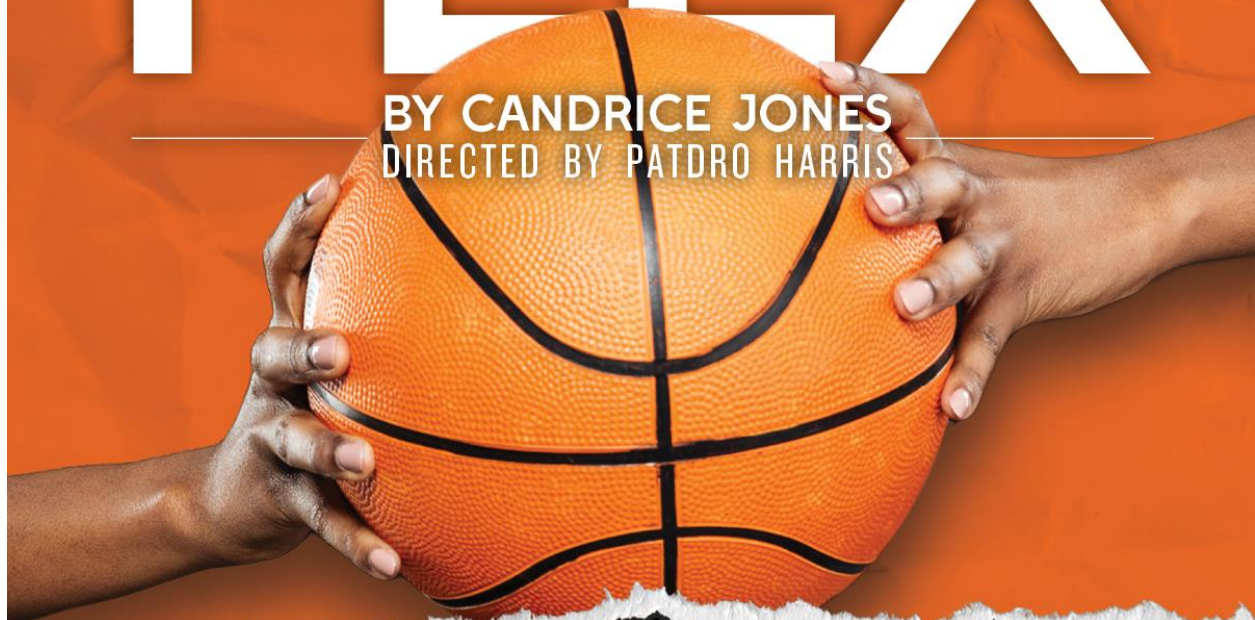


 THEATRICAL  
OUTFIT  
PRESENTS



# FLEX

BY CANDRICE JONES  
DIRECTED BY PATDRO HARRIS



**SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 2, 2022**

**A STUDY GUIDE**

**“Brilliant, Beautiful Examination Of The Lives Of Young Black Women”  
- Diana Burbano for New Play Exchange**

HIGH ADRENALINE. A powerful world premiere about swagger, determination and sticking together. It’s 1997 and the WNBA is changing the game. Every player on Plainnole’s Lady Train basketball team now dreams of going pro – but first, they’ll have to navigate the pressures of being young, black, and female in rural Arkansas. Candrice Jones’s adrenaline packed play about a high school basketball team explores the fierce strength of young black women in the South and what it means to be part of a team.

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**An Interview with the Playwright of *FLEX*:**

*(Below are excerpts from an interview during the Theatre Squared production in July of 2022.)*



**“I saw how those worlds - poetry, basketball, and play structure - collided.”  
Playwright Candrice Jones**

The play, *FLEX*, traveled directly from playwright Candrice Jones’ heart to the page: It was inspired by her own experiences as an adolescent growing up in Dermott, Arkansas. She says she’s wanted to write this story for years now but had to wait for the right time.

“I had to find the correct form to write it in,” she explains. “When I was going through my poetry phase, I couldn’t

bring myself to write a basketball poem. But, when I committed to telling the story through narrated performance - a play - I saw how those worlds - poetry, basketball, and play structure - collided.”

The result is a funny, heart-wrenching story of five young women, all but one of whom have known each other since childhood, for whom basketball isn’t just a sport - it’s a potential escape from the small town in which they’ve lived their whole lives. The Lady Train team members are leaving the last vestiges of childhood behind and stepping into adulthood, and the path is anything but smooth. Jones’ play is a beautiful testament to female friendship, and her dialogue is one of the truest, most honest theatrical representations of what actual teenagers sound like.

There’s a lot going on inside this play, and every bit of it is galvanizing.

Jones answered some questions for us about writing *FLEX*, and seeing one of her own shows on stage for the first time.

**Q: What's the writing process like for you?**

A: I have to work on several projects because it's my job. Mainly, I research, work hard on an outline, and let that guide me. I repeat that process over and over until I have a likeable draft. Then, I try to find a space for workshopping.

**Q: You have an incredible facility for writing fascinating, entertaining plays about some of the most topical current events of the day. Are your plays topical because that's what inspires and interests you or because it's important for your work to cover the most critical issues of the tumultuous times we find ourselves in -- or both?**

A: My plays are connected to my life. I just think my experiences happen to mirror parts of society that are very relatable.

**Q: You workshopped *FLEX* at T2's Arkansas New Play Festival - can you talk a little bit about that, how it helped to shape *FLEX*, and why events like this one are important for working playwrights?**

A: New play development is absolutely important since it provides a multitude of opportunities for, not only playwrights, but directors, actors, designers, and producers. Each group of individuals I've listed gain professional maturity in the new play development process. Getting a new play into the world takes the work of a very large village, that ranges anywhere from the West to the Midwest to the East coast. I don't think that there will ever be a period again, in which one voice (say Shakespeare) dominates each and every corner of theater again. I love a lot of Shakespeare's works, so I don't think his or other dead playwrights' works are disposable. I do think that just as Shakespeare once existed and produced on a major scale, so have other playwrights in each generation since. However, if there are no theaters and programs that push new work, then those voices, the playwrights and all others I listed, will not get heard.

**Q: This will be the first time you've seen the play in a fully realized production. How has the process been for you? What's it like, seeing it up on the stage?**

A: It's an extremely rewarding process. The humanity the actors bring to each role and the energy that comes alive in crucial moments of the narrative is awe inspiring. I know these are my words, but I've released them to Delicia (the director) and the cast. I have zero regrets after seeing what they have given me in return. The performances of Erica Matthew, Naswanna Moon, Arielle Widemon-Siler, Alaina Kai-Chester, Halili Knox, and Sydney Lolita Cusie are going to astound everyone. These women are stars and deserve to be rewarded and celebrated. (*director and actors listed are from the Theatre Squared production*)

**Q: As of last week, *FLEX* became even more relevant, based on the recent Supreme Court striking down *Roe v. Wade*. Can you talk a little bit about how it could contribute to the conversation around the current crisis we face as a country when it comes to abortion access?**

A: There is a character in *FLEX*, April, who is pregnant. She goes down the rabbit hole that many young girls who make that discovery go down. During my high school years, abstinence was preached. The late 90s were the heyday of the "born again virgin." As with many communities in which abstinence or purity was stressed, teenagers did have sex often. And, young men and women were faced with the decision of whether to bring a child into the world or not. Although Roe v. Wade is never mentioned in the play, there is a moment that the complexities of ideas surrounding Roe v. Wade are very clear. These teenage girls deal with that in their own very teenage girl ways.

**Q: If you could address audience members before a production of *FLEX*, what would you say to them, standing there on the stage?**

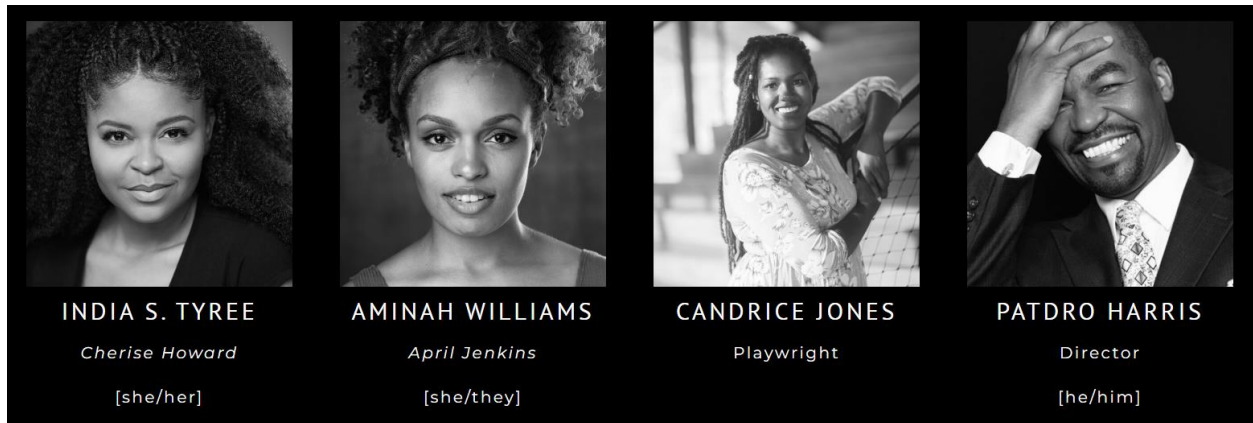
A: When I started writing *FLEX*, I simply wanted to write about my high school basketball experience. The more I dove into the stories, I found myself understanding my hometown and the issues that live in it more deeply. As writer who lives in Arkansas, others often expect me to write about my experiences from a place of sorrow or disdain. *FLEX* is not that. It celebrates the silliness, fun, and immaturity of girlhood in the American South. So, regardless of the flaws the characters may have in the play, I want folks to know this show is a celebration of Black women and girls in the American South.

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## THE THEATRICAL OUTFIT PRODUCTION TEAM:

### Cast, Playwright & Director

			
<b>HAILEY ELIZABETH*</b>	<b>ANDREA GOODEN</b>	<b>KENISHA JOHNSON</b>	<b>WHITNEY NELSON</b>
<i>Starra Jones</i>	<i>Coach Francine Pace</i>	<i>Sidney Brown</i>	<i>Donna Cunningham</i>
[she/her]	[she/her]	[she/her]	[she/her]




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### Exploratory Questions and Activities for *FLEX* by Candrice Jones:

1. Conduct some brief internet research on **Brittney Griner**, both her biography and her pending legal case. What are three themes from her personal narrative that are also mirrored in the play? [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brittney\\_Griner](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brittney_Griner)
2. The **conflict between Stara and Sidney** is maintained through the very end of the play. Create a piece of writing that resolves the conflict between them, years after the play ends. This writing can be either in the form of a *dramatic scene*, a *monologue/speech*, or a *letter* from one of them to the other.
3. Engage in some brief research about **mental health awareness in the Black community**? List four ways that access to mental health might have impacted some of the choices the characters make in the play.  
<https://namica.org/mental-health-challenges-in-african-american-communities/>  
<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/Black-African-American>
4. List four ways that **class or economic challenges** impact the lives of the players throughout the course of the play.
5. **Write a scene** in which Stara has to tell her brother, Shamon, what she did to Sidney.
6. Conduct some research on the **current abortion law in Georgia**. Imagine that the play was set in 2022 Georgia and not 1998 Arkansas. Considering what we know of April's story, what are the specific challenges that she would face in a contemporary and local setting?  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/20/us/georgia-abortion-ban.html>  
<https://states.gutmacher.org/policies/georgia/abortion-policies>

7. The **metaphoric phrase “dirt and dust”** is used several times throughout the play. Explore three ways that this metaphor describes the journey of individual characters throughout the course of the narrative.
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### **Social Studies Standards (9-12)**

#### **SSSocSC4 Analyze the function of social institutions as agents of social control across differing societies and times.**

- a. Analyze the function of social institutions in society, include: family, education, religion, economy, government/politics, health care, and media.
- b. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of various social institutions.
- c. Evaluate other possible social institutions such as sports.
- d. Analyze the functions and inequalities of the criminal justice system in relationship to a society’s construct of crime and punishment.
- e. Explain the role of total institutions.
- f. Analyze the re-socialization process.

#### **SSSocIC1 Analyze forms of social inequality.**

- a. Explain how unequal distribution of power and resources affects the life chances of individuals in that society.
- b. Analyze the sources and effects of stratification on the basis of social class, race and ethnicity, gender, age, and emotional, mental, and physical disabilities.
- c. Analyze the sources of global stratification and inequality.
- d. Evaluate the impact of global stratification and inequality on global relations.

### **Dramatic Writing Standards (9-12)**

#### **TAHSTL.RE.1 Evaluate various aspects of dramatic arts literature using appropriate supporting evidence.**

- a. Compare and summarize theatre literature from various historical periods, cultures, and styles.

b. Develop and apply a set of comprehensive criteria for theatre text analysis. c. Compare and contrast theatre texts to live/film performance.

d. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone.)

e. Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.