern wrk comprts get apt me n lil Mongo and Abdul. Ms Rain I ass you wy me?”

“I stupid. I ain’ got no education even tho’ I not miss days of school. I talks funny. The air floats like water wif pictures around me sometimes.”
Language focus
Giving feedback - worksheet 4 – to the teacher

In this task the students should start by reading the extract from Rita’s story. Then read the feedback that Ms. Rain gives Precious.

Giving Rita feedback, the students should imagine that they are Ms. Rain writing. What do they think about her childhood? What would they say to her?
Worksheet 4

Giving feedback

Ms. Rain asks the girls in Each One Teach One to write about their lives in the journals. Then she reads them and gives her response.

Read the following extract from the novel *Push*. It’s about Rita’s life, told by herself. Then read the following part with feedback from Ms. Rains to Precious on something Precious wrote in her journal.

Imagine that you are Ms. Rain writing feedback to Rita. What do you think about her childhood? She says she wants to tell *her* story - what do you think she means? What would you write to her?
MY LIFE
by Rita Romero

I’m six years old. The walls of the room are maroon. The velvet couch with the white lace doilies is the same color as the wall. It is so pretty. It’s my favorite. In the middle is the dark wood table with the crystal ball. Lace curtains are on the window. The shades are drawn. What’s inside is prettier, outside is just a brick wall. The table has a glass top on it. The edges of the glass where it’s cut is green colored. I like that. The crystal ball is big. Mami is at the table, her hair is black down her back, her lips like red movie star lips, eyes black like oil, looking at me. She hands me a sourball, it’s my favorite; it’s melting in my mouth. By the time it melts I know she be going shoo shoo Negra. I got someone coming. Meaning one of the worry face clients talking in Spanish about somebody dead in jail or in the arms of another, would be there.

But the taste of the sour ball stays on my tongue forever. It’s Papi walk through the door. He don’t say Mamita, he say Bitch! You think I’m crazy. I KNOW que tu puede. I KNOW PUTA! And he pull gun from his pants, shoot Mami—bang bang bang bang. Papi standing there, start crying.
If I close my eyes I could see Puerto Rico—someplace water is blue jewels, palm trees, mangoes, music like Willie Colon all the time. But I never been there. Would it be different if I had been born there steadda here? He kill her there steadda here? What's the difference? Go back? To where you never been? I'm better off here with the AIDS thing and stuff. The health care ain't shit here for addicts but it's better than P.R. my brother say. He went to P.R. die. I got friends here and stuff.

Ms Rain, senora La Lluvia, ask me to write more, write about my life now. Just talk some more in the tape recorder and she transcribe it. What life? Foster care, rape, drugs, prostitution, HIV, jail, rehab. Everybody like to hear that story. Tell us more tell us more more MORE about being a dope addict and a whore! Puta tecata puta tecata. But I tell you what I want, it's my book—we had a nice place, velvet things, lace curtains, the crystal ball. I ask her once my hand in the black river of her hair, my eyes looking up at hers, her caramel color skin, red movie lips, the perfume from her like a pink and purple dream—show me Mami how to see. Show me what's inside the crystal ball. She look at it a long time then say, Ahh Negrita, you don't want to know.
Dear Ms Precious,

You make my day! You just don’t know how much I love having you in class, how much I love you period. And I am proud of you; the whole school is proud of you. I’m sure you’ll be able to find a job when you get your G.E.D. And maybe your social worker could help you get a nice place for you, Little Mongo, and Abdul. I don’t know what you mean by your question, “Why me”? Please explain.

Ms Rain 1/9/89

1/13/89
Dear Precious POET Jones!
Awesome! I love your poetry and your drawings. What are you and Abdul going to see? How did you like the poems we read in class?

Love Ms Blue Rain

1/23/89
Dear Precious,
Are you saying you and Abdul need to take an HIV test? Well, tell me as much as you feel comfortable.

Ms Rain
EDUCATION

For the teacher
The material for 'Education' is aimed at teaching the American school system in a new way through the movie Precious.

Precious is a movie with a wide number of themes and topics. When you watch the movie yourself, you might find other important topics apart from the ones we chose to work on. You will, hopefully, also be able to see the intention of the activities in this material.

Before showing the movie you need to choose when to make the two breaks necessary for doing activities as well as letting students ask questions concerning some of the scenes. We recommend making the first break after Mrs. Lichtenstein visits Precious and the second break after Precious has seen her new school. The activities are built up as one coherent programme (pre- while- and post- activities). We recommend working with all three stages of activities. Before or during the pre-activity please use the background material from Harlem (PowerPoint about Harlem). You are welcome to use the extra ideas/activities.

There is an overall aim for all activities when working with Education as well as specific aims for each section of activities.

Aim

The aim with the activities in 'Education' is for the students to understand Precious’ contact to the American school system.

To be able to do this we will give students tools for seeing the differences between their own school system and the one Precious experiences.

Through the while-viewing activity we hope the students will see the problems Precious deals with in her school life, the opportunities at her new school and also to see the difficulties of her future studies.

In the end the aim is for the students to be able to actively take a stand on Precious' chances in the American school system.

This can include genre writing, different learning strategies, awareness of students' own competences etc. Enjoy!
Before watching Precious

Aim
The students will refresh former knowledge and receive new knowledge on the educational system in the USA and the educational system in Denmark. They will use the knowledge gained to draw parallels between educational systems of the two countries. They will train their own learning strategies in the production of their final mind maps.

Activity
Students make an individual mind map of what they already know about the educational system in the USA. When they have finished their individual mind maps, students can gain extra information from other students in the class. This could be done in pairs, groups etc. To complete their mind maps, students can get the sheet: 'American educational system vs. det danske skolesystem'.

Students need a mind map on the Danish educational system as well. They could do this individually (two mind maps each or one big mind map each) or in pairs or groups where some of them make mind maps about the educational system in the USA and others about Denmark. Afterwards they can share and compare their worksheets.

Follow-up activity
This can be done individually, in pairs or groups, although students need a mind map each (educational systems in Denmark and in the USA).

Students need to remake their mind maps, now using their personal learning strategy. The students need to be able to explain their mind map to someone else and understand it later in the process of working on Precious.

E.g. Students can choose to use colours, make a new mind map using a PC, video/audio record their mind map etc.

When they have made their final mind map, look for similarities and differences between the educational system in the USA and the educational system in Denmark.

Extra ideas or activities
- Find a picture of one (or some) of the characters in Precious. You could also choose the cover poster for the movie. Let the students “guess” or “predict” what the movie is about or who the character is before they see the movie. E.g. you could show the students a picture of Ms Rain and a picture of Mr Westchester. What are these two people like? Use adjectives. What is your reason for choosing the words you did? Work with prejudice and possibly elaborate on this by asking if schooling has any influence on people’s prejudices.
- Make a survey at your school. What is the general feeling towards going to school?
- Become the class expert on a certain area, e.g. 1/3 of the class become experts on the educational system in The USA, 1/3 experts on the educational system in Denmark and 1/3 expert on how it works at your school (interview teachers, headmaster etc.). Class experts of a certain area will make sure the rest of the class become experts as well, possibly in groups of three (1 USA expert, 1 Denmark expert and 1 expert on the situation at their school).
• Make true/false sentences about the Danish and American school systems. The teacher can make sentences and let the students answer or the students can make sentences for each other to answer.
• Make incomplete sentences about the educational system in Denmark/USA. Students complete the sentences correctly.
American Educational System vs. Det danske skolesystem

This is an overview on the American educational system and the Danish school system. You can use this to see the differences between your way of studying in America and in Denmark. This is also a good help to fill in your mind map.

**U.S.**
- Purple = Paid for by the government
- Blue = Pay yourself!
- You start school at the age of five or six
- And usually finish High School at the age of 17-18
- In the state of New York it is mandatory to go to school from the age of 6 to the age of 16.
- Each year of school is finished with a test to see if the students can pass the grades.
- Most students do extra curriculum activities, e.g.: the schools sports team, debate club, political clubs or school newspaper. Doing this, the students gain extra points on their school certificate.
- Weak learners can get extra education after school and in holidays. Weak learners can also attend special schools / classes.

**D.K.**
- Purple = Paid for by the government
- You start school at the age of five or six
- And usually finish "folkeskolen" at the age of 15-16
- It is mandatory to go to school from 0. klasse to 9. klasse
- You don’t have to take a test to pass the grade.
- There is not a lot of after school activities but the school might have a musical or a theatre production.
- Weak learners can go to a special class during school, or during holidays. It is also possible to get an extra teacher to help in class.
While viewing Precious

Aim
Students will get more information about the educational system of The USA and New York (presented in Precious). They will use theory from the pre-activity and watch it in action in this while-activity. Students will become better at noticing specific details in movies.

Activity
The teacher gives the students a summary of the film and informs them about some of the main characters in Precious. This can be done using the material from 'About Precious'. Each student gets a set of while-viewing-worksheets ('Things that make you wonder'). There will be two breaks when watching Precious. In these breaks the teacher (or students) can do an oral sum-up from the pre-viewed section and students can ask questions. Students fill in their worksheets written in an understandable manner (individually, pairs, groups etc.).

1\textsuperscript{st} part of the movie: Students need to focus on how the film portrays Precious’ old school as well as how Precious feels about her old school, teachers, classmates etc.

2\textsuperscript{nd} part of the movie: Students need to focus on how the film portrays Precious’ new school as well as how Precious feels about her new school, teachers, classmates etc.

3\textsuperscript{rd} part of the movie: Students need to focus on which opportunities they think Precious has in the school system, when she finishes “Each One Teach One”. What does Precious think? What does Ms. Rain think?

Follow-up activity
Students need to keep their while-viewing-worksheets. Once the movie has finished, students get together in pairs or groups where they compare their notes from 'Things That Make You Wonder'.

Look for similarities and differences and explain reasons behind your choice. Have a look at the mind maps from the pre-activity. Did you notice something from your mind map happening in “real life” in Precious? What similarities and differences can you find between life at your school and Precious’ life in her school? From what you know about the educational system in the USA, can you think about Precious’ future possibilities in the educational system? Will she go to college?

Extra ideas or activities
- Write headlines for each part of the movie. Compare and explain reasons behind your choice.
- Choose more specific things or scenes for the students to notice while watching the movie. When you see characters act in a strange, reasonable or horrific way, write a question. Ask your question in one of the breaks. Other students or the teacher might be able to answer it or you can use the questions in the extra activity 'The empty chair' / 'Hot chair'. Sample questions: What kind of person are you? Why did you say that? Why did you behave that way? What happened to you when you were younger? What do you think will happen to you when you get older? Etc.
Things That Make You Wonder

1st part of the movie: Focus on and notice how the film portrays Precious’ old school as well as how Precious feels about her old school, teachers, classmates etc.

I noticed this special detail:

Key words that will make me remember it later:
Things That Make You Wonder

2nd part of the movie: Focus on and notice how the film portrays Precious’ new school (Each one Teach one) as well as how Precious feels about her new school, teachers, classmates etc.

I noticed this special detail:

Key words that will make me remember it later:
Things That Make You Wonder

3rd part of the movie: Focus on what future possibilities you think Precious has in the school system. Where will she end up when she finishes from *Each One Teach One*. What does Precious think? What does Ms. Rain think?

I noticed this special detail:

Key words that will make me remember it later:
After viewing Precious

Aim
To use the knowledge they already have on the educational system in The USA – both from their mind maps and from the way it is portrayed in Precious and to understand how it works in real life by placing themselves in the position of an American. Students might do genre writing, become aware of their own competences in English (written, spoken etc.), choose learning strategies etc.

Activity
This activity can be done in various ways. Students can: Write an essay, make a speech (pairs, groups, class), participate in a discussion (pairs, groups, class), make a video or audio recording, prepare and make an interview, make a play, make a song, bake a cake, write a newspaper article (and possibly publish it) etc.

Here are some questions to elaborate on:

Imagine you are the president of the USA. What would you do to change the educational system in the USA? Why?
Imagine you are Ms. Blue Rain. What would you do as Precious’ teacher? Why?
Imagine you are the principal at Precious’ old school. What would you do? (Think about the scene where she tells Precious that she will get expelled because she is pregnant with her second child etc.)
The story in the movie takes place in the late 1980s. Do you think the same thing could happen to someone like Precious now, in 2010?

Overview of Production
Each student now has:
A personal mind map (made in the way best suited for the individual student)
'Educational system in the USA vs. det danske skolesystem'
'Things that make you wonder'
A final product of own choice

Students should have access to the produced material. This can be done in various ways: collected in a folder, published online (school/class homepage etc.), made as a poster, produced as a film (possibly by using Windows Movie Maker, since it is easily accessible and fairly easy to use), collage, etc.

Extra ideas/activities
- Interview the headmaster at your school. What would happen at your school if someone like Precious went to your school?
- Have a look at Push, the book Precious is based on. Find a section where Precious’ school is described. Make a description of your school. What similarities and differences did you find? Why do you think this is?
• Write a newspaper article about similarities and differences between the educational system in The USA and Denmark. Use pictures and possibly add or refer to an interview you have made.

• Use reading strategies, such as skimming, scanning and studying. You can choose a section from the novel, *Push*, or use reading strategies when writing and reading the articles.

• Chose a scene from *Precious* or invent a scene from *Precious*. Act it out. In front of the class/school or just video record it (and elaborate on it using e.g. Windows Movie Maker) and show it in class. You can do the same thing but chose an event from your school.

• Hot Chair / Empty Chair. Use the questions from the extra while-viewing activity or make new questions. Form a circle (sitting on the floor or sitting in chairs). One person takes the 'hot chair' in the centre of the circle. The person in the hot chair now needs to imagine that he/she is a character from the movie (the teacher or the student decides what character he/she should be). Now, the other students get to ask questions in order to guess the identity of the person or learn more about him/her. You can chose many characters and you can use more than one hot chair at a time if students work in smaller groups.
DOMESTIC ABUSE

Useful information for the teacher - before working with the subject “Domestic Abuse”

Domestic abuse – a delicate subject which is to be approached carefully as, statistically, there might be at least one child in your class who experiences domestic abuse.

Please do make sure that you see the film before showing it to the students. There are scenes which might frighten some of the children in your class. Especially there is a scene where Precious’ father abuses her sexually. Dependent on how you approach our teaching material you may leave out the scene (or more scenes). Only if you work with 'escaping from reality', the scene is essential.

Definition of abuse
Family and Intimate Violence can be defined as encompassing threatened or actual use of physical or sexual force among family members or intimate others that either results in or has the potential to result in injury or death.

As you may see in the movie Precious, violence can go on for years without anybody noticing, but it may also send the child to hospital to be treated for the effects of abuse. In Denmark 1,400 children are treated every year for the physical marks that such abuse leaves, and sadly 7 of these children die.

For further DK information
http://www.unicef.dk/script/site/page.asp?artid=467
http://www.familievold.dk
http://www.dannerhuset.dk/default.aspx?

In the USA it is estimated that domestic violence occurs every 15 seconds somewhere in the country and children are involved in 60% of all these cases of abuse. More than three million children witness acts of domestic violence each year in the US. Among black Americans it has been the custom to spank your child as a means of upbringing and to keeping the child under control. This behavior has its roots in the period of slavery.
The spanking does not only count for the African-Americans. We came across a poll published in http://www.thegrio.com which says that 53% of the population feel it’s alright to spank your child – it’s just discipline!

For further US information

Athealth.com is the homepage of an organization who is one of the leading providers of mental health information and services for mental health practitioners and those they serve.

We have chosen to produce teaching material, which approach the subject mostly in writing. We
suggest that your class produces information material rather than having discussions in groups or in class, as there might be children who find it difficult to talk about taboo subjects.

Their products are meant to be used not only by or for themselves, but to be handed out and maybe put in the school library for others to take. The newspaper article could be sent to media which take up such subjects. The Danner House has a good homepage regarding domestic abuse and they might be interested in articles made by students who have worked with the subject.

In your teaching you may also include the novel *Push* by Sapphire which the movie is based on, but be aware that it is written in a sociolect which is hard to read. In the back of the book there are letters from the girls that Precious meets at the *Each One Teach One* school. These letters are easier to read and give a good picture of the situation that many Harlem children face. A few of the letters might be used as background material for working with this particular topic, 'Domestic Abuse'. We would suggest you use the letter from Rita Romero, who has experienced violence and even killing at home. The letter from Rhonda Patrice Johnson about her life describes the sexual abuse that she was experiencing domestically till her mother kicked her out of their house. Both letters are easy to read and written in American English with only a little slang / sociolect. But then again, the episodes described are very violent and should be handled accordingly.

How to use the material
This material can be used in various ways. You may choose only to work with one activity (produce a folder, a newspaper article or a letter from Precious) or to mix the activities, as in The Annual Day activity. You might also use the material for workshops or theme weeks. We also suggest working with the material across class levels, to create a general awareness on domestic abuse within the whole school. The assignment can easily be changed to make it appropriate for the class you are working with.

We recommend that you provide a stimulus while the students write the letter. Ideas for a stimulus are:
- Listen to Harlem music
- Send around small items
  - Pictures
  - Postcards with pictures
  - Small poems
  - Small sections of text from the book *PUSH*
You can ask the students to record their responses for use later on.

The aims are:
- to develop the students’ writing skills
- to make them aware of the ongoing process in the movie of Precious’ education and breaking out of her social context.
The students should be aware of grammatical tense when writing.
Pre-viewing activity

We recommend you teach this topic in connection with *Vold i Familien* and their campaign “Break the Chain”, which is a short music video about growing up with a parent who physically abuses the other parent.

Please follow the description from *Vold i Familien*’s webpage [www.familievold.dk](http://www.familievold.dk) to find the link to the film “Break the Chain”. The song was written by Da-Jab and K-Lyle in cooperation with *Vold i Familien*.

After seeing the film you should have opened up for a discussion about what domestic violence/abuse can be.

Make a brainstorm in class using one or more of the following titles (or make up your own, as long as it keeps the students on track):

- What is abuse?
- What can/does abuse look like?
- Abuse is...
- Domestic Violence is...

The important thing is to make sure the students know different types of domestic violence/abuse.

E.g.:

- psychological abuse (threats, bad comments (that lower self-esteem), lack of support from parents, lack of love and care, being yelled at, locked in a locker (as a punishment), etc.)
- physical assault (being spanked, burned, thrown, thrown things at, kicked, etc.)
- sexual abuse (having intercourse, other sexual behaviour, touching, kissing, etc.)

First make a long list of words and then fill them into a mind map for later use and reference.
While viewing the movie *Precious*

**Precious’ reaction when being confronted with bad behavior**

- Find signs which could explain why she reacts the way she does in class at her old school
- Notice how her mother treats her
- Notice what her mother shouts at her in the 'staircase scene'

Fill in key words that will make you remember it later:
While viewing the movie *Precious*

The longest journey begins with a single step, Miss Rain says

- Look for signs that Precious is changing her violent behavior.
- How does she react to being bullied in her new class?
- Does Miss Rain react? Is the reaction different from her old teacher’s reaction?
- What do you think makes her want to change?

Fill in key words that will make you remember it later:
While viewing the movie *Precious*

*Your first responsibility is to yourself, Miss Rain says*

- Find signs that Precious picks up that responsibility
- Is she taking care of herself when she runs away from home?
- Notice Miss Rain and Precious’ voice-over dialogue when Precious is packing up to leave the hospital
- Notice what the halfway house means to her

Fill in key words that will make you remember it later:
Core activities

Produce a folder
Your school has become aware that in every classroom there is at least one child who experiences abuse at home. The headmaster wants to produce a folder with information on the various kinds of violence you may experience at home and with relevant links on the internet for further information and phone numbers where you can find help if you experience abuse or know of someone who is abused. You are asked to help him write the contents, do the lay out and make the production.

Go together in groups of four. Search the Internet for information that would be relevant to put in an information folder. That could be: statistics, description of what domestic abuse is, where to get help and maybe telephone numbers to help lines. A good place for you to start is to google keywords and see what comes up. Your may also use the following links:
http://www.unicef.dk/script/site/page.asp?artid=467
http://www.familievold.dk
http://www.dannerhuset.dk/default.aspx?

Newspaper article
Your local newspaper has a series on what goes on behind the four walls at home. Next week it’s about domestic abuse and violence. They already have adults writing articles on the subject but they also want the teenage angle on abuse in the family. Write a newspaper article and use layout to make it look real. Alternatively send it to your local newspaper (in a Danish version) to have it accepted for print.

Go together in pairs, write the article and do the lay out with both text and pictures. Make the lay out as realistic as possible. Be aware that if you plan to publish your article and you use screen dump pictures from the movie you might need permission from the film distributor to use the pictures.

Annual day for 'Stop Domestic Abuse'
Your school has joined the annual campaign on elimination of domestic violence. Your class has been asked to manage all activities in that connection. There will be posters, info letter to the students at school, an article in the school newsletter and various other activities needed.

Go together in pairs or groups of 4 dependent on the type of activity. Decide on which activities would be useful at your school.
That could be:

- Posters with pictures and information on domestic abuse
- Information leaflet or letter to the students at you school
- An article to the schools newspaper
- Postcards to send or frame
- Form a new value statement about awareness to add to the school ethos
Use your imagination and come up with more ideas

Write a letter to…
Precious saw her abusive mother for the last time when she left the social worker’s office. She has a lot of thoughts, a lot of anger and an awful lot of questions to ask the woman who brought her up. Precious has gone through major changes and now, eight years after she walked away, she would like to write a letter about her thoughts, her feelings and her life now.

Go together in pairs and choose one of the following characters that Precious would want to write a letter to now, eight years after she left her mother at the social worker’s office.

- Her mother
- One of the girls from class
  - Rita – Rhonda – Consuelo – Jermaine – Joann

In pairs you write a letter, making sure that each of you has a copy when finished. Individually you pair up with a new partner and swap letters. Your job now is to read your partner’s letter and come up with an answer to ‘Precious’, which you will give orally. When you have both received and given an answer to the letter you received, you get your own letter back and go search for a new partner with whom you’ll now swap letters.
Discovering Harlem

The following interview is with the 34-year-old Danish nurse, Jackie Fernandez, who lived for a period of four months in Harlem, New York during her professional training to become a nurse. This is her story of how she perceived the area where parts of the movie *Precious* takes place...

When did you stay in Harlem and what was the purpose of your stay?

“I stayed in Harlem during the winter of 2007, approximately four months as a part of my training for becoming a nurse. I had the opportunity to get a scholarship that combined attending university in the Bronx (another area in the city of New York) and getting some practical experience from a local hospital and community center in Bronx”.

And how did you come up with the idea of going to Harlem?

“I knew that I wanted to go to the US as part of my education. I’ve always been very attracted to the country and the American culture and I have several friends and acquaintances over there. So when I got the opportunity to go abroad for a semester, I started to search the internet for opportunities. My college in Denmark provided me with a grant so there was a financial backing for my stay. I contacted the Lehman College located in the Bronx and they provided a mentor for me, a professor who would help me arrange the
practical details about my stay. I have a friend who lives in Manhattan so I wanted to find a place to stay in that area. The mentor from college had arranged for me to stay with a Puerto Rican family, but I visited the place on the first day and I wasn’t impressed by the room. It was too gloomy and the room was painted in this salmon-reddish color which I didn’t fancy one bit. And besides, I had already made some other contacts through the internet for accommodation. First, I went to West Harlem (the area where ‘Precious’ takes place) to check out an offer for an apartment, but it was a nasty, shabby, cockroach-infested place, so I opted on an apartment in East Harlem with two rooms and a low rent”.

So you ended up where?

“East Harlem, also known as Spanish Harlem”.

And how was the area?

“East Harlem, where I lived, was very ethnic. The Puerto Ricans dominate the area and you see their presence all over. On the street corners, the shops, the selection of food in the supermarkets, everywhere you moved you could feel and see the Puerto Rican influence. The area was a low income area and people didn’t have a high standard of living. There weren’t any fancy shops with designer brands or any franchise places like Starbucks (American international coffee shop chain). There were a lot of fast food chains like McDonalds, Burger King, Dunkin’ Doughnuts, etc.

There was also an area dominated by tenements like the ones you see in Precious – also known as the Projects. ‘The Projects’ is a common name for places, ghettos if you like, for people with a minimal income and quite often they are on welfare and depend on whatever benefits they can get from the State, just as you see in the movie with Precious and her mom.

Were there any particular features in East Harlem that separated it from the rest of Harlem?

“Well, as I told before, the area was completely dominated by the Puerto Ricans, but also other Latin-American groups resided there. The different areas in New York have a concentration of particular ethnic groups dominating that area and in East Harlem the Latin American influence was present all over. East Harlem is a vast area and is actually the place in New York with the largest Latin American population. There are barely any blacks living there, they primarily reside in West Harlem. So I was living in an area predominantly occupied by Puerto Ricans/Latin-Americans. Every single billboard you saw was in Spanish and a lot of the advertisements you’d see in the streets were in Spanish. Commercials around town were exclusively in Spanish and information from the Government regarding public services were only in Spanish. Even the signs in the shops were in Spanish and people automatically spoke Spanish to me thinking that I might be of Latin American origin. I’m half Philippine (on my mother’s side) so I can understand why some might have mistaken me for a Latin American. Philippines and native South Americans share some common features. But I don’t know a word of Spanish and even in places like McDonald’s they addressed me by
saying: “Hey, Mami” (a nickname in many Latin American countries for “little mama”). If you entered an official post office they only spoke Spanish to me, leaving me somewhat confused. And the street vendors selling their goods didn’t speak one word of English.

The shops were playing Latin American music all the times. On the streets you constantly came across all these little stands selling Latin American foods. Like takeaways in a street miniature version. The food was most often very unhealthy and not very nutritious; deep fried vegetables, wraps with meat or sweet crepes (pancakes) that the children usually bought for breakfast in the morning on their way to school. The fast food diners were open 24/7 (meaning, all hours) so you could always buy yourself a cheap, but also very greasy, unhealthy meal at any time and at any place in the area. There was a high concentration of obese people in that area. I’d say that the Puerto Ricans that I met were generally very overweight and had an unhealthy diet. Actually, figures in East Harlem have exploded when it comes to having the highest percentage of obese people living in one area in the entire state of New York. Cases of diabetes, vascular problems (diseases related to clogging of the aortas in the heart, mainly caused by too much grease in the diet) and premature death have skyrocketed in recent years. Government officials are trying to campaign for people to go to their local community center to get a check on their blood pressure, measure the amount of insulin in the blood, to receive the necessary information on the right kind of nutrition and to get physically active. The last part on the right kind of nutrition is hard. East Harlem has no grocery shops to offer, only convenience stores offering really crappy processed food. Kind of like the bargain stores of Aldi that we know in Denmark. No shops offering fresh vegetables and fruits, only fast food stores. And it’s hard to motivate people to live healthy lives if they don’t have any healthy food available in their neighborhoods to buy. And if people are poor, like they are in East Harlem, they don’t think about what kind of food they put into their mouths, as long as they’re able to buy any kind of food at all and get something to eat”.

So there weren’t any other cultures present in East Harlem besides the Latin-American/Puerto Rican?

“Well, you did come across a few Asians but I think that they mainly worked in the area. You typically ran into them at the service sector, takeaway places or dry cleaning businesses. The Asians in the area didn’t speak very good English and when I went to my local dry cleaner to deliver my dirty loads of laundry the only thing they did say to me was a monotonous:“Five dollar!” There was this one particular Asian takeaway place near my house and the owner was standing behind a bullet proof window selling his dishes! Not a very welcoming feeling you’d get from his place and the windows were covered with greasy stains from the chicken roasting on a spear. It was really unsanitary”.

In what particular way did East Harlem differ from your own familiar area back in Denmark?

“I live in an area in downtown Copenhagen with a vast variety of different cultures and ethnicities. So I am no stranger to multicultural surroundings. What I really thought was different from what I’m used to at home was the way that the culture gets mixed with the society that they live in. The Puerto Ricans adapt to American society and values but at the same time they maintain strong links with their background. Like the term “Latin-American”. They can be Americans and be proud of the American values and society and be extremely patriotic about their country. But they also remember their Latin inheritance and kind of mix big chunks of that culture into their newly adapted American culture. Many of the Puerto Ricans don’t venture much outside their neighborhood though. They stay in their local community and go to work, school, and do their daily business inside the perimeter of East Harlem. And another aspect of their culture was living much of their free time in the streets. You’d encounter heaps of people standing outside residential buildings just talking, or sitting on the pavement or staircases debating, shouting, laughing, and commenting on by-passers. I’m not used to this kind of active engagement in the local community. There is a lot of hustle and bustle all the time. Maybe it’s due to the fact that the Puerto Ricans are very sociable and like to get together.
And the apartments are often very small and overcrowded so they gather in the streets where they can keep an eye on what’s going on in the neighborhood. This also causes a lot of traffic and pollution. People litter all over. The garbage cans are lined up on the sidewalks for collection from the renovation companies”.

Was there a concentration of social outcasts in the area, being a poorer quarter of the town?

“You did come across some homeless people sleeping in the streets but no more than usual from other parts of town. I really didn’t see any people shooting up (taking drugs) but I guess there were crack heads in the area just like everywhere else. I did notice a few alcoholics sitting with their bottles on staircases or benches. But, again, I don’t think that there was a larger concentration of alcoholics in East Harlem than in other city area. So even though it was a poor neighborhood I don’t think that there was a majority of social outcasts living in the area. But I have a Danish friend who lives permanently in Brooklyn, New York. And whenever she used to come and visit me, she told me that she really didn’t like the area. As a person residing in the much more fashionable Brooklyn with a concentration of people with a higher income than average, she really did feel like visiting a ghetto area, when visiting me. And that’s completely different from my own impression of the different areas in New York City. She thought that East Harlem was a slum area that she really didn’t like visiting, and I really didn’t mind staying there, nobody ever bothered me. On the other hand, I really didn’t like going to the Bronx area. Everyone knew that the Bronx is a real shady place with a lot of crime and gang violence. One time I fell asleep on the subway on the inbound (going back to East Harlem). I woke up in the Bronx and I nearly died of fright. It was in the middle of the night and I was all alone in the subway, a bit tipsy after a night out. I got off at a station and waited for the next train outbound for East Harlem, waiting anxiously and looking all around me the entire time. I never ever had that kind of feeling in East Harlem”. Moving on to your work place: Can you describe the work place, your job and the environment?

“Well, I worked for an organization called S.H.O.P.P (Senior Health Outreach & Prevention Program) that the Lehman College provided for me as part of my practical training process. S.H.O.P.P is an organization that is funded by private finances and government support. The basic idea of S.H.O.P.P is to provide help from a professional team of nurses for health issues and social workers for legal advice or support for applying for certain benefits. S.H.O.P.P would then typically go out to certain community centers and provide the necessary help for the people frequenting these centers. We mostly visited senior citizen community centers for people who didn’t have a lot of money to live on.

The patients were primarily Afro-American senior citizens. Some of them lived in a residential building adjacent to the community centers and sometimes I had to go to their apartments to collect them for certain tests or checkups. Typically they suffered from diseases like diabetes, high blood pressure, overweight, vascular problems, etc.

We provided them with the opportunity to get a checkup on their health. We did the measurement of their BMI (Body Mass Index), blood pressure and checked them for diabetes. If they were in need of further treatment, we made the arrangements for them with their doctors or hospitals.

We basically offered them our expertise and empowered them to take care of themselves. We actually got some of them to do their own measuring of blood pressure and to perform measurements on other senior citizens. We tried to talk them into seeing a physician if we thought that they needed it and tried to direct them to the best ones we knew. We also offered physical exercise to them, danced with them and got them to exercise on a regular basis. Our main goal going out to these senior community centers was to get the seniors to take responsibility for their own health and to empower them to share their knowledge in their local communities. Many of them didn’t have much money and barely made it through the day on a small pension. The hospitals are expensive in the US, you have to pay for your stay and the help you receive there. It’s not like in Denmark where the state provides the necessary help for you for free. You pay everything yourself in the US”. 
“In the US it’s only the poor people who go to the public hospitals. A thing like going to your doctor’s office to see him for a consultation about some petty thing costs you money. Many poor people then go to the public hospitals for minor, sometimes insignificant problems since the government pays. Also the public hospitals offer their patients possibilities of someone speaking their language, and if a patient doesn’t speak English they will provide an interpreter for you free of charge. A major difference in the US to the Danish health care system is that as a medical professional working at the hospital you need to have a private insurance for cases of law suits. Many patients end up suing the hospitals for wrong treatments or if they get sick again after being discharged from the hospitals. And the hospital, as an employer, doesn’t cover any law suits against you. That’s entirely up to you, as a private person, to cover. So you need insurance when they hire you at the hospitals. A co-worker of mine received a law suit from a patient long after she stopped working at a hospital. The patient claimed that she received the wrong kind of medication and sued for a large amount of money. The hospital that my co-worker used to work for refused to help her, and she had to take matters into her own hand with her assurance company. Luckily the patient lost any claims she had. In another example, a patient fell out of her bed in the hospital and she sued them for not putting up the protection bar on the bed. The risk of being sued is present all the time and as a health worker you constantly double check your own work for flaws and mistakes”.

What was your general impression of the welfare system in the US?

“In the health sector you have to pay for everything yourself. That’s why you need insurance. That is IF you’re able to afford it. The public hospitals don’t have the best possible help to offer. They are underfunded and short of expertise. The waiting time for help is a lot longer in public hospitals. You can always get some sort of help from the government. Like social welfare, Medicare and Medicaid (two financial aid possibilities from the
government for people with a low income). But you really don’t receive much and it won’t get you far. If you get ill, you had better pray for having been able to afford a good insurance in due time and also a prosperous pension agreement so you can provide for a decent golden age (retirement period)."

**How about the educational system in the US? What were your own impressions and experiences?**

“The educational sector is, like the health sector, sponsored by private funds. That means that you have to pay for your own education once you have finished high school and go to college/university. You can apply for grants and hope for some public funding but basically you have to pay for your own future. I attended a city community college, the Lehman College. It was a place for people who didn’t have much money. You could tell that the facilities were out of date and in need of some modernization. The books at the school library were a bit out of date as well.

But the teachers were all highly educated and good at their professions. The way it works in college in the US is that you have to pass a test in every subject after each term in order to continue studying. That’s different from the Danish system. They also graded you on every single paper you handed in. You had to produce and show a portfolio on all your work to your teachers. You were constantly being assessed and guided by your teachers. And you’d only address them by “Dr...” or “Professor...” and then their last names, never by their first names. That’s something unknown of in the Danish educational system.”

The movie *Precious* stresses the desperate struggle she goes through to get through education so she can improve the opportunities for herself and her children. Do you think that the story is realistic in portraying a typical American view on education in general and the values connected with educating yourself (following the slogan “the sky’s the limit”)?

“I think it gives a very realistic view of the typical American attitude towards education in the US. It is the only way to go if you want to improve your situation and move on up in society. Your opportunities are connected with your education and skills. It is not uncommon that people keep on adding degrees to their diplomas all their working life. I had a professor at the Lehman College who had not one, not two, but THREE masters on her diploma. The Americans are proud of what they can do. And they flaunt their achievements with great pride. You won’t find the use of the Danish term “Jantelov” in the US. The sky IS the limit. Everyone agrees with that saying. If you want to achieve something in life, the opportunities are there for you. You constantly encounter advertisements in papers, bill boards and TV about improving your skills.

“Are you sick and tired of being stuck in a low-life, dead-end job with no hopes for the future? Then try the Lehman College for a professional boost in your career. We have the most experienced professionals and the best expertise in educating people, who then move on and achieve great success in life”. Such a slogan could be a typical statement in advertisements. So I’d say that the movie is very realistic in depicting Precious and her strive for wanting to improve her skills and opportunities”.

**And how about the cultural depiction of Harlem in Precious, the Afro-American environment? Do you recognize anything from your own stay?**

“The movie is realistic when you think of the time frame. It’s been twenty-three years from when the story took place. And today the area of West Harlem has undergone some changes. It’s not only an exclusive Afro-American population residing there anymore. The Projects have been totally renovated and the entire area has had a facelift. Actually the area of West Harlem today is a much more attractive area to live in than East Harlem is. You still see these militaristic veterans standing on their boxes at the corners of the streets and shouting about civil rights for the blacks and oppressions from the whites. But you don’t see that many anymore”.

63
How about the way that parents in the Afro-American society address their children? In the movie of Precious you see some really horrible examples and you kind of get the feeling that it’s a more general mentality in that particular society.

“Well, I really couldn’t say. I didn’t see enough of the black communities to tell whether the movie is realistic in depicting the parent-child relationship in the Afro-American community. I did, however, see, one day riding the subway, this black woman standing with her toddler of a girl in her arms. The girl was restless and tried everything she could to get down. Her mom kept yanking her braids and telling her that she’d get a good “whooping” (spanking) if she didn’t behave. I was quite surprise that the mom didn’t seem to mind that she was standing in a public place and that people were listening in on them. I couldn’t say whether it was an isolated incident or a somewhat representative view of upbringing from an Afro-American perspective”.

In your opinion what would you say was your most negative impression of Harlem?

“The shopping for food and the lack of opportunities to get some fresh healthy food. At least that goes for East Harlem”.

And the most positive?

“That would have to be the diversity of people, the ethnicity and the way it just worked. There was such a vibe and buzz going on all the time. The city never really sleeps – that’s a fact!”.

The pictures featured in this interview are from Jackie’s own private collection and taken by her during her stay. For further information about the S.H.O.P.P project, please check out the national organization’s home page at:

http://www.ochealthinfo.com/shopp/index.htm
LINKS AND REFERENCES

Literature references

*The Color Purple* by Alice Walker

*The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

Harlem

http://www.changingfaceofharlem.com/  movie site about changes in Harlem throughout history

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/iraas/harlem/index.html web site with background information about Harlem on: history, culture, education, ethnic groups, famous people from Harlem, etc.

http://invinciblecities.camden.rutgers.edu/intro.swf web site by US photographer Camilo José Vergara documenting Harlem in pictures. People, streets, buildings, art, etc.

http://wirednewyork.com/forum/showthread.php?t=11241 web site with a lot of pictures from everyday life in Harlem

http://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/mcwhorter.htm web site from controversial US linguistic John McWorther from Center For The American University at The Manhattan Institute For Policy Research who has dedicated his research field to Afro-American English (Black English). Has written articles and books upon the subject of Afro-American dialects and sociolects.

www.harlemworldblog.wordpress.com

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Contains activities for working with English in class and at home.

http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0112617.html (compulsory school attendance N.Y)
Abuse

http://www.unicef.dk/script/site/page.asp?artid=467

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