

NOUS LE NORD

An Agitate Play experience for wee-ones and not-so-wee-ones

By: Brendon Allen

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Note to the reader/performer & talking points for families

This play is best performed as a story time or weekend play experience. The performance is meant to inspire discussions, activities and fun on a summer day when maybe you do not have any plans yet or maybe on a day when you or your little activist have a spark of curiosity toward these topics. If you do not have access to a laptop or tablet that all the actors can read from, you can print as many copies of the script as you may need. The stage directions are written with a participatory feel. This is an attempt to make the experience feel playful. Play along if you can. If the stage directions ask you a question, feel free to answer out loud. This play works best with a cast of three, but can be done in any way you choose. The casting is flexible to allow for name changes, gender flexibility and ways to personalize to match your household. It is up to you. Each scene does not go beyond two characters speaking, so you can share all the parts, including reading stage directions.

This play presents the opportunity for the actors to engage in exploring discussions on diversity, language, racism and an example of how common passions can bring us together.

If you are engaging with this with your wee-ones, here some talking points and videos to help:

Language and assuming English is the universal one in sport (and life)

In this [video](#) Pascal Siakum (aka: one of the Toronto Raptors) jokingly expresses disappointment for not having any French questions and then returns to the mic when a French report offers one. This is a beautiful reminder of how diverse teams are and that a team does not operate in only one language. It also emphasizes the point that sports are not enjoyed in only one language.

Racism explained by picture book artists

Racism can be a topic some parents and teachers shy away from; however, many artists and illustrators are taking up the charge. It is essential to engage in discussions around this and here are two starting points from some of my favorite picture book authors.

[Elise Gravel](#)

[Christian Robinson](#)

How to stop Bullying for Grown-ups and Wees?

The reality of bullying is that it exists in all spheres of life and it, like racism, must be discussed so that individuals can not become a victim of it with their self-esteem and mental health bearing the brunt.

Here are two resources to start the conversation:

[Talking about Bullying for Grown-ups](#)

[Talking about Bullying for Wee Ones](#)

Jean-Michel Basquiat as an agent of protest

Here are some links to expand the discussion on Basquiat as an artist and provocateur, all kid-friendly:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y33ZjeXFDfM>

<https://kids.britannica.com/students/article/Jean-Michel-Basquiat/628054>

<https://ed.ted.com/lessons/the-chaotic-brilliance-of-artist-jean-michel-basquiat-jordana-moore-sag-gese>

I hope you enjoy this Agitate Play experience. Break a leg!

CASTING

Bass: is short for Basquiat, a young Haitian-Canadian boy, he was born in Canada, but both his parents are Haitian-born.

Stiltz: a neighbourhood friend, she is quite tall and very good on the basketball court.

Jacob: a kid from the neighbourhood who likes to give everyone a hard time. Jacob speaks only English and his parents are quite tough on him discipline wise. Jacob is white.

Andre: a kid from the neighbourhood who tends to follow Jacob's lead. Andre's parents are from France. He speaks both English and French, but he rarely speaks French outside of the house. Andre is white.

Sprout: a grade 7 neighbourhood reporter who has taken to hosting a YouTube channel where he reports on neighbourhood news. Sprout is Chinese-Canadian, English & Mandarin-speaking and can be cast as any gender.

Mme. Dalisma: Basquiat's mother.

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SCENE 1:

We see Bass struggling with a knife to cut his basketball. It is obvious they are upset. I don't know if you have ever been so upset with a sport that you have tried to wreck the tools used to play the game. Have you ever played a sport and become really frustrated by trying to learn the skills of that game? I am not sure if that is what is going on here, but it makes me think of that. Bass sits in the entry area to a large apartment complex, Stiltz sees Bass from afar and approaches trying to help.

Stiltz: Bass, what're you doing to your basketball?

Bass: Pop it. *(Continues to struggle with the task)* I don't need it anymore.

Stiltz: Oh, don't pop it! You just got it to spin on your thumb, last week! You're steps away from trying out for the Raptors.

Bass: That won't happen!

Stiltz: Ok, maybe the Lakers.

Bass: Not even *(starts to cry)*.

Stiltz: Whoa, buddy, don't let this get you down. What's got you so upset? How did you go from hours a day on the court to trying to pop your ball with a butter knife?

Bass: I don't like butter.

Stiltz: Oh, it's just the name for a knife. It doesn't mean you have to like butter.

Bass: English is weird.

Stiltz: Yea, it is.

Bass: *(in Haitian Creole, "Creole makes more sense")* Kreyol fè plis sans.

Stiltz: I don't really understand what you're saying.

Bass: I can speak French too.

Stiltz: I'm not so good with French. I don't really like it as a class at school...when there is school.

Bass: (*speaking French "I don't like it at school either"*) Moi, j'aime pas ça comme sujet à l'école non plus.

Stiltz: Your accent is so cool.

Bass continues to cry.

Stiltz: Bass, what is it?

Bass: The kids (*stammers with tears*), the big kids with the skateboards and the hover-things, said that if I wanted to play basketball, I had to speak English.

Stiltz: That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. Wait, are you talking about Jacob and Andre?

Bass: Yup.

Stiltz: They used to talk trash at the court about girls not being able to play basketball too.

Bass: But you're the best player in Toronto!

Stiltz: Well, maybe not Toronto, but I did put them in their place with a ball in the face (*miming blocking a shot*). You should've seen it!

Bass: But I can't do that! (*stutters with emotion*) And they were, they were, they were being really mean. They said I should go back to my country. And, and, this is my country. My mom says some families have many countries. My family is from Haiti and Canada. I was born in Canada, but Haiti is part of me.

Stiltz: Bass, you don't have to explain. Their words are ignorant and it means that we're gonna need something other than a butter knife to solve this problem.

Bass: They even called me names, well, just Jacob, but Andre was there too.

Stiltz: Like, racist names?! Bass! This has to stop, right away.

Bass: Maybe we can challenge them to a 2 on 2 tournament, I will slam dunk (*in French "right in the face"*) en plein visage!

Stiltz: Well, I think maybe we need to step up our protest beyond that. Some ignorance is bigger than the court. All of this and I still hear them being mean to the other girls trying to play. I think it's time for Operation We The North.

Bass: *(in French "Operation We The North", a battle cry)* Opération Nous le Nord!

Stiltz: Oui!!

SCENE 2:

Here we meet Jacob. He was the ringleader to the problem on the basketball court with Bass. In fact, he was the one who called Bass some racist names. It is typical for Jacob to bully the other kids around him. Now he is chasing Sprout through the playground. He likes to pick on Sprout because of their size. Andre finally gets his hands on Sprout and pins them to the ground.

Jacob: What're you up to Sprout!? Get outta here. I told you, I don't wanna see you on my basketball court. And here I find you running around with these papers, acting like it's some big secret. Do you have any money?

Sprout: I don't have any money.

Jacob: What are you up to?

Sprout: Nothing!

Jacob: Give me the papers!

Jacob gets way to close and then pushes Sprout to the ground. The posters he is holding fall to the ground. Sprout is terrified, screams and runs away, leaving the remaining posters on the ground at Jacob's feet.

Jacob: You better run, you little punk.

Sprout: You know something Jacob?!

Jacob: What's that, Shrimp?

Sprout: It's Sprout! Get it right!

Sprout runs off.

Jacob: You better scam before I make tempura out of you, Shrimp! Now get! *(Has a funny thought and tries to get Sprout's attention)* Hey Shrimp, make sure you talk about this on your

stupid YouTube channel! *(he laughs)* I'm happy to be interviewed as I squeeze you in a headlock *(he laughs some more)*, maybe after Covid, when headlocks are friendly again *(he laughs even more)*. What's this?...*(reads the poster)* "Watch the Raptors take on the Magic at 9 pm in the basketball park on the big screen." What big screen? What're they on about? *(Back to reading)* "Bring a lawn chair and some snacks to watch the Raptors as a community." Huh! The Raptors on the big screen, this sounds pretty... lame *(It's obvious that it is not)*. I gotta tell Andre about this! I mean... this is my court!

Jacob runs off with an air of mischief in his step.

SCENE 3:

Sprout enters with a kids-version of a sports jacket and an oversized tie. Sprout holds a homemade microphone made from a bath loofah attached to a toilet paper roll but uses a sophisticated selfie-stick to film. Sprout is a young YouTuber who is doing neighbourhood reporting for his content. Maybe you follow some kid YouTube talent. Who are your favourites? Sprout is just getting started, but as you will see, there is a lot to be explored in this neighbourhood.

Sprout: Welcome to this evening's episode of *Sprout & About*, don't forget to like and subscribe to get all the latest and greatest from my neighbourhood and beyond. Tonight we'll be witnessing an exciting happening, as Raptor fever takes on Covid-19. Well, I guess the Raptors are taking on the Orlando Magic at the same time. This will be an amazing event organized by Bass and Stiltz for our apartment complex. With me now, I have Mme. Dalisma, who is Bass's mom and apparently provided the projector and sound system for this major event. Hello Ms. Dalisma, can you tell me a bit about how this event came to be and how Bass made it happen?

Mme. Dalisma: Who is Bass? Do you mean Basquiat? My son, Basquiat.

Sprout: Well, yes, we call him Bass.

Mme. Dalisma: His name is Basquiat. He's named after Jean-Michel Basquiat, not a guitar. *(Pulling Sprout's device closer to her face)* You can tell your friends in there, his name is Basquiat!

Do you like art? Basquiat, or Jean-Michel Basquiat is a famous artist known all over the world with movies and all sorts of stuff made about him. There are a few links in the notes about him and maybe you could do a Google Image search to see some of his most famous pieces. His style was very unique when it first came out.

Sprout: *(Gently trying to regain his device, while maintaining distance)* Well, subscribers, it looks like this is a *Sprout & About* exclusive. How did this community event, organized by *(struggles slightly with the name)* Stiltz and Basquiiiiat-

Mme. Dalisma: (Correcting) Basquiat.

Sprout: Basquiat. How did it happen?

Mme. Dalisma: Well, when someone is struck down by the words of others, the community needs to stand up. Black Lives Matter! They do, you know, but not everyone seems to.

Sprout: I thought that those kinds of protests were about police violence and racism.

Mme. Dalisma: They are. And they're also about all kinds of moments of racism in our communities that aren't always as obvious. They're about saying enough is enough.

Sprout: Is that what this evening's screening of the Raptors is about?

Mme. Dalisma: When hateful words are thrown at someone because of the colour of their skin, the language they speak and their country of birth, you better believe that enough is enough energy is coming for you. That's what got the idea going for them for tonight. To get everyone together in the energy of it.

Sprout: From the number of people that are already filling the basketball court after Stiltz and the other kids chalked off the social distancing lines, there are a lot of people coming out to the game.

Mme. Dalisma: You see Sprout, that is where I have to correct you again. This evening is not a game, this is a protest. We're using an event that will interest a lot of people as a way to rally, educate, and come together. Some protests have signs, some have chants. Some have communities taking a stand or sitting in. I guarantee this one will have a bit of all of it, and even a few surprises that Basquiat has cooked up for everyone.

Sprout: Can you share any more exclusives for *Sprout & About* subscribers?

Mme. Dalisma: I think I've chatted enough, I haven't even got my Raptors Jersey on yet...it's been in the back of my drawer for a while.

Sprout: Well, there you have it fans. By the time this video is uploaded, the Raptors will be just about to take on the Magic on the big screen stretched out by Stiltz at the nets. Bring your own chairs, wear masks and-

Mme. Dalisma: Oh, I almost forgot, for what it's worth, I wanted to say thanks to everyone who helped out. Mr. Forsythe for the use of his projector and screen, Ms. Wu for snacks, the Baldersons for all the printing of posters. All the acts of protest show the mettle of our community and how firmly we oppose racism, in all its forms.

SCENE 4:

Bass is on his way to speak at the event. He carries a kid's microphone made of plastic. Bass looks nervous. Have you ever spoken in front of a big group of people? What about at an event that you planned? Bass speaks to himself mostly throughout this scene as an aside. An aside is something we use in theatre to show the characters inside thoughts. Imagine that when Bass is speaking that no one but him can hear it. When Andre speaks to him, he is not speaking as an aside, so both Bass and Andre can hear those words. I don't know about you, but I speak in "asides" in my head all the time.

Bass: *(Aside)* Camilla from down the way had given me her special plastic microphone for announcements and karaoke and stuff. She never shared it with anyone, so it was a big deal. I walked down the alley to the basketball court. I squeezed the microphone nervously. I thought it might give me courage. What if Jacob and Andre were there? What if no one came? *(he looks down at the plastic microphone)* What if I got Coronavirus from using this microphone that could have other mouth germs on it?! My mind started getting really busy with worry and all I could think about was running back home and hiding in my room. And that was when...

Andre enters from behind Bass.

Andre: Hey, Bass! This is quite the big deal. I think the idea to play the game on the big screen is huge and my dad is really excited to have everybody watch it in French. I haven't seen him smile in months. Thank you...You know that stuff on the court with Jacob...he and I hang out, but sometimes he says some really dumb stuff. Worse than dumb. It's not me and I actually stopped hanging out with him. I'm sorry, I should have stood up and stopped it. It's hard though, in the moment.

Bass: My mind slowed. I couldn't find any words to share, but Andre had never spoken like this to me before. For some reason I believed him.

Andre: Since we know the french NBA games are such a hit, maybe we should replay the 2018 World Cup when France won...that would really get my dad going.

Bass: I smiled at Andre. This would be fun. I just couldn't believe he was talking to me like this. I nodded my head.

Andre: You're pretty cool, you know. I don't think you're gonna need that toy microphone, you have a pretty strong voice, when you choose to use it. *(speaks in French)* Tu peux parler avec beaucoup de passion en anglais ou français. And I bet in Haitian Creole too, though I wouldn't understand what you're saying...

Bass has a moment of relief. Bass did not know Andre was a French speaker. Bass tucks the microphone down the back of his pants and smiles at Andre as he walks towards the crowd.

SCENE 5:

This is the point in the story where everything gets pretty intense and, lucky enough, Sprout found a way to catch it and upload it to his YouTube channel. You are watching a YouTube clip, where Sprout has shared Bass' speech from the protest.

Sprout: This heroic titan came out from the alley, almost like the Raptors coming out of their dressing rooms onto the court. For a 5th grader he stood like he was 10 stories tall and the crowd hushed. The ocean of signs, some with "We The North," some with Raptors players' names on it, some with statements in French, Haitian Creole, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin and so many other languages, they all dropped down as Basquiat came into the yard. Applause erupted like we were in Jurassic Park and the Raps had just won the championship. The sun was almost completely set at this point. The crispness of the screen in the dark summer sky was perfect. Basquiat spoke in French to the crowd first and then he translated into English for those who didn't understand. I filmed it and got Basquiat's permission to share it as an exclusive for *Sprout & About* subscribers.

Bass: *(recorded voice, as Sprout has edited it into the YouTube video)* The Raptors are one of the most diverse teams in the history of the NBA. Even the sport of basketball is loved all over the world and broadcast in over 34 languages. I know that Canadians like to claim that they invented basketball and that's cool, I guess, but the whole world loves it *(big cheer from the crowd)*. I've been so happy to have basketball back on TV as a way to be excited again in a hard time. Earlier this week, just as my mom was feeling ready to let me go back to the parks and throw my ball around, there were other kids around who decided to call me names, racist names, and to say cruel things about my language. These words came from a member of our community here. *(Sounds of disapproval can be heard)* I'm not saying this to shame them. To be honest, I don't even know if they're here. But people need to know that there's a line. Or enough is enough, comme maman dit. That's what we believe here and we need to show it, not just think it. *(Sounds of some cheers and support from the crowd)*

Mme. Dalisma joins her son to talk through the next part.

Mme. Dalisma:

This evening we'll broadcast the game in French, as a reminder that not everything in the world is English, not everything in the world is a particular colour, and the beauty of this team and this sport, is that, win or lose, it brings us together. The racist words that hurt my son, didn't really come from a kid, they came from the parents who raised them, they came from a society that is still even figuring out what racism is, where some people can't accept they've done bad things or are a part of the problem, and whether we like it or not, they came from our community too. I just, before we started, needed to say that to you all, as a reminder. These words are hard for

Basquiat to say, because he is still hurting. So, I will stand up and say them for him. These words are not welcome on the basketball court or anywhere. Never again!

Bass: Thank you Mom. *(to the audience)* I'm so happy to see you all here tonight. I'm so excited for the game. To those who tried to cut me down with hate, I hope you leave this game-protest-rally-gathering tonight knowing that the world is a big place filled with many languages, colours and cultures. And this one, this one right here, his name is Basquiat and he will be ready to solve our differences the same way Pascal Siakum does it, on the court and, awesomely, in French *(huge applause, the recording stops)*.

Sprout: At this point, the event began. What surprised me was that everyone knelt down, it kind of reminded me of church, but the grown ups told me that this too was a form of protest, even the Raptors knelt. It was intense and for both anthems. It was evident that our little corner of the world was changed by this moment to get together, 6 feet apart obviously, but we came together and we thought about what it means to be a community. That's all for today. Thank you all for tuning for yet another episode of *Sprout & About*. *(Pause)* Don't forget to like and subscribe.

The End