about the performance

Starring Newark’s very own Michael B. Jordan (Black Panther, Creed, Creed II), and Oscar winners Jamie Foxx (Ray, Baby Driver, Django: Unchained) and Brie Larson (Room, The Glass Castle, Captain Marvel), Just Mercy is an inspiring drama that brings one of the most important stories of our time to the big screen. Award-winning filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton (The Glass Castle, Short Term 12) directed the film from a screenplay he co-wrote, based on the award-winning nonfiction bestseller by Bryan Stevenson. A powerful and thought-provoking true story, Just Mercy follows young lawyer Bryan Stevenson (Jordan) and his history-making battle for justice.

After graduating from Harvard, Stevenson heads to Alabama to defend those wrongly condemned or those not afforded proper representation. One of his first cases is that of Walter McMillian, who is sentenced to die in 1987 for the murder of an 18-year-old girl, despite evidence proving his innocence. In the years that follow, Stevenson encounters racism and legal and political maneuverings as he tirelessly fights for McMillian’s life.

Walter McMillian (left) celebrates with family after Bryan Stevenson won his release from death row in 1993

About NJPAC On the Mic
NJPAC On the Mic is an audio resource that takes SchoolTime performances to the next level. This podcast series features three exclusive, curriculum-aligned episodes for all of NJPAC’s 2022-2023 SchoolTime performances. On the Mic offers students the opportunity to engage their listening skills, deepen their understanding of the performance and learn about the process of bringing a live or recorded production to life. This immersive audio experience features a theme song by students in the NJPAC arts education program.

Jamie Foxx playing Walter McMillian (left) and Michael B. Jordan playing Bryan Stevenson (right) in Just Mercy

How to listen to this episode of NJPAC On the Mic
Scan the QR code above or visit: njpac.org/education-program to access the podcast and the following show notes:
Part 1: About | Pre-show audio, 6 minutes
Includes: An introduction to the performance, artists & venue, welcome message
Written and hosted by Dania Ramos
Sound editing and design by Michael Aquino
Theme and outro music by Slim Beats from NJPAC’s Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program
Additional music from Epidemic Sound
Voiceover by Michael Aquino
Welcome message voiced by Donna Walker-Kuhne

Part 2: Connect | Post-show audio, 10 minutes
Includes: Reflection questions, a look at artists who contributed to the Equal Justice Initiative’s Legacy Museum and Memorial for Peace and Justice, a brief selection of vocabulary words
Written and hosted by Dania Ramos
Sound editing and design by Michael Aquino
Theme and outro music by Slim Beats from NJPAC’s Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program
Additional music from Epidemic Sound
Opening question voiced by Donna Walker-Kuhne

Part 3: Spotlight | Post-show audio, 17 minutes
Includes: An exclusive interview with Donna Walker-Kuhne, discussion starters
Written and hosted by Dania Ramos
Sound editing and design by Michael Aquino
Theme and outro music by Slim Beats from NJPAC’s Hip Hop Arts and Culture Program
Additional music from Epidemic Sound

Starring Newark’s very own Michael B. Jordan (Black Panther, Creed, Creed II), and Oscar winners Jamie Foxx (Ray, Baby Driver, Django: Unchained) and Brie Larson (Room, The Glass Castle, Captain Marvel), Just Mercy is an inspiring drama that brings one of the most important stories of our time to the big screen. Award-winning filmmaker Destin Daniel Cretton (The Glass Castle, Short Term 12) directed the film from a screenplay he co-wrote, based on the award-winning nonfiction bestseller by Bryan Stevenson. A powerful and thought-provoking true story, Just Mercy follows young lawyer Bryan Stevenson (Jordan) and his history-making battle for justice.
### Inspired Ideas in the Classroom

| Prepare for the Performance | **Share statistics from the following resources with your students. Think about which statistics may be most impactful to your students.**
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
|                            | **Rocks the Death Penalty**
|                            | **Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States since 1980**
| Lead a discussion about the unethical nature of the statistics you shared. Pose the question, “What can we do about this?”
| **Transition to introducing Bryan Stevenson, the Equal Justice Initiative and Just Mercy by showing the trailer for the film and Stevenson’s introduction.**

### Experience the Performance

| Introduce and define the term empathy. As they view the film, ask students to consider which characters demonstrate empathy, and which do not. Remind students that the movie is based on a true story, the bulk of which spans the years of 1986 (Ronda Morrison’s murder) to 1993 (Walter McMillian’s release from prison).
| **Lead a discussion about the unethical nature of the statistics you shared. Pose the question, “What can we do about this?”**
| **Transition to introducing Bryan Stevenson, the Equal Justice Initiative and Just Mercy by showing the trailer for the film and Stevenson’s introduction.**
| **Reflect on the meaning of the term empathy. Which characters in the movie demonstrate empathy and which do not? How do you imagine you would react if placed in their scenarios? Remember: Just Mercy is based on a true story and took place not even 40 years ago.**

### Reflect, respond and read

| Throughout the movie, there are allusions to the history of racism in the United States. Recall the scene when Walter McMillian sees a group of Black inmates working in a field (a clear connection to slavery), and when Johnny D. states, “This is just another excuse to Lynch a Black man” in reference to his unjust incarceration.
| **Throughout the movie, there are allusions to the history of racism in the United States. Recall the scene when Walter McMillian sees a group of Black inmates working in a field (a clear connection to slavery), and when Johnny D. states, “This is just another excuse to Lynch a Black man” in reference to his unjust incarceration.**
| **Lead a discussion comparing the daily entry and the movie.**
| **Use the current day’s event to complete Activity Sheet 1 as a class. Then provide students with a copy and allow them time to choose a date/event and work independently.**

### Focus

| As a class, take a look at the cases page on the Innocence Project’s website. Choose a case to highlight for the class. Discuss notable similarities in Johnny D’s case in Just Mercy and the influences of racial injustice in the United States when applicable. Then, allow students time to explore the site independently. Ask students to look for a case that evokes an emotional response like Bryan Stevenson felt upon discovering Johnny D’s case.
| **Review the case files on the Innocence Project’s website with your teacher. Consider what connections you can make between the cases on the website and Johnny D’s from Just Mercy. Do you notice the influence of racial injustice in the history of the United States? How many more inmates in our country do you think have been falsely accused and deserve to be exonerated?**
| **Refer to the “History of Racial Injustice Daily Calendar” as a guide, complete Activity Sheet 1 together with your class. Afterwards, fill out the activity again independently by choosing your own date/event.**

### Origin</p>

| As a class, read the scene from Just Mercy where Bryan Stevenson presents his closing argument in Johnny D’s case. The text for this scene can be found in the script. Discuss the tone used by Stevenson, the content and the overall persuasive manner of his speech. Ask students to imagine themselves in the position of either Stevenson or a lawyer with the Equal Justice Initiative/Innocence Project. Their task is to write and present a closing statement for the case they chose on the Innocence Project’s website. Distribute Activity Sheet 2 and monitor students’ progress as they brainstorm and write their argument.
| **Rewatch Bryan Stevenson’s closing argument scene from Just Mercy and consider his tone of voice and the content he used. Can you imagine yourself in his shoes? Or the shoes of a lawyer for the Equal Justice Initiative/Innocence Project?**
| **Select a case from the Innocence Project website and prepare a closing argument for the case you have chosen on the Innocence Project’s website. Your goal is to achieve exoneration (or complete release) of your client. Use Activity Sheet 2 to brainstorm and write your closing argument.**

### Rehearse

| Ask students to find a partner and present the first draft of their closing arguments. The student who is listening should do so from the viewpoint of a judge or jury member – someone who will decide the fate of the case. By receiving feedback from their partner, students can revise as needed in preparation for their “court case” (final performance).
| **Pick a partner and present the first draft of your closing argument. They will listen from the viewpoint of a judge or jury member, and then you will do the same when they present. If you were the judge or jury, would you free your partner’s client? Exchange feedback and make any revisions in preparation for your “court case” (final performance).**

### Make magic

| Arrange your classroom to resemble a courtroom. Each student will perform as a lawyer presenting their closing argument with the goal of exonerating their client.
| **Channel your inner Bryan Stevenson and present your argument to exonerate your client. Consider your body language, the tone of your voice and your overall demeanor while presenting.**

### Standards

| **Social Studies**
| **English Language Arts**
| **History of Racial Injustice Daily Calendar**
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### Activity Sheets:

1. **Activity Sheet 1**
2. **Activity Sheet 2**
Career Readiness, Life Literacies, & Key Skills
9.4.12.IML.7
Develop an argument to support a claim regarding a current workplace or societal/ethical issue such as climate change.

English Language Arts
RH.9-10.3.
Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; draw connections between the events to determine whether earlier events caused later ones or simply preceded them.

NJSLA.SL.3.
Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

NJSLA.SL.4.
Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

NJSLA.W.1.
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

NJSLA.W.5.
Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

NJSLA.W.7.
Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects, utilizing an inquiry-based research process, based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

SEL
Recognize and identify the thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of others.
Demonstrate an awareness of the differences among individuals, groups, and others’ cultural backgrounds.
Utilize positive communication and social skills to interact effectively with others.

Social Studies
6.1.B.CivicsDP.3.a
Use primary and secondary sources to assess whether or not the ideals found in the Declaration of Independence were fulfilled for women, African Americans, and Native Americans during this time period.

6.3.B.CivicsHR.1
Construct an argument as to the source of human rights and how they are best protected.

6.3.B.CivicsPR.5
Engage in simulated democratic processes (e.g., legislative hearings, judicial proceedings, elections) to understand how conflicting points of view are addressed in a democratic society.

Find the standards
For more detailed information on the standards, visit these websites:
NATIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS
corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy
NATIONAL SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS
socialstudies.org/standards
NATIONAL CORE ARTS ANCHOR STANDARDS
nationalartsstandards.org

vocabulary
Circumstantial Evidence
Indirect evidence that does not, on its face, prove a fact in issue but gives rise to a logical inference that the fact exists

Death Row
A prison block or section for prisoners sentenced to death

Empathy
The ability to understand and share the feelings of another

Exoneration
The action of officially absolving someone from blame; vindication

Exoneree
A person who is shown to be not guilty of a crime for which he or she was formerly found guilty

Forensic Evidence
Evidence obtained by scientific methods such as ballistics, blood test and DNA test and used in court

Implicit Bias
Attitudes towards, or associated stereotypes with, people without conscious knowledge

Incarceration
The state of being confined in prison; imprisonment

Racial Bias
A personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment made solely on an individual’s race

Wrongful Conviction
When the person convicted is factually innocent of the charges; a conviction in which procedural errors violated the convicted person’s rights
Websites
Equal Justice Initiative
eji.org/about

Just Mercy Movie Discussion Guide

Vox Media interview with Bryan Stevenson
vox.com/21327742/bryan-stevenson-the-ezra-klein-show-america-slavery-healing-racism-george-floyd-protests

The Legacy Museum:
The National Memorial for Peace and Justice:
museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum

Journeys in Film: Just Mercy Curriculum
journeysinfilm.org

The Innocence Project
innocenceproject.org

Death Penalty Information Center
depthpenaltyinfo.org

Race and Wrongful Convictions in the United States 2022

A History of Racial Injustice Daily Calendar
calendar.eji.org/racial-injustice

Just Mercy (Book & Movie)
justmercy.eji.org

Bryan Stevenson
eji.org/bryan-stevenson

Winfred Rembert
winfredrembert.com

Elizabeth Catlett
nmaahc.si.edu/latinx/elizabeth-catlett

Monument Lab | Kwame Akoto-Bamfo, Building
Restorative Justice Across the African Diaspora
shorturl.at/cwG78

NYU | Steinhardt
steinhardt.nyu.edu/people/donna-walker-kuhne

Videos
Just Mercy official trailer
youtu.be/GVQbeG5yW78

Bryan Stevenson’s TED Talks
ted.com/speakers/bryan_stevenson

More from NJPAC
NJPAC | About NJPAC
njpac.org/about

NJPAC Resources | Just Mercy
njpac.org/arts-education/teacher-resources

NJPAC Arts Education programs
njpac.org/arts-education

NJPAC Standing in Solidarity series
njpac.org/series/standing-in-solidarity

njpac.org/education
In-School Residencies: NJPAC teaching artists come right to your school to teach the performing arts to your students. Our super-flexible in-person residencies are designed to meet your needs, and you'll have a dedicated program manager to help you every step of the way. It's the perfect program to keep your students creating, connecting and expressing themselves through the magic of the arts.

Professional Development: Calling all educators! Expand your teaching skills, deepen your curriculum and give yourself a creative boost in NJPAC's forward-thinking professional development workshops. Our virtual PD programs are for teachers all the way from pre-K to high school, and include hip hop, dance, storytelling, theater, music and more. Not only will you learn something... you'll also have fun and be inspired.

For more information or to schedule an appointment, please email our education sales team at artseducation@njpac.org. Or visit njpac.org/education

Saturday Programs: NJPAC’s Saturday programs are geared towards students at every level — from those who dream of starring on Broadway to those who are still learning their scales. Students work with professional artists to build technique and develop their own creative style in hip hop, jazz, theater, musical theater and symphonic band.

Summer Programs: Want to begin to explore the arts? Or immerse yourself in the study of one genre? Then join us at NJPAC next summer in one of seven programs that spark the creativity in every child through the study of music, dance and theater.