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### Community Chapter Assignment

Preface: Thoreau, Alvord, Rodriguez, Brown, and Mengestu are in a musical directed by Martin Luther King, Jr. Thoreau is on lights and sound, Alvord is the lead, Rodriguez is a chorus member, Brown is the stage manager, and Mengestu is in the pit orchestra.

KING

Okay, let's stay on schedule. It's time to run the opening number. Alvord? Are you ready for your lines?

ALVORD

Well...I guess...

KING

What's the matter? The time is now! I've been patient too long!

ALVORD

I just feel like this show has it all wrong...why is there one lead role? Can't I sing in a group? This is all too individualistic and I-

KING

Sorry Alvord, I can't hear you too well. Sound, turn her mic up please!

THOREAU

Don't worry about listening to her voice, Martin. The only voice you need to hear is your own...

KING

I don't want to hear my voice, I want to hear the lead actor's voice, please?

THOREAU

Maybe you should visit the woods...then you'll hear your voice...I sure did...

KING

Forget it. Alvord, just speak louder. Chorus? Are we ready?

RODRIGUEZ

*(He looks stressed)*

KING

Rich-heard, we've been over this. You speak English now. You're fine.

RODRIGUEZ

But my family won't recognize me in this role, speaking English! The mannerisms are so different, and I just don't know if I'm ready to play this part...

KING

Yeah, it's called getting in character. Anyway, let's move on. Alvord, you're sitting at the table drinking your- where's the table? Brown?! Where's the table? Where are all the props?!

BROWN

Oh, I got rid of those. You didn't expect me to hang onto all that stuff, right? What's life without moving forward?

KING

We've had those props since I started working here! Decades ago!

BROWN

And I was starting to worry we'd never get any new ones. Now we can!

KING

*(He sighs)* Okay. Let's just start the song. The time is now. Pit? Are we ready?

MENGESTU

Absolutely.

KING

Finally, someone is ready for action. And, go.

*(The scene begins, Mengestu is playing a different song)*

KING

Cut! Mengestu! You're playing the wrong song! We're on the opening number! What song was that?

MENGESTU

Oh, sorry. It's from *Into the Woods*. I think we should do that show next year.

KING

How about you play the song from *this* musical?

MENGESTU

Do you not want to do *Into the Woods*?

KING

I want to do *this* musical.

MENGESTU

Ah, I see your problem. You're not concerned about the song being from *Into the Woods*, but about how the song is not from *this* musical. I can understand that feeling...I came to understand it during my years in Peoria, always coming to, never going from...

KING

Stick to the...never mind. Break for today.

*(Thoreau, Alvord, Rodriguez, Mengestu, and Brown go out to lunch)*

WAITOR

Can I start you off with something to drink?

THOREAU

Just water, please.

RODRIGUEZ

I don't know anymore...

BROWN

Just a small cup of coffee, I don't want to take anything from this.

MENGESTU

Get me something...American. No, Ethiopian. Actually, I'll have whatever the most popular drink on the menu here is. I want to get acquainted with this place.

ALVORD

Let's just get a pitcher for everyone to share.

WAITOR

Yeah, okay. Sounds good. *(He rolls his eyes and walks away)*

MENGESTU

So Alvord, what happened at practice today?

ALVORD

I just feel the nature of this production is-

THOREAU

Mengestu, why are you so worried about other people? Let them live their own lives, you don't need their news.

ALVORD

No no, it's perfectly okay. That's what a community is, being a group, not individuals.

THOREAU

Oh, you've never been to the woods...you don't know yourself yet...you need to live more...deliberately...

ALVORD

Thoreau, you don't know what it means to be in a tribe. When you're in a tribe, you live your life to benefit everyone, not just yourself.

THOREAU

But can you hear your own voice?

ALVORD

Can you hear anyone else's?

RODRIGUEZ

I can't hear my family's language anymore.

MENGESTU

What do you mean?

RODRIGUEZ

Ever since I assimilated to American society, speaking English, I have lost touch with my own family...it's as though Mexico isn't even a part of my life anymore...

MENGESTU

Were you born in Mexico?

RODRIGUEZ

No, I grew up in San Francisco.

MENGESTU

You mean to tell me...that you've been going on and on about missing your heritage when you didn't even grow up in Mexico?

RODRIGUEZ

My parents moved here before I was born! Back before I gave them up for a community life...

MENGESTU

Yeah, the same thing happened to me. I feel like I should have a connection to Ethiopia, but that's my parents, not me.

RODRIGUEZ

But...I do feel a connection to our old way of life...I didn't want to have to give it up, but I suppose assimilating to society was necessary for success.

MENGESTU

You can recreate your home in different places. Take a place like Brooklyn, for example. It's constantly reinventing itself as new groups of people move in. Cultures can coexist.

RODRIGUEZ

But what about language? If you can't talk to each other, you obviously can't communicate.

MENGESTU

I knew a man across the hall who only spoke Mandarin Chinese. I learned how to say hello to him in his own language, and he smiled every time I did. From just one word! I like to think we were good friends without even talking to each other.

RODRIGUEZ

But my family used to laugh and sing...now we're just like any other family.

MENGESTU

You'll always be connected by your heritage, even if you're not as enthusiastic about expressing it as you were before...perhaps you were just coming of age?

BROWN

Alright, let's move on. Who needs people, just move forward. The community you're in is the community you should focus on, not the ones in the past.

ALVORD

Like how I went to Dartmouth and found a new tribe?

BROWN *(an aside)*

Definitely friending her later.

*(The waiter returns)*

WAITER

Are we ready to order?

THOREAU

The marrow of life, please. With a straw.

ALVORD

I'll order appetizers for the whole table and eat from those.

RODRIGUEZ

Pico de gallo...I mean a cheeseburger...

BROWN

I don't want any leftovers, so just a small sandwich, please.

MENGESTU

I've never been here before...so I don't really have a connection to any of the dishes.

WAITER

*(With sarcasm)* Pizza? Sounds great. Anything else I can do for you today?

THOREAU

Could you turn the music down, please? I can't hear my own voice...perhaps some nature sounds?

WAITER

Sure thing.

THOREAU

You are a wonderful waiter. Thank you.

WAITER

Oh it's an art, alright. I'll be back shortly with your food.

*(KING, the director of the musical, enters)*

KING

I thought I might find you all here.

BROWN

Stalker. I'm unfriending you. Not that it's a big deal...but I still am.

KING

I wanted to talk to you about the...productivity of today's rehearsal.

THOREAU

Why right now?

KING

It is never the wrong time to do the right thing.

MENGESTU

Couldn't it wait until after we finish eating? Why're you here?

KING

Injustice in my theater is injustice anywhere...my presence is always relevant. So is yours.

ALVORD

Alright, tell us what you have to say.

KING

Well, I want to hear from you. What do you feel went wrong today?

THOREAU

Too many people. Cut the cast down to, maybe, one or two. Or none, it'll be quieter. Yes, none.

KING

I should fire all the actors, Thoreau?

THOREAU

Just send them all on...a career alternative enhancement program. Perhaps by a lake. But, each of them to a...separate lake, of course...*(He drifts off in thought)*

KING

*(He sighs)* Alvord, what do you think?

ALVORD

We need to focus on the group, not the individuals. Why glorify one person when everyone can have an impactful role on the scene?

KING

This is a musical, not an induction ceremony. Rodriguez?

RODRIGUEZ

You need to tell the cast to abandon their family language if they ever want to assimilate.

KING

*(With sarcasm)* Then I wouldn't have to fire them, they'd all quit!

BROWN

Or, just tell them to get over past musicals. Singing lyrics from old shows doesn't leave you enough room in your mind for new ones.

KING

But those are fond memories of the past, we can't just let those go, even though there is a bright future ahead.

BROWN

You can't move into the future with old ties.

MENGESTU

In that case, ditch everything. I'm ready for *Into the Woods!*

THOREAU

I'm sorry, were all of you talking just now? I don't mean to be rude, I was just having a moment with myself.

KING

You know, you can't have a community of one.

THOREAU

Why not? I did fine by Walden...

KING

Because we keep each other sane. Issues of the community should be dealt with by all involved, which is always everyone.

RODRIGUEZ

If I may interject, Thoreau, you *can* have a private identity *and* a public one...just sometimes, they don't connect with your family's...

THOREAU

An interesting thought.

KING

Anyway, Mengestu. Settle in with this musical for now. You can learn to feel at home in any show, as long as you take the time to understand what it has to offer you.

MENGESTU

So, you're saying I need to find a personal connection to it?

KING

Yes.

BROWN

And I should appreciate the past, but live in the present?

KING

Yes.

ALVORD

And not worry about taking a different role from the group?

KING

Yes.

THOREAU

And we need an internal sense of self, along with appropriate public concern?

RODRIGUEZ

Private...and public identities?

KING

Yes. Exactly.

BROWN

Let's all get out of here. I feel like I've known you all too long.

*(The six people leave the restaurant and go their separate ways)*

*(Outside the restaurant, through the window, a man sees their food arrive to an empty table)*

SINGER

Murderers!