

SCENE ONE.

This play can be done using all the written instructions but should be subject to experiment. Use your own vision. For example, the story can seem very different depending on whether the girls are both Black, both white, or a combination.

The audience hears Billie Holiday's "Strange Fruit" as they enter the theater. The scene is a small wood. It is autumn. Near a small river in the outskirts, two young girls are walking through the woods. Most of the trees are poplars that are losing their color. The ground is covered in a layer of red-brown leaves. The sun is high. The river is barely a trickle. The pace is slow and thoughtful.

GIRL 1

What a pretty day.

GIRL 2

It's gettin' cold.

GIRL 1

Look at the trees. Their leaves are all fallin.'

GIRL 2

The branches are bare. Look like skeleton arms.

GIRL 1

And the leaves are so red. We're lucky, we got the prettiest trees.

GIRL 2

Look like blood to me.

GIRL 1

You smell it?

GIRL 2

Smell what?

GIRL 1

Winter's comin'. I can smell it. It's like cinnamon. And burning leaves.

GIRL 2

Smells more like rotting leaves. The sun is makin' me tired. We've been walkin' a long ways.

GIRL 1

Let's rest for a while.

They sit down beside the small river. The two girls nestle between two large roots of a tree. A cool shadow comes over the stage. Soon they fall asleep. The light changes like a cycle of night into day. They wake up on what appears to the audience to be the next day, but later in the day than before. When the sun rises, the audience sees shadows of bodies hanging on trees in the background and one prominently hanging on the tree at which the girls are sleeping. It should be obvious that these people are Black men and women who have been lynched. The girls see none of it.

GIRL 1

How long were we sleepin'? The sun moved.

GIRL 2

I don't even feel like I was sleepin'. I'm all sore. You smell that?

GIRL 1

Winter? You smell it now?

GIRL 2

No. Smells like...burnin'. Something rotten. Or...a dead animal.

GIRL 1

The wind is prob'ly blowin' a fire from one of the fields.

GIRL 2

What's this? There's somethin' sticky on the tree.

GIRL 1

Jus' sap. It's on all the trees.

GIRL 2

We should be goin' back. It's gettin' late.

GIRL 1

You're right.

They stand up and turn to walk back the way they came. Girl 2 looks at the river and stops short.

GIRL 1

What?

GIRL 2

What's that in the river?

GIRL 1

What?

GIRL 2

The red. Looks the same as what's on the trees.

GIRL 1

It prob'ly is. Jus' sap. Let's go. You're scaring yourself.

They go around the tree and come right up to the man hanging there. He's hanging by his neck from a low branch, his toes only a foot from the ground. The girls stare with their mouths open. They make no noise. The woods are silent. The wind is blowing and the trees are creaking under the weight of the bodies.

GIRL 1

Since when did fruit grow from these trees?

GIRL 2

I don't know, I never saw it before. Why didn't we see it before?

GIRL 1

I don't remember fruit ever growin' from the trees before. It looks strange.

The girls walk around the man and inspect
the other trees.

GIRL 1

It's growin' on all of them. What kind of trees are these? How did they grow fruit so fast?

GIRL 2

It doesn't smell like winter anymore. I don't like it here.

GIRL 1

Me neither. Let's go.

GIRL 2

Maybe it'll be gone again by tomorrow. We should come back and check.

GIRL 1

Who's gonna take this fruit? Where's it gonna go?

GIRL 2

Maybe some animal will eat it. Maybe it's real tasty and that's why we never seen it
before.

GIRL 1

I hope so, it looks unnatural hangin' there.

The girls walk out of the woods, on the same
path they entered by. The crackle of the trees
in the wind follows them. "Strange Fruit"
begins to play again after the girls have
exited. The bodies are left hanging on the
trees as the lights dim like a sunset.