

# Learning Guide

# *10 SECONDS*

By: Miriam Gonzales



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# About This Learning Guide

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### AGE RANGE

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This learning guide is recommended for grades 8-12.

### CONTENT ADVISORY

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**10 SECONDS** is a modern drama that depicts surrounding policing and young people.

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This learning guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to enduring understandings of the play's meaning and relevance.



## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

### MIRIAM GONZALES

Miriam Gonzales' works include: *The Smartest Girl in the World*; *Sunny and Licorice*; *Bertie, Maggie and the Magic Zero*; *Óyeme, the beautiful*; *The South Overlook Oaks* (adaptation); and *Girl Power!* (Kennedy Center, NSO youth concert series). Her work has been produced at Childsplay (Tempe, Ariz.), Imagination Stage (Bethesda, Md.), Arts on the Horizon (Alexandria, Va.), Atlas Performing Arts Center (Washington, D.C.), Columbus Children's Theatre (Columbus, Ohio) and Austin Playhouse (Austin, Texas). In addition to stage productions, her work has toured extensively into schools and communities throughout the D.C. area and Arizona. Her work has been developed and has received professional readings at the Write Now Festival, La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series, Northwestern University's PLAYground Festival, the AATE National Conference, Imagination Stage, Latinx Theatre Commons, Georgetown University's CrossCurrents festival and the TCG National Conference. Gonzales is a former teaching artist with Young Playwrights' Theater (YPT) in Washington, D.C., and served as YPT's board chair. She currently serves on the board of the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. Gonzales is the co-developer of Imagination Stage's ¡Óyeme! project, which is a theatre arts program for Central American refugee youth. Gonzales is the recipient of the Write Now Award, the Aurand Harris Memorial Playwriting Award, the AATE Distinguished Play Award and Imagination Stage's Imagination Award. She is a graduate of Brown University and received her Ph.D. in education and M.A. in sociology from Stanford University. Gonzales hails from Corpus Christi, Texas, and currently lives in Washington, D.C., with her husband and two daughters.





# Play Synopsis

Fourteen year old Ray Henderson narrates a day that went terribly wrong for him and his friend, Jimi. As a self-described "math-nerd" and budding young theatre artist, Ray follows the advice of his drama teacher, Mrs. Martin, and shares the events of the day through his playwriting. Their story begins with Jimi and Ray deciding to change their image through the "greatest plan ever". This plan includes Ray auditioning for the school play with a 10 second monologue. Jimi decides that he will write a poem for Annie, the girl on whom he has a crush. Jimi hopes that if Annie returns his affections it will ameliorate the stress he feels over his mom leaving the home and the tension in his relationship with his dad.

At an earlier time, Jimi has befriended Officer Leland while he waited at the metro to go to school. He shared with Officer Leland his feelings about Annie, and Officer Leland showed support for him and encouraged him to not skip school. Ray was dismayed that Jimi became friends with "12".

On the day of the audition, Ray does not get the part. At the same time Jimi shares his poem with Annie, and her friends mock him. Jimi runs away from school and shares the events through a phone call with Ray. Officer Leland meets Officer Kent earlier in the day and advises her that they are on the look out for pick pockets stealing cell phones and other items. After Jimi talks to Ray he returns to the metro highly agitated. Officer Kent confronts Jimi and accuses him of stealing the cell phone. Jimi resists her, and she wrestles him to the ground. Officer Leland tries to de-escalate the situation. The melee ends with Jimi on the ground and Officer Kent reaching for her utility belt. Ray arrives at the metro at the beginning of the confrontation and observes the events.



# The Characters

## Ray

14 years old, Jimi's friend. Ray identifies as African American. Ray is a math nerd, actor, and playwright.

## Jimi

14 years old, Ray's friend. Jimi identifies as African American. His mom has left the household, and his relationship with his dad is strained.

## Officer Samantha Kent

Officer Kent is an adult and identifies as a white woman. She is the only employed member in her household, and her son struggles in school.

## Officer Craig Leland

Officer Leland is an adult and identifies as an African American man. He is a father with two young children.



# Theatre Vocabulary

**Character:** A person in a novel, play, or movie.

**Climax:** The highest, most intense point of a story.

**Crisis:** In the structure of a play the climax, or crisis, is the decisive moment, or turning point, at which the rising action of the play is reversed to falling action. It may or may not coincide with the highest point of interest in the drama.

**Conflict:** The essence of dramatic storytelling. Conflict may manifest as external or internal. External conflict usually involves the protagonist and the antagonist. A conflict in literature is defined as any struggle between opposing forces. Usually, the main character struggles against some other force

**Dialogue:** A written or spoken conversational exchange between two or more people, and a literary and theatrical form that depicts such an exchange.

**Exposition:** The portion of a story that provides the listener with background information such as character names, relationships, details about the setting, and prior plot events.

**Fourth Wall:** An imaginary wall that separates the audience from the action of a stage play or film, which is said to be broken when an actor talks directly to the audience or starts talking as themselves rather than as their character.

**Gesture:** A movement of part of the body, especially a hand or the head, to express an idea or meaning.

**Improvisation:** A spontaneous performance or rehearsal without specific or scripted preparation.

**Inciting Incident:** The event or decision that begins a story's problem or conflict.

**Monologue:** A dramatic monologue is any speech of some duration addressed by a character to a second person.

**Plot:** The main events of a story.

**Setting:** The place or surroundings in which the story takes place (in a house, on a plane, on the beach, during a war, during a school year, while working on a farm or in a factory, etc.).

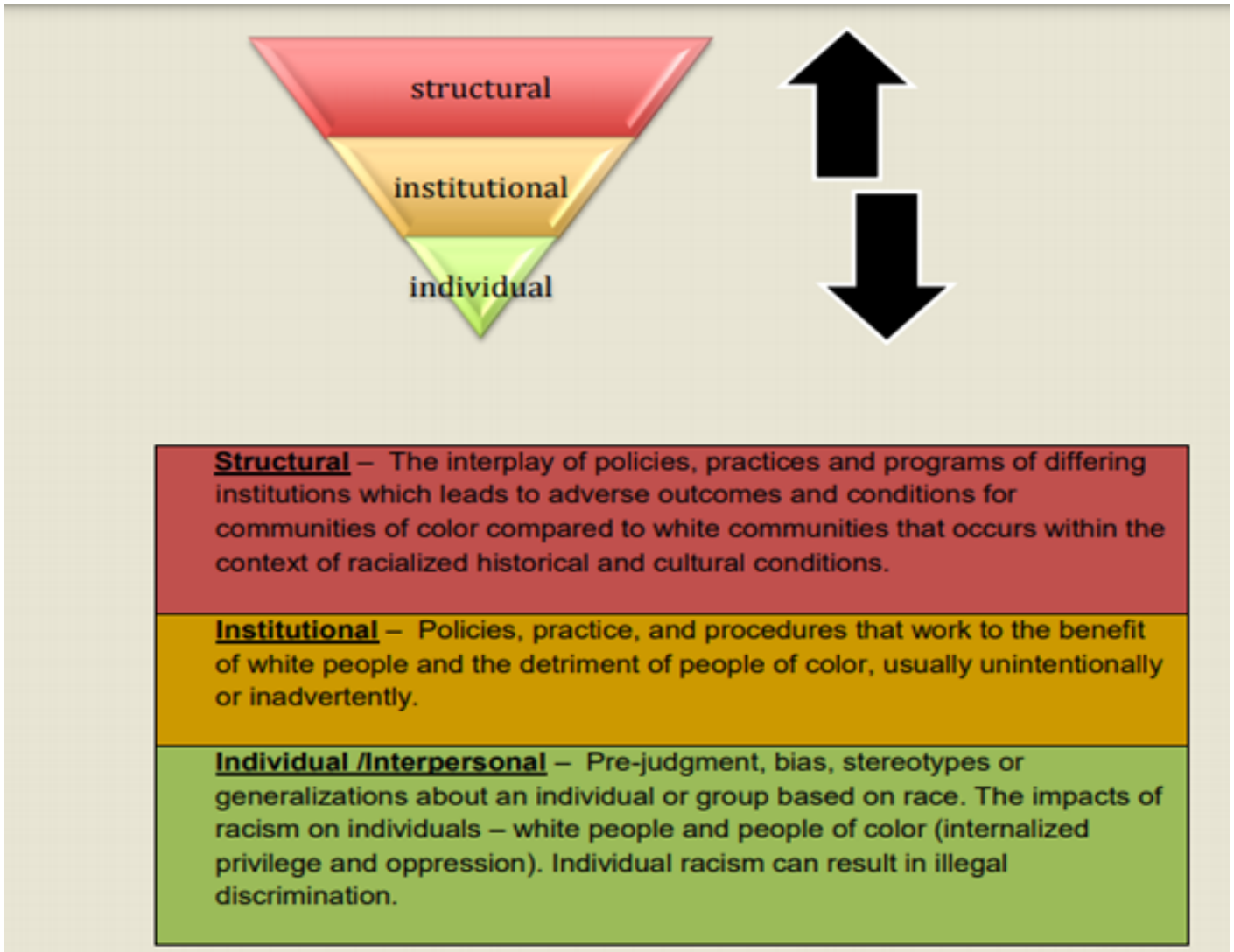
**Soliloquy:** An utterance or discourse by a person who is talking to himself or herself or is disregarding or oblivious to any hearers present (often used as a device in drama to disclose a character's innermost thoughts): Hamlet's soliloquy begins with, "To be or not to be."

**Story Arc:** The path along which the story develops.

**Story Structure:** The major elements of a story, including plot, characters, setting, and theme.

**Theme:** The subject in a story. A story can have several themes. For instance, one theme is the life of a young woman; simultaneously, the story also follows a second theme, which is how the young woman's father is having problems at his work. The themes may influence each other or develop independently; in this example, the second theme may be the setting for the first theme (see "setting").

# Theme 1: Structures of Racism



Types of Racism

It is important to recognize and understand that there are multiple levels of racism in the United States that contribute to the inequities and injustices faced by people of color. While individual racism (personal prejudice and biases) are most commonly understood in this country, emerging explanations of racism deem that individual racism is a symptom of systemic or institutional racism: policies and practices on a large scale that routinely and repeatedly produce racially inequitable outcomes. Some examples of systems where structural/ systemic racism is deeply rooted includes employment, housing, incarceration, and drug arrests.



## Theme 2: Historical Trauma

The Department of Health and Human Services defines historical trauma as "multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural, racial or ethnic group." Clinical Social Workers began noting the existence and effect of historical trauma when studying the descendants of Holocaust survivors and descendants of interned Japanese Americans in World War II. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a clinician and researcher, refers to historical trauma as, "cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experience."

In 10 Seconds, Jimi and Ray discuss how painful interactions with law enforcement have been happening for "hundreds of years". These lines of dialogue are referring to the painful and complicated relationship of policing with the African American community. While a thorough historical and sociological analysis of past and present problems of policing in the African American community will be beyond the scope of this guide, we will provide an overview of many of these issues.

While modern day police forces start in the early 1900s, the origins of policing in the United States date back to the American colonies. A slave patrol began in the Carolina colonies in 1704. Their duty was chasing and hunting escaped slaves and releasing terror on slave communities to prevent riots. These slave patrols last until the Civil War.

By the mid 1800s, immigrants from Germany and Ireland move into the Northern states and citizens from England, and The Netherlands clash with the new settlers. As the new immigrants are blamed for disorderly conduct and mobs, a "night watch" is created to keep order. In 1838, the first official police force is established in Boston. Their main duty is to prevent crime.

After the Civil War, the first Black Codes are passed. These laws specify how and where freed slaves can work and how much they can be paid. The Black Codes essentially maintain the structure of slavery without calling it "slavery." Other Black Codes restrict Black Americans' rights to vote and dictate where they can travel and live. Many ex-Confederate soldiers transition to policing where they could enforce these rules and continue to perpetuate the oppression of Black Americans.

Radical Reconstruction, through legislation and Constitutional amendments, ushered in new protections of civil rights for African Americans. These gains were undermined at the end of Reconstruction when

Jim Crow laws became the status quo in many Southern states. These Jim Crow laws were not done away with until the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

## **Theme 3: Collective Trauma**

According to Psychology Today, Collective Trauma "refers to the impact of a traumatic experience that affects and involves entire groups of people, communities, or societies. Collective trauma is extraordinary in that not only can it bring distress and negative consequences to individuals, but in that it can also change the entire fabric of a community."

Unfortunately, there is an intersection of racism and various types of trauma. In 2018, a study was conducted to examine the impact on mental health from police violence. In the study, almost 50% of African Americans stated that they were exposed to police killings of unarmed residents. (This exposure occurred through word of mouth or through media.) According to Rashad Robinson of the Color of Change this type of trauma engenders a distrust of policing.

More recent policing policies and legislation also contribute to the collective trauma around law enforcement. For example, the 1994 Crime Bill was used to over incarcerate African Americans. The bill imposed harsher penalties for crack than for powder cocaine. "The disparity in the treatment of crack and cocaine really was backed up by anecdote and stereotype, not by data," said Gertner, a lecturer at Harvard Law School. "There was no data suggesting that crack was infinitely more dangerous than cocaine. It was the young Black predator narrative."

"Tough on Crime" political movements had long been fodder to subjugate African Americans, but during the 1980s and 1990s, the movements resulted in initiatives such as Operation Clean Sweep in Washington, DC. The stated mission of the initiative was to rid the city of drug selling, but instead it resulted in the arrest of one in four African Americans in Washington, DC. These and other policies created a system where African Americans found themselves in a perpetual cycle of contending with the justice system and incarceration, often for misdemeanor offences or for issues surrounding substance abuse, which should have been treated from the lens of the disease model as opposed to criminality.

# Theme 4: Personal Trauma

Personal trauma can be defined as emotional and psychological trauma that is the result of extraordinarily stressful events that shatter a person's sense of security. Personal trauma can be the result of a one-time event such as an accident, injury or an attack. It can also stem from ongoing stress such as bullying, neglect, or abandonment. Lastly, personal trauma may result from commonly overlooked causes such as the sudden loss of someone, humiliation, or cruelty.

Personal trauma presents itself in many ways, and it is helpful to learn its symptoms. There may have emotional and psychological symptoms such as shock, anger, anxiety, shame, hopelessness, or disconnection. It can also have physical symptoms like insomnia, fatigue, agitation, aches, pains, and muscle tension.

One key component of how people cope with personal trauma is through not isolating. Connecting with counselors, friends, support groups, are valid strategies to address issues surrounding personal trauma. Many people use self-care techniques like meditation and breathing to calm down the nervous system's response to trauma. There are a plethora of resources in school and in the community available to support people addressing these issues.

# Discussion Questions

1. What was a moment in the show that stood out to you? Why did it stand out to you?
2. Did you have a question before the performance began? If so, was it answered? What questions do you have now about the performance?
3. Which characters stood out to you? How would you describe their character traits, and how did those traits affect events in the story?
4. How would you describe the show to someone who has not seen it?
5. What are the conflicts in the play? What are the issues and assumptions that create the conflicts?
6. Did your experience at **10 Seconds** change your perspective or deepen your understanding of the intersectionality of racism and policing in America?

# Activity

One internal conflict that Jimi and Ray share is their need for freedom of expression while feeling the imposing forces of those in power around them. We will use either the desire for freedom of expression or the weight of imposing forces or both to inspire our creative writing exercise. We will write a Diamante Poem, which is an unrhymed seven line poem. The following template will guide you in the writing process.

Line 1: 1 word (subject/noun)

Line 2: 2 adjectives that describe line 1

Line 3: 3 -ing words that relate to line 1

Line 4: 4 nouns (first 2 relate to line 1, last 2 relate to line 7-  
-if you're writing about opposite topics)

Line 5: 3 -ing words that relate to line 7

Line 6: 2 adjectives that describe line 7

Line 7: 1 word (subject/noun)



# Resources

## Go-Go Music

- An introduction to Go-Go music in Washington D.C.

<https://washington.org/visit-dc/gogo-music>

## Police and Youth

- A resource exploring encounters between police and youth and how to reduce juvenile arrests.

<https://strategiesforyouth.org/>

- An article that explores how bilingual youth alternate between two or more languages in conversation.

<https://bilingualkidspot.com/2018/04/04/code-switching-sophisticated-linguistic-tool/>

## Social Justice and Tolerance

- Teaching for Change

An educator's resource for building social justice in the classroom.

[teachingforchange.org](http://teachingforchange.org)

- Learning for Justice (formerly known as Teaching for Tolerance)

Another resource for building social justice in the classroom and beyond.

[learningforjustice.org](http://learningforjustice.org)

- Tools for Talking about Race

A variety of resources from the National Museum of African American History & Culture on how to discuss race, build community, understand bias, and choose to be anti-racist.

<https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race>