

# MLIMA'S TALE

BY  
**LYNN NOTTAGE**

DIRECTED BY  
**MARK LAMOS**

**OCT 1-19**



## STUDY GUIDE

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## THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is important. Students should be aware that this is a **live performance** and that they should not talk during the show. Students may respond to the strong emotions elicited by theater in different ways, and appropriate audience reactions are warmly encouraged. But please take the time to address and discuss proper behavior in the theater with your students. This will enhance their appreciation of the work and allow other audience members to enjoy the performance at the same time.

### Some guidelines for your students:

- Please do not bring food or drink into the theater.
- Turn off all cellular phones and pagers or anything that makes noise or lights up.
- No texting, please.
- Please talk only before or after the performance or during intermission.
- Remember that this is a live performance, and that in addition to being disruptive to your neighbors, unruly behavior can be heard by the actors on stage.
- Act with maturity during romantic, violent or other challenging scenes.
- Open your eyes, ears and mind to the world on stage. Theater has the power to transport us to another place; open your heart to that experience.

Thank you for your help, and we hope that you enjoy the show!



## THE PLOT

On the protected savannas of a Kenyan game preserve, Mlima roams the night, aware of the constant and imminent danger of poachers seeking to secure his legendary tusks. Soon the elephant is overcome by two Somali poachers, Rahman and Geedi, who have spent forty nights stalking Mlima away from the watchful eyes of the preserve's rangers. Rahman talks of his hungry family and Geedi assures him that the market price for Mlima's tusks will keep him and his family fed for years to come. As Rahman and Geedi butcher Mlima to extract his tusks, Mlima's soul emerges from the elephant's body, becoming an embodiment of the tusks as they leave the game preserve and are shipped down the "Ivory Highway."

The play follows the movement of Mlima's tusks from their transfer to the corrupt police chief who manages the illegal poachers, to their sale and subsequent smuggling out of Kenya on a cargo ship, to their confiscation by Vietnamese customs agents. The tusks ultimately land in China, where they journey through carving houses and increase in value to \$7 million before finding their final resting place in a wealthy couple's penthouse.





## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT LYNN NOTTAGE



Lynn Nottage was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1964 to a school teacher mother and a psychologist father. A commitment to justice through storytelling was in her bones: her grandmother was a storyteller and her mother was a political activist who participated in the Civil Rights and Feminist movements. Nottage was a playwright from a very young age (she wrote her first play when she was eight), and has always felt that it is her “social responsibility to shine a light on areas that don’t get seen.” While still a high school student, she wrote her first full-length play, titled *The Darker Side of Verona*, about a black Shakespeare company performing in the American South.

After earning her bachelor’s degree from Brown University and her Master of Fine Arts from the Yale School of Drama, she went to work for Amnesty International as a press officer. Of that time, Nottage says: “I took that job immediately after graduating from Yale drama school because I felt as though I had spent my entire life in school and I needed an alternative experience. And I turned to human rights activism, which in some ways I don’t see that different from being a storyteller and bringing to light stories of people who’ve never been told.” After a photographer for Amnesty brought in photographs documenting domestic abuse, Nottage realized that she needed to do just that: write the stories that go untold.

Over the course of her career, Nottage’s plays have been produced widely in the United States and throughout the world. Her works include: *Mlima’s Tale* (which premiered at the Public Theater in May 2018); *Sweat* (which went to Broadway and won the Pulitzer Prize, an OBIE Award, a Tony Nomination, and a Drama Desk Nomination); *By The Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Drama Desk Nomination); *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, OBIE, Drama Desk); *Intimate Apparel*; *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (OBIE Award); *Crumbs from the Table of Joy*; *Las Meninas*; *Mud, River, Stone*; *Por’knockers*; *POOF!*; and the book for the musical adaptation of *The Secret Life of Bees*, the novel by Sue Monk Kidd (Atlantic Theatre Company, 2019). In addition to being a playwright, Nottage also co-founded the production company Market Road Films, developed original projects for HBO and Showtime, and is writer/producer on the Netflix series “She’s Gotta Have It,” created by Spike Lee. Nottage is the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including a MacArthur “Genius Grant” Fellowship.

While writing about Nottage, scholar Sandra Shannon observes that:

*“Nottage brings to the American stage extreme passion and global awareness of women’s issues that deemphasize borders and differences and invite audiences to contemplate a shared humanity.”*

*As a global citizen, she has created a platform in her work to expose inhumane treatment of peoples of color — especially women. Indeed, one senses in Nottage’s writing a profound awareness of a debt to be repaid and a legacy to be upheld.”*

## WHERE DID **MLIMA'S TALE** COME FROM?

Looking at excerpts from the script and from Lynn Nottage herself, let's examine the playwright's ideas behind *Mlima's Tale* and how she weaves them into the play.

**LYNN NOTTAGE:** This is a subject matter that has been widely covered, and even though it's widely covered, it still needs more amplification. We, as human beings, consume at such a rate and I've been thinking about the price of that consumption and the way in which it's destroying our environment. Elephants and other rare species are caught in that web; I think of Mlima's journey as a metaphor for [that].

**ANDREW:** We can't stand by as our most precious resources are systematically being destroyed. Poachers plunder with impunity. Ivory trafficking has decimated our elephant population. 45 years ago there were 1.3 Million elephants roaming the plains and forests of Africa, today there are less than 400,000. The maths are simple. There are more elephants being killed than are being born, which means that in less than 20 years they may well be extinct.

**LN:** I just immersed in everything that I could find out about elephants. The thing I came away with is that they're not that dissimilar from us. Family is immensely important, they mourn and they love in very similar ways to human beings. They have these very close-knit communities that they build for life. They're able to have love affairs. I've been a longtime lover of elephants, I have had the privilege of going on Safari many years ago and actually seeing elephants in their natural habitat.

**MLIMA:** Still now, I hear Koko Mkimbiaji wailing as his mother and sister died at the end of a poison spear, and anger became his guiding spirit. It took a year of wandering to calm him.

**LN:** I wanted to tell the story from the point of view of an elephant. What happens to that elephant in the last moments of his life? And then take the journey of this elephant as he continues to haunt the people who are responsible for his death. Who would have touched this elephant? I wanted to show how many people are actually responsible for the killing of this beautiful animal. It's not just the person who shoots the poison arrow, but it's all of the people who kill this elephant because of desire.

**MLIMA'S TALE stage directions:** Over the course of the play, Mlima continues to transform, becoming whiter. However traces of his brown skin should always be visible. As Mlima journeys through the play, he leaves a white streak of paint or dust on every person he encounters. Residue. A stain. A mark of complicity.

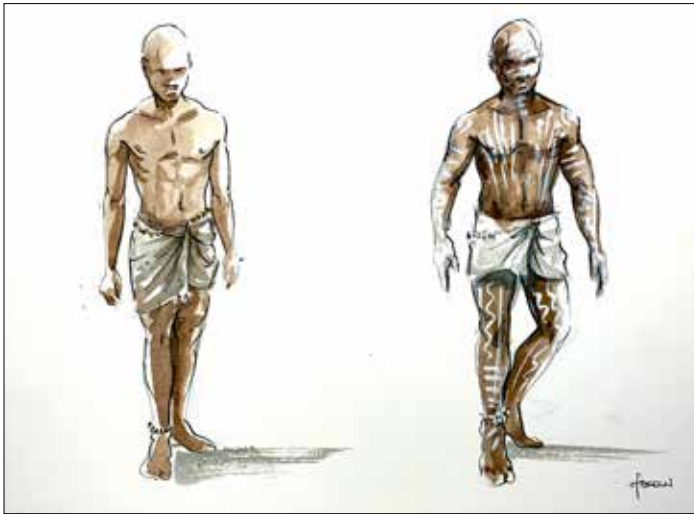
**LN:** On one level, what I want people to think about is just the cost of ivory and how, in many ways, in order to feed our desire, we're destroying our planet. In other ways, I want people to think of this on a more meta level: it's not just about the ivory trade, but it's about the exploitation of the African continent and how for hundreds of years this beautiful continent has been ravaged for human desire and human greed. So I hope people look at this play on two levels: they see one play that is about the ivory trade and about an elephant, and on the other level is looking at the exploitation of our environment, what we're doing to it, and in particular the African continent because it is being ravaged for our desire.

**MR. CHEUNG:** Then I would not be afraid of the cost. It is nothing compared to how you will feel when you look at them each morning. The question is what price are you willing to pay for beauty?

Interview excerpts from *Variety's* interview with Lynn Nottage in their *Stagecraft* podcast.

## COSTUMING MLIMA: A Q&A WITH COSTUME DESIGNER FABIAN AGUILAR

**Fabian Fidel Aguilar** is the Costume Designer for *Mlima's Tale* at Westport Country Playhouse. Fabian was born in El Paso, Texas, where giant skies and vast desert landscapes were a blank canvas for a highly active imagination. Fabian attended Yale University and Boston University to pursue theatrical costume design. While in Boston he worked for various theaters, conservatories, and universities, including American Repertory Theater, Boston Ballet, Moscow Ballet, and the Commonwealth Shakespeare Company. He has designed costumes for several other Playhouse shows, including this season's *In the Heights*, 2018's *Man of La Mancha*, and *Romeo and Juliet* in 2017. In his spare time, Fabian enjoys watercolor painting and urban sketching.



**QUESTION:** Can you tell us a little bit about your process? When approaching a new production, how and where does a costume designer start?

**FABIAN FIDEL AGUILAR:** I think my process boils down to research and constant questions. For *Mlima's Tale* I first watched nature docu-series because I just wanted to see the colors of the Savanna and the textures of the grasslands — that starts to develop a visual vocabulary that can inspire the design. Then it was important to watch documentaries about the ivory trade and learn more about who the characters represent and what they wear. So, research is where I like to start. I try to learn as much as I can about the subject so that choices made further down the road can be as informed of a decision as they can be. It's important to give the subject matter that respect.

**Q:** What kinds of conversations have you had with Director Mark Lamos about designing for *Mlima*? What is he looking for and what have you begun to brainstorm?

**FFA:** Mlima's transformation into tusks and how he interacts with the other characters was an important part of the conversation, for sure. A big portion was also that, especially with the changing characters, we didn't want to lose the joy and comedy that can exist among all the seriousness too.



**Q:** How does preparing sketches for a non-human character differ from preparing sketches for a human character? In what way might the process of designing for *Mlima* differ from that of designing other kinds of characters?

**FFA:** One of my favorite things to do is anthropomorphize objects or critters, and when a play calls for characters that are animals I like to focus on the humanity of its nature. It makes the character more relatable as well. An elephant is not fat and grey; an elephant is strong and ancient — that's who I draw.

I wanted to focus on what the spirit of *Mlima* was, versus what the physical body of an elephant is supposed to be. In other words, instead of making a human look like an animal, I want the animal to feel human. That's how we relate to him. I thought about what could embody ideas of warrior, strength and ancestry — what could that look like? And then, can that have some characteristics like color, texture, or shape evocative of a physical elephant? But I needed to design a warrior not an elephant, which led me to look at the Maasai tribe for inspiration who live throughout Kenya and Tanzania where *Mlima* begins.

## COSTUMING MLIMA: A Q&A WITH COSTUME DESIGNER FABIAN AGUILAR (CONT'D)

For the “tusks” I had to think very practically: what was the “white” of the tusks physically, how does that look, how does that change, when does that change, how does that stain other characters? I saw images of elephants splashing themselves with watery white clay to fight the heat and I thought to look into natural clays like those used in cosmetics for one that could be our white tusks. The dusty quality of the clay also adds to the ghostly quality of his presence. Visually, I wanted that transformation to stay in vocabulary with the ideas of his first look, so for inspiration I looked at how the Maasai and other tribes add white paint on themselves.

**Q:** How do you incorporate the actor’s body into your designs once the rehearsal process starts? Do your designs shift as the production gets underway?

**FFA:** Thinking about how the costume works on an actor’s body is something your eye is always on and thinking about; even as I design I’m keeping as much of that in mind as possible. But rehearsals often reveal layers you can’t easily just read off the script and I love being inspired by what an actor is doing in the rehearsal room, so I do make adjustments to the design to support that if I see an opportunity: maybe it’s an accessory that that didn’t exist before, maybe it’s a different dress.

Whatever the character, that’s what I want the costume to do — support the actor. Designs are just blueprints for a living, growing entity, so shifts can happen due to any number of reasons at any point in a production process. In any case, I’ve found that most shifts are for the better.

**Q:** What struck you the first time you read *Mlima’s Tale*? What made this a show you were excited to design?

**FFA:** Lynn Nottage’s writing! She is such an incredible writer. And the voice that she gives to elephants in *Mlima’s Tale* is almost spiritual. But I have to admit that as the person that has to make the costumes a reality, I was also struck every time a new character was introduced. That was exciting.





## TRANSFORMING MLIMA: A Q&A WITH JERMAINE ROWE

**Jermaine Rowe** is the actor who plays the play's title character, Mlima. He is a trained actor, dancer, singer, and theatre maker based out of New York City. Born in Jamaica, Jermaine was awarded that country's highest youth award, the Prime Minister Youth Award for Excellence in Culture. While in Jamaica, he gained his B.A. and was a principal dancer with the National Dance Theatre Company of Jamaica. Jermaine came to the United States to pursue his M.F.A. in Theatre at Sarah Lawrence College before moving to New York on a dance scholarship to the Alvin Ailey School. Jermaine has danced with the world-renowned Dance Theatre of Harlem, in the West End production of *The Lion King*, and in *Fela!* in the British National Theatre production, the first US National Tour, and the Broadway run.



**QUESTION:** When approaching a new role, what is the first thing you do as an actor? Do you have a process you go through when getting to know a part?

**JERMAINE ROWE:** I am constantly in observation or training as an actor, however when approaching a specific new role, one of the first things I do is to read the script several times. I do this to understand the world the play exists in before narrowing down the character's personal journey. I try to observe larger things first, i.e. relationships, time/place/location, world, etc. Then I re-read it with a primary focus on my character's journey throughout the play. I create a "timeline" of the journey. The "how" and "why" to the character's final moment. Then I start my research.

**Q:** How are you approaching playing Mlima, and how is that different from how you approach playing a human character? I'm thinking specifically about how this role requires you to both be Mlima in his elephant form and also transform into his tusks.

**JR:** As with every character, the background research is important. However Mlima is different in the sense that it feels like I'm learning a new language. I've been fascinated by the ways elephants communicate — showing love, loss, empathy, joy. I've also become aware of elephant awareness to life and death, and how an elephant moves. The difference in physical life and presence of community. I'm still learning how to be present and

honest in the embodiment of ghost-like tusks by investigating specific shapes, movement and sounds to do this. So physical life exploration is imperative.

**Q:** You have extensive dance training and experience. How does your work in movement and dance inform the way you approach a part like Mlima?

**JR:** The great thing with a strong dance background is that I have previous experience of embodying stories on stage without speaking. The challenge becomes making the internal life of Mlima equally as present as the mere outward presentation. I've been interested in what I've come across in my research as "energy shift." That is, when we are aware that something or someone enters/leaves a space and it changes the feeling/energy of the space. That kind of movement exploration I've found more fascinating, than per se, a trained dancer's technique.

**Q:** So much of this part relies on you being present — and really making the audience aware of that presence — without speaking. Have you played a role that works this way before? How do you approach that as an actor?

**JR:** Not in the same way. Of course all roles require you to be fully present and hopefully always making the audience aware of you, whether or not you are speaking. But specially to this role, the fun part of it is the exploration. It is in giving Mlima a specific arc, a specific need to be in the space, that will hopefully lead towards being present and honest in the moment.

**Q:** What struck you the first time you read the script?

**JR:** That the protagonist dies after the first scene, and we must be aware of him all the way through. I thought this was brave writing, but also gives the actor(s) freedom in storytelling.

**Q:** Going off of that, what made this a role you wanted to do?

**A:** The immediate fact that I didn't know how to approach that. There was something exciting and scary in the possibility of the role. It was like nothing I've ever done, but also within the process, there is inevitable growth.



# THE IVORY TRADE A HISTORY

750 BCE

Under the Roman Empire, the ivory exported from Africa largely came from North African elephants. By the fourth century C.E., **these elephants were hunted to extinction.**

800 CE

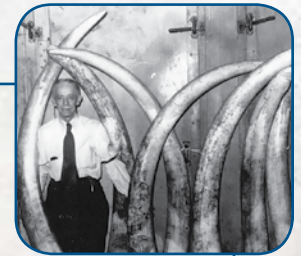
**The trade in ivory from African elephants was on the rise**, as traders transported ivory from West Africa, through market-cities, and on to Europe or Central and East Asia.

1400

European navigators arrived on the West African coastline and entered into the lucrative ivory trade.

1700

**Ivory traders entered into the international slave trade**, purchasing slaves to carry ivory from the inland elephant herds to the coast where the traders would sell both the slave and the ivory for hefty profits.



1913

**The mass production of combs, brush handles, piano keys, and billiard balls fueled an "ivory frenzy."** Africa's elephant population declined to roughly 10 million. The USA was consuming 200 tons of ivory per year.



1900

Several African colonies passed laws to limit hunting, although recreational hunting remained possible for those who could afford the expensive licenses. It became a popular sign of wealth and power for Western men.

1800

**26 million elephants were estimated to be roaming the continent of Africa.** European ivory hunters began hunting elephants in greater numbers.

1988

The African elephant population declined to 600,000. Despite regulation efforts, it was estimated that over **90% of the ivory in international trade was from illegally poached elephants.**

1977

In 1973, the **Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES)** signed a treaty to protect threatened species and regulate international trade. Four years later, African elephants were added to the category of animals for which commercial trade could continue but needed to be regulated.

1976

The African elephant population fell to an estimated 1.3 million.

1999

Under pressure from Southern African and Asian countries, **CITES allowed a special sale of stockpiled ivory**, sanctioning a legal trade in tusks and unintentionally stimulating poaching across the elephant range, and increasing ivory smuggling around the world.

1998

African elephant population **rebounded to approximately one million.**

1989

To alert the world to a poaching crisis, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi and Executive Director of Kenya Wildlife Service Richard Leakey **publicly burned 12 tons of ivory stock.** CITES then banned all international commercial ivory trade.



2008

**A second sale to China and Japan** reinvigorated the Chinese government-approved ivory carving industry, which had been waning since the 1989 trade ban.



2014

**The European Parliament passed a resolution condemning the illegal poaching of elephants** and calling for a moratorium on all ivory sales by its members. China announced its own planned ban in 2016.

2018

A World Wildlife Fund reported that elephant population was on the rise, but poaching persists and researchers warned that **current levels are still unsustainable for maintaining an elephant population in Africa.**

## THE IVORY TRADE: WHERE ARE WE TODAY?

“I hope that when people leave here that they think a little deeper about whether they have ivory in their homes, they think a little deeper about their clothing and where it comes from. I’m not someone who backs away from activism and politics; in order for us to be global citizens we have to be engaged on some very profound level. I’m an artist, so that’s the way I engage.”

LYNN NOTTAGE



Carved ivory stockpile slated to be destroyed. The destruction of ivory is meant to reduce the amount of ivory in circulation and choke the demand.

The reinvigorated ivory market has led to an increase in elephant poaching. In 2011, 25,000 elephants were poached over the course of the year; in 2012, that number rose to 30,000. Amid mounting pressure from international non-profit groups and wildlife protection agencies, the European Parliament passed a 2014 resolution that condemned the illegal poaching of elephants and called for a moratorium on all ivory sales by its members. In response, China banned the import of carved ivory for 12 months, and later announced that the country intended to shut down its legal ivory sales and processing industry responsible for much of the world’s carvings. Finally, in 2016, China declared it would ban all trade in ivory by the end of 2017.

The 1989 CITES ban on international commercial trade of ivory was the result of an international outcry over the threatened status of African elephants, and led to an impressive rebound in the elephant population. Following the 1999 and 2008 CITES-sanctioned sales of stockpiled ivory to China and Japan, however, the existence of an ivory market allowed for the illegal trade of ivory, creating an incentive for the poaching of elephants from game preserves like the one in *Mlima’s Tale*. As wildlife preservationists argue, the presence of any authorized market makes it relatively easy to launder ivory and sell it as “legal” as traders can abuse their legal selling licenses to conduct illegal trade. The government regulation of ivory remains a challenge in China, which is the world’s largest consumer of ivory, as the powerful individuals profiting from the trade are able to bribe politicians, security officers, and customs agents, making the reporting of ivory trafficking to police incredibly dangerous.

## THE IVORY TRADE: IF TRADE IS BANNED, WHY IS POACHING STILL A PROBLEM?

Like we see in *Mlima's Tale*, the sale of fresh ivory still thrives underground. The presence of antiques that contain ivory makes regulating its place in the market even more challenging. The United States and Britain have near-total bans on the trade of African elephant ivory – with some exceptions linked to antiques of a certain age and value. Thus, new ivory is still used, illegally, to repair legally traded antiques creating an ivory demand. In some places, like Japan, the ivory trade is still relatively unregulated. Ivory traders only need to register whole tusks — not ivory objects — and they don't need to provide verifiable proof of how, where, or when an elephant tusk was acquired, making it relatively easy for fresh tusks to slip into the legal domestic market. With increased access to online marketplaces on social media platforms, the illegal trade has moved online, making it harder to stop smuggling. In 2018, The World Wildlife Fund (WWF), TRAFFIC, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare launched the Global Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online, bringing together technology, e-commerce, and social media companies to work together to shut down online wildlife traffickers.

While it may seem easy to lay blame solely at the feet of poachers and traders, *Mlima's Tale* works to show the many layers of corruption responsible for the thriving illegal ivory trade. Rangers are being bribed by increasingly organized poaching gangs, and while the prices of ivory have soared (because of its increasing rarity), the wages paid to rangers have not. As Sean Willmore, president of the International Ranger Federation, explains: “There's more money floating around now from the poachers, so it's more of a problem than ever before. If rangers aren't getting enough remuneration, they can be corrupted. In Cambodia, for example, rangers were being paid \$100 a month and that was cut to \$30 a month by the government. What do you do if you want to feed your family?”

Of course, the problem goes even further than individual rangers. In 2012, the government minister and top officials at Tanzania's Wildlife Department were fired for taking bribes from poachers and even arranging for 116 live animals to be transported to Qatar. And still, even when the poachers are caught, they are frequently subjected to a fine far less steep than the amount they are paid for the selling of illegal ivory. The money allocated to conservation can't compete with the increasingly organized crime syndicates.

When looking for the root cause of the ivory trade, it's important to examine the desire for these luxury items, like the tusks we see at the end of the play. The potential of elephant extinction doesn't hinder ivory traders, but rather the opposite: the fewer elephants there are, the higher the value of ivory. Elizabeth Quat, a member of parliament in Hong Kong who came out publicly in 2016 calling for a complete ban of the ivory trade in Hong Kong, put it this way: “When the buying stops, the killing can too.”

*The potential of elephant extinction doesn't hinder ivory traders, but rather the opposite: the fewer elephants there are, the higher the value of ivory.*



## CURRENT STATUS OF AFRICAN ELEPHANTS



The most recent elephant census was conducted in 2016, before China enacted its 2017 ivory ban. As of 2016, there were 352,271 African elephants left, and the rate of decline was projected to be 8% per year. According to the World Wildlife Fund in 2018, however, the elephant population was reportedly on the rise, with 415,000 elephants left in the wild. That same report also estimated that 20,000 African elephants are being killed each year — an average of 55 every day. The annual poaching mortality rate fell from a high of more than 10% in 2011 to less than 4% in 2017, but researchers have warned that current levels are still unsustainable when it comes to maintaining an elephant population in Africa. In Botswana, considered an elephant stronghold for decades, a leading conservation group has warned of surging elephant poaching as an estimated 400 elephants were killed across the country in 2017 and 2018. In May, 2019, Botswana lifted its ban on hunting, saying it would help to control a booming population that was damaging farms.

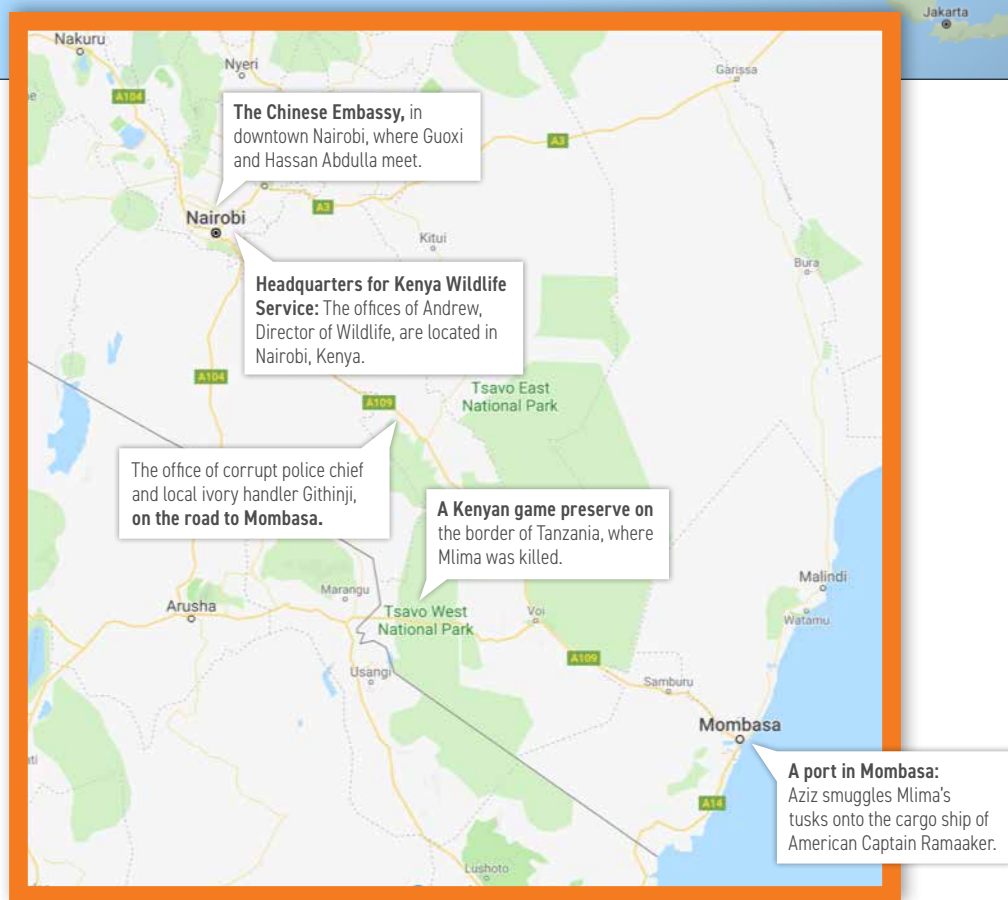


Craig Miller, Head of Security at Big Life Foundation in Kenya, said in 2016: “Every elephant is at risk at the moment, even the females and calves with only a couple of kilos — a poacher would still make a bit of money for his effort. Every time something bad happens, you’re losing much, much more than the individual animal, because elephants have an amazing memory, and they can live 60, 70 years. The passing down of knowledge and experience is something that is amazing to witness. Calves learn everything they do from their mothers and they’re much more connected to each other than even humans are these days.”

As Lynn Nottage also observed, elephants are extremely intelligent, and much more similar to humans than we may understand. Craig Miller says: “I’ve heard stories of elephants hiding their tusks — and I’ve seen [our biggest elephant] do it once. Specifically when they know humans are watching them. They hide their tusks because they know their tusks are valuable and they’re definitely intelligent enough to figure it out.”



## MAPPING MLIMA



## BEFORE SEEING *MLIMA'S TALE*

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

#### Going to the Theater

1. What are the **differences between live theater and cinema**? What is the responsibility of an audience when watching a play? What is the responsibility of an audience when watching a musical?
2. When you get into the theater, look around. **What do you see**? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.
3. Discuss **the elements that go into producing a live performance**: The lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the “behind the scenes” elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students’ eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast?
4. Pay attention to **when you’re excited about something on stage**. What excited you? Pay attention to when you’re bored. Why were you bored? What would you have done differently to make the play more interesting? Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students’ reactions to the play.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

#### The Play

1. The playwright, Lynn Nottage, says that it was important to her to tell the story from the perspective of Mlima, the elephant. Why do you think this was important to her? **What makes the story more powerful coming from the point of view of an animal instead of a human?**
2. Have you ever seen **a movie or a play where the main character was an animal (or a non-human creature)**? How was that character brought to life?
3. Now **imagine that you are in charge of designing the costumes** for *Mlima’s Tale*. How might you bring Mlima and his tusks to life? How do you imagine they might look on stage?
4. Look at the **World Wildlife Fund’s Endangered Species list**. Pick an animal on this list and do some research about them: Where do they live? Why are they endangered? What are people doing to protect them?
5. Lynn Nottage says that as a playwright, it is important to her to write about issues that matter and to inspire people to take action. **What is an issue that is important to you, about which you would want to inspire people to take action?**



More costume sketches from the Playhouse production of *Mlima’s Tale*, designed by Fabian Fidel Aguilar.

## AFTER SEEING *MLIMA'S TALE*

1. In *Mlima's Tale*, a small group of actors play a wide range of characters. **How did the actors transform throughout the play?** What production elements indicate these transitions into new roles? Which transition was your favorite and why?
2. The leading actor in *Mlima's Tale* plays Mlima the elephant as he is alive in the beginning of the play, and then transforms into Mlima's tusks. **How was the actor different as Mlima and his tusks?**
3. **What moments stood out to you** in the performance? Why?
4. Lynn Nottage writes a lot of plays about important contemporary issues — unemployment and racism in the United States, the ramifications of civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. **Why do you think it was important to her to tell this story?**
5. **How would you describe the music** (both the songs Mlima sings and the scoring in the play)? What did the songs add to the story?
6. **Why do you think the playwright chose to have the story played out with Mlima on stage throughout the play?** Why not just have the ivory traders appear alone?
7. **Can you imagine a different ending** to the story? What would it be?
8. **Did seeing the play make you feel a certain way?** What way? Did it inspire you to want to take action? Why or why not?
9. **Would you recommend this play to a friend of yours?** What would you say?



## FURTHER READING + OTHER RESOURCES

### READ

The African Wildlife Foundation: The Illusion of Control: Hong Kong's 'Legal' Ivory Trade."

[www.awf.org/sites/default/files/media/Resources/Facts%20%26amp%3B%20Brochures/HK\\_Ivory\\_Trade\\_and\\_the\\_Illusion\\_of\\_Control.pdf](http://www.awf.org/sites/default/files/media/Resources/Facts%20%26amp%3B%20Brochures/HK_Ivory_Trade_and_the_Illusion_of_Control.pdf)

*National Geographic Magazine*: "Who Buys Ivory? You'd Be Surprised."

[www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/08/150812-elephant-ivory-demand-wildlife-trafficking-china-world/](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/news/2015/08/150812-elephant-ivory-demand-wildlife-trafficking-china-world/)

Michigan State University Animal Legal & Historical Center: Detailed Discussion of Elephants and the Ivory Trade.

[www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-elephants-and-ivory-trade](http://www.animallaw.info/article/detailed-discussion-elephants-and-ivory-trade)

### EXPLORE

#### NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC: TRACKING IVORY SERIES

The Human Toll audio gallery: [www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/index.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/index.html)

Tracking the Illegal Tusk Trade interactive map: [www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/map.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/map.html)

How Killing Elephants Finances Terror in Africa article: [www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/article.html](http://www.nationalgeographic.com/tracking-ivory/article.html)

#### PBS LEARNING MEDIA: BATTLE FOR THE ELEPHANTS SERIES

The History of the Ivory Trade: [ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/f8b9191e-7f64-445d-9156-970ded50c9c7/battle-for-the-elephants-the-history-of-the-ivory-trade/](http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/f8b9191e-7f64-445d-9156-970ded50c9c7/battle-for-the-elephants-the-history-of-the-ivory-trade/)

Trafficking Poached Ivory: [ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/eaf3a1dd-64d3-4db7-8178-5fe169ee856a/battle-for-the-elephants-trafficking-poached-ivory/](http://ny.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/eaf3a1dd-64d3-4db7-8178-5fe169ee856a/battle-for-the-elephants-trafficking-poached-ivory/)

New York State *Conservationist Kids* Online Magazine: *All About Ivory*

[www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration\\_pdf/0218c4kivory.pdf](http://www.dec.ny.gov/docs/administration_pdf/0218c4kivory.pdf)

*National Geographic Resource Library*: *The Trading Game, a simulation of international trade*

[www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/the-trading-game/](http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/the-trading-game/)

### WATCH

*The Ivory Game*. Directed by Kief Davidson and Richard Ladkani, Vulcan Productions, 2016. Netflix.

[www.netflix.com/title/80117533](http://www.netflix.com/title/80117533)

*Last Days*. Directed by Katherine Bigelow, Produced by Megan Ellison, 2014.

[time.com/3617282/kathryn-bigelow-last-days/](http://time.com/3617282/kathryn-bigelow-last-days/)

**WARNING:** Although this short film is animated, it features graphic animations of poached elephants and some non-graphic but frightening footage from the 2013 Westgate mall shooting.



## ABOUT WESTPORT COUNTRY PLAYHOUSE

The mission of Westport Country Playhouse is to enrich, enlighten, and engage the community through the power of professionally produced theater and the welcoming experience of the Playhouse campus.

The not-for-profit Playhouse provides this experience in multiple ways by offering live theater experiences of the highest quality, under the artistic direction of Mark Lamos; **educational and community engagement events** to further explore the work on stage; the **New Works Initiative**, a program dedicated to the discovery, development, and production of new live theatrical works; special performances and **programs for students and teachers** with extensive curriculum support material; **Script in Hand play readings** to deepen relationships with audiences and artists; the renowned **Woodward Internship Program** during the summer months for aspiring theater professionals; **Family Festivities presentations** to delight young and old alike and to promote reading through live theater; youth performance training through **Broadway Method Academy**, Westport Country Playhouse's resident conservatory program; and the beautiful and historic Playhouse campus open for enjoyment and community events year-round.

Charity Navigator has recently awarded its top 4-star charity rating to the Playhouse in recognition of its strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

Originally built in 1835 as a tannery manufacturing hatters' leathers, it became a steam-powered cider mill in 1880, later to be abandoned in the 1920s. Splendidly transformed into a theater in 1931, it initially served as a try-out house for Broadway transfers, evolving into an established stop on the New England straw hat circuit of summer stock theaters through the end of the 20th century. Following a multi-million dollar renovation completed in 2005, the Playhouse became a state-of-the-art producing theater, preserving its original charm and character.

Today, the not-for-profit Westport Country Playhouse serves as a cultural nexus for patrons, artists and students and is a treasured resource for the State of Connecticut. There are no boundaries to the creative thinking for future seasons or the kinds of audiences and excitement for theater that Westport Country Playhouse can build.

