A STUDY GUIDE

Having Our Say

The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years!

DAIMLERCHRYSLER
Expect the extraordinary

A CELEBRATION OF AMERICA’S PEOPLE
Welcome! As “HAVING OUR SAY, The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years” becomes a Kraft Premier Movie, the producers, Camille O. Cosby and Judith Rutherford James, and corporate sponsor of this study guide, The DaimlerChrysler Fund, are pleased to welcome more audiences into the lives of Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany. These ordinary women, whose remarkable accomplishments earned them the admiration and respect of generations of Americans, have much to share as their lives are revealed to viewers. We hope you will enjoy visiting with the Delany sisters as much as the readers of the book and the nationwide audiences of the play, and that you will learn and grow from this experience. If you are like others who have been touched by the messages that emerged from the lives of these women, you will view others around you with new insights - particularly older people; you will feel a greater interest in “others” - people who are different from you; and you will want to develop your own way of coping with life and its challenges - using these special women as models of wit, courage and commitment to beliefs, despite difficult circumstances. As you soak up these ideas, you will have an extraordinary experience, having a good time with some real people whom you will learn to love before the movie is over. Then, treat yourself by reading their books. We believe you will thank us for introducing you. Again welcome!

CAMILLE O. COSBY and JUDITH RUTHERFORD JAMES present
A KRAFT PREMIER MOVIE
A production of TELEVEST and COLUMBIA TRISTAR TELEVISION
Presented on the CBS Television Network

Having Our Say

Starring
DIAHANN CARROLL, RUBY DEE and AMY MADIGAN
with
LISA ARRINDELL ANDERSON, MYKELTI WILLIAMSON, LONETTE Mckee
and introducing AUDRA McDONALD
with RICHARD ROUNDTREE
Special Appearance by DELLA REESE as Martha Logan

Based on the book by
SARAH DELANY and A. ELIZABETH DELANY
with
AMY HILL HEARTH

Teleplay by
EMILY MANN

Directed by
LYNNE LITTMAN

in association with
DREYFUSS/JAMES PRODUCTIONS, INC.

Educational outreach is made possible by a generous grant from the DaimlerChrysler Corporation.
“A vivid panorama of a section of American history seldom seen in the theatre”

—Vincent Canby, WQXR

Bessie and nephew “Little Hubie” Bourne, 1934
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On Line Resources at http://HavingOurSayFilm.com
The Lives & Times of Sadie & Bessie Delany (see Time Lines)
Bulletin Board for Discussion (see Conversations)
Post Your Story (see Guest Book)

All the quotations in this Study Guide are from the Broadway Play that opened April 6, 1995.
Amy Madigan, Diahann Carroll & Ruby Dee in the Film
“The most provocative and entertaining family play to reach Broadway in a long time”
—Vincent Canby, The New York Times

“...more than a century of American history radiating from the stage”
—Michael Bourne, WBGO Radio

“HAVING OUR SAY is the ultimate family values Broadway show”
—Jeremy Gerard, Variety

“...plays with the heart and soul of HAVING OUR SAY are rare on Broadway nowadays”
—Frank Scheck, The Hollywood Reporter

“...charm, wit, determination and undaunted pride — two extraordinary lives”
—Claude Reed, AMSTERDAM NEWS
“Pure storytelling in the great old American tradition”

— Michael Sommers, The Star-Ledger
Introduction

This story is about America’s people. As it demonstrates how vision, tenacity and courage can help strong people prevail over seemingly insurmountable odds, it is also a testament to the human spirit, wherever it is found. Thus, it is a story with universal appeal.

With the guidance of the show’s producers, Camille O. Cosby and Judith Rutherford James, this study guide has been developed to assist teachers of high school or college students who plan to see or have seen HAVING OUR SAY. The modules were developed to encourage students to use ideas and themes from the story to better understand our world. The guide will help prepare students for a deeper experience when they see the story, and can extend students’ interests beyond the theatrical encounter. Please encourage students to carry out the activities they like most, and if they want to develop ideas of their own—that’s fine!

Since HAVING OUR SAY can be understood on different levels—as a story that celebrates America’s people; as pointed commentary about prejudice, discrimination and social injustices; as a good story, told well; as an example of living history; and as a theatrical experience—this guide covers a broad spectrum of subjects, easily integrated into a variety of educational settings. The modules may be used as developed—for a history or literature class, for example—or they may be used as a part of an ongoing theme in any class. Self-identity and biography can be used in either history or literature classes, for example. The modules each contain:

• Objectives
• Background Information
• Discussion Questions
• Suggested Activities
• Terms.

We hope this organization will make it easy for you to use the story to help students learn more about the subjects or themes that you teach.

The time lines that you can find on the Web Site (http://HavingOurSayFilm.com) can be printed, duplicated and distributed for use. The time lines gives important dates in the lives of the Delany...
Consider the wealth of more than 200 years of experience talking on that stage
—Roma Torre, NY1

sisters and corresponding events in the world. Additionally, you can create your own time line on the Web Site. Remind students that we have living histories—like the Delany sisters—right in our homes, neighborhoods, schools, and places of worship. Students may want to interview one or more older relatives, friends, neighbors, or teachers to learn of significant events to place on the time line. Students can find out how their interviewee felt about what was going on in the world at the times he or she talks about, or what things they did to “have their say” about the world. How did and do they express themselves—through writing, singing, dancing, talking to others—or, through political activities or social protests? Using the feistiness and charm of the Delany sisters, help students see how much fun it can be to connect with older people! Encourage your students to fill in the Guest Book on the Web Site with comments on their interviews with older people. With the time lines and interviews, we focus your attention on this one of a series of rich ideas offered in the following pages that you may use to spark students’ interest. Read on for the others.

Bessie in Her Classroom in Brunswick, Georgia, in 1914
We believe this story helps the audience understand that in the history of the world, rarely has a group of stigmatized people, in only one or two generations, moved from having few resources with which to carry on their lives to monumental achievements made by members of that group. Despite legally sanctioned discrimination, and overt and covert prejudice that presented a continual series of obstacles, some African Americans can accurately claim such a record, as is clear to readers of the book *HAVING OUR SAY*. This book presents a vision of the Black community that has rarely been the focus of attention in any of the mass media, including theatrical productions. Yet stories of Black achievers in history who persevered against the odds and succeeded need to be described and placed into historical contexts, alongside their counterparts from other groups.

Through the years, America’s storytellers have preferred to show images of Black people that focused on those who could not or did not make the leap in a few generations, rather than to talk about those who did. Often, the attention that was focused on the Black community showed clownish buffoonery, decadence, violence and despair, or chaos and confusion, becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy for many. *HAVING OUR SAY* fills a void left by those who traditionally wrote the stories of our country, but who could not tell the stories or who prevented stories such as this from being told. By focusing attention on the dedication, commitment, hard work, intelligence, and the strong and courageous human spirit found in the heart of Black America, this story helps set the record straight, bringing Americans such as these the recognition and respect they earned long ago.
Having Our Say

**Having Our Say** opens with 103-year-old Sadie and 101-year-old Bessie Delany in their home in Mount Vernon, New York. We, the audience along with Amy Hill Hearth who came to write an article and subsequently a book about them, are guests in their home. They recount a fascinating series of events and anecdotes drawn from their rich family history and their careers as pioneering African American professional women. They lived during the turbulent times for descendants of slaves that occurred just after the Civil War, and they continue into the present, doing daily yoga exercises and watching the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour each evening.

We visit the Delanys’ girlhood home on the campus of St. Augustine’s School in Raleigh, North Carolina—one of the nation’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s). The audience feels the sisters’ frustration, anger and pain as they come of age during the Jim Crow era, just as the audience mentally celebrates the sisters’ successes as they overcome obstacles to rise to the top in their professions.

As **Having Our Say** unfolds, we witness the rise of middle income African Americans facing prejudice and discrimination in the South during and after slavery. We follow them at the turn of the last century as they move to Harlem just before the Roaring 20’s. We follow them in Harlem during the Great Depression and through two world wars as they resolutely obtained their education in an environment hostile to women. This, then, is a story about the struggles of women in a male dominated society; of a family working together building a good life, as they serve others as good neighbors and set examples for the younger members of their family. Finally, it is a story about ordinary people who make extraordinary achievements, living as good citizens, actively engaged with life, voicing strong opinions about current events—for more than 100 years.

We should all draw broadly from this story. This simple story about the struggles of two women typifies the essential human condition—of struggle and achievement, universal in its appeal and in the messages it sends.

Clearly, **Having Our Say** is our history. It celebrates women and men, African Americans, our country, and the indomitable human spirit.

*It is a celebration of America’s people.*
Before

seeing **HAVING OUR SAY** you may use some of the following ideas to stimulate discussions and interest in the play.

1. Have students read the book and discuss why the theme of the study guide and the underlying theme of the book—**A CELEBRATION OF AMERICA’S PEOPLE**—is appropriate.

2. Have students describe how they view older people. Do they see older people as storytellers who can help them understand the past or are they fearful of older people? Do they feel awkward around older people because they do not know them well? Maybe the ideas in the book will help students feel more able to open up to older people, to listen and learn from them.

3. Ask students their views about the experiences of the Delany sisters concerning prejudice and discrimination. Have your views changed as a result of the book? Has discrimination affected your life or the lives of others you know or have read about?

4. Have students tell or write about favorite stories they have heard from parents, other relatives, or teachers about life before the students were born.

5. Have students discuss how the book made them feel an appreciation for those who are different from themselves—older, different ethnic group, different cultural experiences, different color, different life experiences. Have them discuss why they believe we should embrace each others’ differences and appreciate our common human qualities.

6. Have students use the time lines, referred to in the Introduction of this Study Guide, even before the class sees the play. It can be the focus of activities that help students come to the experience of the play better prepared to understand what the sisters’ story is about.

After

seeing **HAVING OUR SAY**, you may ask students questions such as the following: How can we, as a country, find a way to move forward from here? How can we follow the Delanys’ example of positive optimism as they face the future? What do you think Bessie Delany meant when she said: “let’s put this race mess behind us”? What things can we do to embrace differences and celebrate our common human qualities?
“We have to deal with the past only as we make it useful to the future.”

— Frederick Douglass
BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
When the Civil War ended, freedmen sought ways to make a new and better kind of life for themselves and their families. Soon, however, many southern states enacted Jim Crow laws, designed to keep former slaves in a second class status where they would have few rights. Most of the freed slaves wound up in a new form of slavery — the sharecropping system. Sharecroppers worked the land owned by others — many of them former masters. The owners kept the records on what the sharecroppers owed them for living on and growing crops on the owners' land. In this environment, former slave Henry Beard Delany, Sadie and Bessie Delany's father, set out to raise his family. Unlike most former slaves, Henry Delany could read. This advantage gave him opportunities others could only dream of having. HAVING OUR SAY tells his story and the story of his wife and children.

OBJECTIVES:
After completing this module students will be able to:

a) Relate HAVING OUR SAY to history that is about ordinary people—not just leaders and wealthy people.

b) Analyze how the lives of ordinary people are reflective of the major historical events going on around them. Demonstrate an understanding of oral history as an organized way to learn the personal stories of real people.

c) Demonstrate that we use oral history to learn about personal perspectives; and that history is a collection of stories about people, where some people have sometimes attached only their group's stories as the "real" history.

d) Compare and contrast the migration experiences of various groups in U.S. history.

e) Discuss the role of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) in the education of Black people in the U.S.
QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:
You may use the following ideas to stimulate discussions:

a) What have you learned about life for African Americans? How has this knowledge added to or changed your ideas about this group?

b) What were the Jim Crow laws? What impact did they have on the everyday life of the Delany sisters?

c) How did the Delany sisters see the role of education in their own lives and in the lives of their family?

d) Analyze the story the Delany sisters told about Sadie refusing to sit in the back of the shoe store. How might this story have been told by one of the salesmen—or by another customer? How do different perspectives make stories different?

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES:

1) Explain to students that compensation by providing land and materials (reparations) was proposed by some as a means of economic rehabilitation for former slaves. Have students use Forty Acres and a Mule by Claude F. Oubre (LSU Press, 1978), and Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution by Eric Foner (Harper and Row, 1988), to research this concept.

2) Call attention to the Delany sisters' discussion of the terrible crime of lynching, where Black people—men, women and families—were lynched by white mobs as a form of social and political control. Have students use the library to search for books and periodical articles relating to lynching; have one or more students report to the class on the extent of lynching and on specific cases. Learn more about the case described by Bessie Delany: in the 1920s a Black man was lynched, and when his wife took the names of the men who committed the crime to the sheriff, she was hanged and her unborn child died with her.
6) Have students research the patterns of Black migration in the early twentieth century, looking specifically at the population shifts and reasons for the “internal migration”.

7) Have students find out how their families came to settle where they now live. Find out why, when and how they moved, and in which generations.

8) Have students describe how migration experiences may influence group identity or individual identity.

9) To the Delany sisters, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s) represented a crucial stepping stone that allowed them and others like them to build good lives. They each graduated from St. Augustine’s School in Raleigh, N.C. Have students find out how HBCU’s are faring in contemporary America, and if they are meeting a special need, as they have done throughout history.

3) Have students study the concept of Jim Crow in greater depth, including the 1896 Supreme Court decision in Plessy vs. Ferguson. What did Jim Crow mean and how was it applied?

4) Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute, was a prominent African American leader of his time. Have students abstract and read the main section of the speech Washington gave at the opening of the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895.

5) W.E.B. DuBois, born in 1868, Harvard graduate, scholar and uncompromising militant, continues to have an impact on the philosophy of race relations. Have students research his ideas by reading The Souls of Black Folk, published first in 1903. Have students analyze the literary and intellectual content; have students contrast the political and social ideas of DuBois and Booker T. Washington.

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*Booker T. Washington*

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*W.E.B. DuBois*
10) Have students compare and contrast stories about other Americans who endured hardships and discrimination. They may include Latino Americans, whose lands were taken by the U.S. in the 1800s; Catholics (most of whom were Irish), who were victims of anti-Catholic legislation and discriminatory practices during the mid-1880's; Native Americans, whose lands were seized by the U.S. as they were forced to live on reservations; Asian Americans, who helped build railroads across the U.S. at very low wages and some of whom were forced from their homes into detention centers during World War II; and Jewish Americans, who faced persecution and anti-Semitism as they sought peace for family members who survived the Nazi labor camps of World War II.

11) Have groups of students gather information about the migratory patterns of various groups: African Americans, Latino Americans, Jewish Americans, Italian Americans, German Americans, etc. Each group can present its findings to the class, explaining where groups moved, why and how they moved.

**TERMS:**
Migration
History
Jim Crow
40 acres and a mule
Reparations
“I, too, sing America.”
— Langston Hughes
SECTION TWO

The Harlem Renaissance

125th Street and 8th Avenue
BACKGROUND INFORMATION
The Delany sisters moved to New York just as the Harlem Renaissance, an explosion of artistic and cultural activity among African Americans, was taking place. It was a time of intellectual ferment and artistic production. Lasting contributions in music, art, literature, and drama were made. Both classical and popular performers became household names whose genius and talents became legends in the performing arts; creative works from this period continue to enrich our cultural life.

OBJECTIVES
After completing this module, students will be able to:

A) Analyze and interpret the literature, music, artwork and plays of the historical period known as the Harlem Renaissance.

B) Perform, exhibit or present a favorite work from this period.

C) Demonstrate an understanding of the historical significance of this period.

D) Compare and contrast the Harlem Renaissance with the so-called Renaissance of the 1990's of African Americans in literature, art, music, dance, and motion pictures.

E) Do independent research to identify novelists, poets and dramatists of the Harlem Renaissance.

F) Formulate a definition of folklore and folk tales.

G) Demonstrate an awareness of cultures other than their own.
It is said that the Harlem Renaissance was essentially a literary movement. The movement flourished in the 1920's and although there was activity in other parts of the country, Harlem was acknowledged as the center; it was a time “when Harlem was in vogue”. In a seminal work, *The New Negro* (1925), Alain Locke set out the basic philosophy of those who would become the exemplars of the Harlem Renaissance.

Contributions ranged from Jean Toomer’s acclaimed novel *Cane* to Alain Locke’s famous *Plays of Negro Life* (1927). Paul Lawrence Dunbar used folk situations to describe the human condition and Langston Hughes used dialect as the vehicle for expressions of “Negro” life, while Zora Neale Hurston, trained in anthropology, used folklore as the basis for her writings. American literature was forever enriched by contributions such as these.

**QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:**

*Use the following questions to stimulate class discussion:*

a) What brought the Delany sisters to Harlem? What did they expect to find? How did this move affect the course of their lives?

b) How were the Delany sisters influenced by the uniqueness of the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920’s?

c) Who were Cab Calloway, Paul Robeson, W.E.B. DuBois and Walter White, some of the famous people the Delany sisters knew during this time? Why were these people important?

d) What were the professions of the other members of the Delany family? There were barriers which made it difficult for Black people to move into professional and business careers. How did the Delany family deal with these restrictions? How successful were they?
The Harlem Renaissance

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

1) Have students select a poem, book, short story, artwork, motion picture or musical selection from the Harlem Renaissance period. Have them write an essay describing what they like, appreciate, or find most appealing about the work they selected. (See the “Suggested Resources” section on the following page.)

2) Select a major historical figure from this period, such as Paul Robeson, Romare Bearden or Zora Neale Hurston. Write a biography of the person's life, focusing on what made him or her stand out.

3) Have students use the play as a beginning reference point, being creative! For example, have them make up a story about an ordinary person who lived during this period. Be sure to have them include authentic information about what life was like.

4) Have students do independent research to identify a poet, dramatist, or novelist of the period; and have them write a critical review of a literary work by that person.

5) Have students select an African American folktale; in an oral presentation, describe the legend involved as well as “the moral of the story”.

6) Have students concentrate on women writers of the period, making an oral or written presentation about their work.

7) Have students select a short play for performance before the class.

8) Have students select a popular entertainer mentioned in HAVING OUR SAY and write a brief biographical essay about that person. They may share one of the works of the person with the class. They may compare and contrast a popular entertainer from that period with one from today.

9) Have students read a biography of a poet, artist, dramatist or musician from the Harlem Renaissance; write a critical review of the biography and select an African American folktale and a folktale from another culture or country. In a group setting, compare and contrast the legend; emphasize the human virtues and failings found in the folktale.

Children at play in Harlem, NYC

Class of students dancing
10) Have students find poems by African American writers of the Harlem Renaissance period. They may hold a discussion with their group about what the poems mean; or in a class panel discussion, share their thoughts with the class.

11) Have students hold a poetry festival in your classroom. Ask each student to bring in poetry by a writer representative of their own ethnic, religious, or regional background, or national origin.

12) Have students read some poetry aloud and discuss what the poems mean to them. They can write a poem in the style of the chosen writer.

**SUGGESTED RESOURCES:**

You may have students go to the following sources for specific materials for their activities:

For **plays**, they may use: Alain Locke and Montgomery Gregory, *Plays of Negro Life*. 1927.

For **poems** and **songs** they may use:

For **short stories and essays**, they may use:

For **folktales**:

**TERMS:**

Renaissance
Popular
Classical
Dialect
Drama
Folktale
Legend
Novel
“There is properly no history, only biography.”
— Ralph Waldo Emerson
A 50th Wedding Anniversary in the 1930’s

Biography:
Learning About Others
OBJECTIVES
After completing this module
students will be able to:

A. Analyze how the lives of ordinary people are reflective of the major historical events going on around them.

B. Analyze the impact of local, national and historical events on the lives of the Delany sisters.

C. Demonstrate an understanding of biography as historical method.

D. Demonstrate an understanding of oral history as historical method.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Biography is history that relates to an individual. It offers a picture of a person as that person moves through life, it is a chronicle of their activities and achievements.

The following paragraph chronicles the Delany sisters’ lives as young adults:

After graduating from St. Aug’s, the sisters spent several years teaching in North Carolina, putting away what they earned as tuition for college. Sadie, at age 21, ended up by default as the supervisor for all of the Black schools in Wake County. In 1917, the two took their cue from their brother Hap and joined the thousands of other African Americans who were heading north in search of a better life. They settled in New York City just in time for the Harlem Renaissance. They soon enrolled at Columbia University — Bessie studying for a degree in dentistry, Sadie working for an advanced degree in education.

A 1923 Columbia graduate, Bessie became the second Black woman licensed in New York State to practice dentistry. Sadie followed in 1925 with a master’s degree in education. Bessie set up her dental practice along with their brother Hap in the heart of Harlem. The office quickly became a popular meeting place, often functioning as an impromptu social service agency, as well as a dentistry office. Throughout her 27-year practice, “Dr. Bessie” never raised her fees and often treated people free-of-charge. On her end, Sadie was able to quietly outwit a still racist school system and become the first Black home economics teacher in a New York City high school.

The Delany sisters spent over three decades in Harlem, where they lived together along with many of their siblings. There, they gained great prominence, becoming friends with such legendary figures as Dr. W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, E.
This production of *HAVING OUR SAY* takes place in the sisters’ Mount Vernon home where the Delany sisters have lived for the last 38 years — still doing their own cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Today, as Bessie would say, they are proud to “have their say” as, in the great storytelling tradition, they pass down their biographies — their history — to another generation.

**QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:**

**USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO STIMULATE CLASS DISCUSSIONS:**

a) This play is about storytelling. Describe the role storytelling plays in people’s lives.

b) What is oral history? How does it differ from secondary sources such as textbooks and encyclopedias? What insights have you learned from the Delany sisters that you may not learn from these secondary sources?

c) This play is about love and affection and cherishing the elderly. Discuss the role of the elderly in society today. Describe how you feel about growing older. Imagine yourself as over 100 years old. Discuss how life may be then and what you may want to remember about the present time.

d) This play places food and its preparation as central to some concepts. Discuss the roles that food and food preparation play in your families. Describe family activities that revolve around eating and cooking and your favorite foods of today that you will tell young people about when you reach 100.

e) Bessie and Sadie have a strong sense of family identity and history. Discuss those who tell the family stories to you and the stories you will want to pass on.
4) Have students interview some of the elders in their community. Have them use the **time lines** in the Web Site to record authentic information about older people whom they have interviewed, placing some of their memories under the section: **“Record events here from those whom you interviewed”**.

5) Have groups of students research the lives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Malcolm X, who are seminal figures from the 1950’s to the present day, preparing reports on their philosophies and accomplishments.

6) Discuss how both men’s views evolved as the current political and social thinking changed. How were they influenced by the events and conditions in America and the world? How were they influenced by each other?
7) Have students prepare a songbook (or songfest) of the music engendered by the Civil Rights Movement. Ask students to analyze the emotional tone and the messages of these songs. (Many of these songs are collected on tape or CD’s.)

8) Have students research the national and local organizations that are concerned with current social problems including racial/religious/ethnic relations. Ask them to prepare an informational leaflet for distribution that describes goals, major areas of concern, and current leadership of these organizations.

9) Have students prepare a forum and invite various speakers from their community to discuss questions relating to the relationship of various racial/religious/ethnic groups in their community. Encourage the class to determine what role they can play to improve the quality of life for all.

10) Have students research movements in other countries that have dealt with issues of discrimination, poverty, voting, and protests. Ask them to particularly look at the role of common people in fueling these movements. Students may find interesting materials in the situations in Northern Ireland, South Africa, the Middle East and Haiti. They may also research and present speeches by outstanding leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela. Have students compare and contrast the work of these movements with those of American social reformers.

**TERMS:**
Autobiography, Biography, Memoir, Narrative, Oral history, Journal
“I never let prejudice stop me from what I wanted to do in this life, child. Life is short. It’s up to you to make it sweet.”
— Sadie Delany
Identity: Learning About Ourselves

School Orchestra, 1927
Identity: Learning About Ourselves

OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, students will be able to:

a.) Demonstrate an appreciation for themselves as unique beings, who are a part of a human chain.

b) Analyze the roles and ways of living of people from today and yesterday.

c) Demonstrate an understanding of the need to appreciate others.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:
Sisters Sarah Louise (Sadie) and Annie Elizabeth (Bessie) Delany were raised in Raleigh, North Carolina. Born in 1889 and 1891, respectively, Sadie and Bessie were second and third children in a family that included eight other children. The daughters of a mixed-race mother, Nanny James Logan, and a born-slave father, Henry Beard Delany, Sadie and Bessie grew up happily on the campus of St. Augustine’s School, an Episcopalian institution dedicated to educating African Americans. Having met as students at the school, their parents devoted most of their lives to working at “St. Aug’s” — Reverend Delany as vice principal and Mrs. Delany as matron.

Bessie and Sadie have remarkably different personalities, yet they remain close and in fact, have lived together nearly their entire lives. Nicknamed “Queen Bess” by her father, Bessie has a mind of her own. Often emotional and quick to anger, she “would rather die than back down”. Sadie is the exact opposite. Nicknamed “Sweet Sadie”, she is much calmer and more agreeable. As Bessie puts it in HAVING OUR SAY, “Sadie is the sugar, and I’m the spice.”

The sisters were reared in an environment of discipline and hard work, combined with a healthy dose of love. Strong religious faith and an abiding belief in the importance of education formed the backbone of their family life. Reverend and Mrs. Delany instilled in their children a strong sense of purpose. The children learned early on that their job in life was “to help somebody”. Both sisters were brought up to “reach high” and to never let anything hold them back.

For the Delany sisters, the family was everything. Nurtured by parents who taught their ten children to respect and support each other and to be self reliant, Sadie and Bessie developed a strong sense of identity and history. They can recite their genealogy back to the early 19th century, and like them, we all have a genealogy and history.
3) Have students create a family time line illustrating to what extent their lives and the lives of their families, and therefore their identities, have been impacted by local, national and international events. On the left-hand side of the time line, have them write important events, e.g. recession, wars, new technologies, changes in political institutions and uprooting of populations. On the right-hand side, have them write important family events that were the result of outside influences, e.g. loss of a job, involvement in the military, new job opportunities, migration.

4) Invite students to share some of their family’s stories about the past. Ask them to discuss: Who tells the family stories to you? What importance are they to you? What stories will you want to pass on? Students may wish to bring in old family photos as part of their presentation.

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES**

1) Encourage students to explore their own identities by creating a collage that helps them express who they are. They can use magazines, newspapers, photos, etc. Invite students to present their collages to the class, noting similarities and differences between themselves and others. Discuss: What have you learned about similarities and differences between yourself and others? Were there any surprises?

Students may also work in groups to create a collage representing a group identity to present to the class. Group identity can be found not just in race or ethnicity, but in interests, academic pursuits, etc.

2) Have students construct a family tree or personal genealogy. They can begin by reading introductory books on genealogical research (see Suggested Readings or Read More About It). Students might:

- Talk to the oldest members of their family
- Search records at home such as the family Bible or other religious records, birth certificates, and marriage licenses
- Research military records
- Examine the Passenger and Immigration Lists Index, available in large libraries
- Visit the local historical society
Identity: Learning About Ourselves

6) Help students understand that they are historical figures, just like the Delany sisters. Have groups work together on a journal about the present period in their lives that they will want to share with younger people when they turn 100 years old. They need to select a recorder to keep the group's journal over the semester—and include copies of news clippings, photos, charts and graphs, and recorded observations. Ensure that each student makes significant contributions to the journal to obtain credit. Periodically, or at the end of the semester, students can share their group's journal with the class. (Or, students may work individually on personal journals about life in their own family to pass on to the next generation.)

7) Invite older storytellers to class to pass on information to the next generation about life in earlier times. Impress upon students that they are living biographies—historical figures—much like the Delany sisters. Encourage a lively discussion. Have students pretend that it is fifty years from now and they are talking to their grandchildren. “When I was young, things were very different than they are now. We didn’t have…”

8) Working in small groups, have each group interview a different person about the same period of time or event in history (e.g. the 1960’s, World War II, the Depression, the Civil Rights Movement). Have the groups determine in advance the range of questions to be asked. For example, they might ask the interviewees about their memories of a particular period or event, the tone of the period, and its impact on their lives.

9) As a variation of Suggested Activity #3 above, have students prepare a time line from WW II to the present, tracing the life events of a fictitious person from another culture and country (e.g. Serbs and Moslems in Bosnia, Jews and Palestinians in Israel, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland). On the left-hand side of the time line, have them write important events that occurred in that country and, on the right-hand side, have them write family events that might have been the result of these outside influences. Discuss to what extent people’s lives in other countries and cultures, and their identities, might have been impacted by local, national and international events.
**FURTHER QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:**

As a direct follow-up to the previous section on suggested activities, have students respond to the following:

a) What have you learned about similarities and differences between yourself and others? Were there any surprises?

b) From your interviews, what have you learned about different points of view of different people? What have you learned about hearing only one perspective?

c) What would happen to your self identity if you allowed others to totally define who you are?

**TERMS:**

Identity
Archives
Genealogy
Griot
Oral History
Passenger List
Pension List
Ellis Island

10) Have students look for stories, novels, and poetry written by contemporary writers living in other lands in order to understand how the authors’ identities have been shaped by their own cultural experiences. Students may look particularly for writings by young Africans, by young Israelis and Arabs living in the Middle East, and by young Eastern Europeans finally free of the yoke of Soviet domination. Have students look for commonalities and differences between these writers’ experiences and their own American experiences in terms of the importance of family attitudes towards childbearing, the role of aggression, concepts of morality, and attitudes towards death and dying.
MOTTO

I play it cool
And dig all jive
That’s the reason
I stay alive.

My motto
As I live and learn
is:
Dig and Be Dug
In Return

— Langston Hughes
“Education! Education, child. Education always makes the difference!”
— Bessie Delany
**Home Longings**

I’ve been here fur many days
Standin’ in the city’s maze
Jumpin’ out and skippin’ in
List’nin to the roar an’din,
Gettin’ hard an’ keen an’ cold
Grown’ gray before I’m old;
I want home.

Home’s the best place after all;
When the leaves begin to fall
An’ the frosty atmosphere
Hints o’winter drawin’ near,
Seems as ef yore
mind goes back
Mighty swift along the track
’At leads home.

— Langston Hughes

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**THE DELANY SISTERS**
Delany, Sarah L. and A. Elizabeth with
Amy Hill Hearth. Having Our Say.
The Delany Sisters’ Book of Everyday Wisdom.

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**AFTER THE CIVIL WAR**
Bennett, Lerone, Jr.
Frazier, Edward Franklin.
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Chicago: Chicago Univ., 1939.
Ginzburg, Ralph. 100 Years of Lynching.
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THE HARLEM RENAISSANCE

Black Writers of America. 
Bearden, Romare, and Harry Henderson. 
Six Black Masters of American Art. 
Bone, Robert A. The Negro Novel in America. 
Brewer, John M. American Negro Folklore. 
Davis, Arthur P., Sterling Brown and Ulysses Lee, eds. 
The Negro Caravan. 
Driskell, David. 
Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black Americans. 
Huggins, Nathan, ed. 
Voices From the Harlem Renaissance. 
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The Book of Negro Folklore. 
N.Y.: Dodd, Mean, 1958.
Hurston, Zora Neale. 
Their Eyes Were Watching God. 
Phila.: Lippincott, 1937.
Johnson, James Weldon, ed. 
N.Y.: Harcourt, Brac, 1922.
Kellner, Bruce. The Harlem Renaissance: 
A Historical Dictionary of the Era. 
Lewis, David L. When Harlem Was In Vogue. 
N.Y.: Knopf, 1981.
Locke, Alain, and Montgomery Gregory. 
Plays of Negro Life. 
Magill, Frank N. 
Masterpieces of African American Literature. 
McKay, Claude. Harlem: Negro Metropolis. 
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Southern, Eileen. 
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N.Y.: Bone & Liveright, 1923.
Toomer, Jean. The Wayward and the Seeking: A Collection of 
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Turner, Darwin T., ed., Black American Literature: Essays, 
Poetry, Fiction, Drama. 
N.Y.: Charles E. Merrill, 1970.

Stars

“Speaking of aiming for the stars,” one of poet Countee Cullen’s admirers wrote from Paris, “you have virtually disarranged the entire solar system.” From 1923 onward, the skies over Harlem shimmered with new stars, candidates for Charles Johnson’s ambitious program to promote racial advancement through artistic creativity. Two writers – Claude Mckay and Jean Toomer – had already won critical acclaim. Two others – Langston Hughes and Countee Cullen – needed only to shine upon the world beyond Harlem to be recognized for their brilliance.

— When Harlem Was In Vogue, David L. Lewis
“The Cane Years”

In my writing I was working, at various times, on all the main forms. Essays, articles, poems, short stories, reviews, and a long piece somewhere between a novel and a play. Before I even so much as glimpsed the possibility of writing Cane, I had written a trunk full of manuscripts. The phrase “trunk full” is often used loosely. I mean it literally and exactly. But what difficulties I had! I had in me so much experience so twisted up that not a thing would come out until by sheer force I had dragged it forth. Only now and again did I experience spontaneous writing. Most of it was will and sweat. And nothing satisfied me. Not a thing had I done which I thought merited publication — or even sending to a magazine. I wrote and wrote and put each thing aside, regarding it as simply one of the exercises of my apprenticeship. Often I would be depressed and almost despair the written thing. But, on the other hand, I became more and more convinced that I had the real stuff in me. And slowly but surely, I began getting the “feeling” of my medium, a sense of form, of words, of sentences, rhythms, cadences, and rhythmic patterns. And then, after several years’ work, suddenly, it was as if a door opened and I knew without doubt that I was inside. I knew literature! And that was my joy!

— Jean Toomer, Novelist
The Souls of Black Folk

By every civilized and peaceful method, we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain forget: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

— W.E.B. DuBois, Collected Works, 1903

A Harder Task Than Making Bricks Without Straw

From the very beginning, at Tuskegee, I was determined to have the students do not only the agricultural and domestic work, but to have them erect their own buildings. My plan was to have them, while performing this service, taught the latest and best methods of Labour, so that the school would not only get the benefit of their efforts, but the students themselves would be taught to see not only utility in labour, but beauty and dignity, would be taught, in fact, how to lift labour up from mere drudgery and toil, and would learn to love work for its own sake. My plan was not to teach them work in the old way, but to show them how to make the forces of nature — air, water, steam, electricity, horse power — assist them in their labour.

— Booker T. Washington
Frances Foster and Lizan Mitchell in Having Our Say in Chicago

Gloria Foster and Mary Alice in Having Our Say on Broadway
A Glossary of Terms in “Having Our Say”

**Daughters of the American Revolution**  Women’s organization founded supposedly to foster patriotic principles and celebrate the principals of the American Revolution. In 1939, the D.A.R. refused to allow world famous singer African American Marion Anderson to perform at Constitution Hall in Washington, DC because of her race.

**Marion Anderson**  (1897-1993) Famous Black contralto whose voice was singled out by Sibelius and Toscanini in 1935 as “one of the greatest singers of the world”.

**N.A.A.C.P.**  (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)  Founded in 1909 in the United States, the membership was open to all races. It was established to foster justice and equality of citizenship for Americans of color through civil rights.

**Segregation**  The governmentally enforced laws of Jim Crow and racial segregation in the United States from the period of Reconstruction (1865-1871) until 1954. Apartheid is said to have been modeled after United States segregation.

**Issue free Negro**  A term associated with people of African ancestry in the period of American Slavery who sought and obtained their freedom and were awarded it with appropriate documentation. Some were born of non-slave parentage.

**13th, 14th and 15th Amendments**  (1865, 1868, 1870)  Legal revisions made to the Constitution of the United States abolishing slavery, guaranteeing African American men the privileges to full citizenship and guaranteeing African American men the right to vote.

**19th Amendment**  (1920)  Legal revision made to the Constitution guaranteeing women the right to vote.

**W.E.B. DuBois**  (William Edward Burghardt)  (1869-1963)  African American educator, social theorist, historian and Civil Rights leader who was the first African American PhD to graduate from Harvard University. He was also a founder of the N.A.A.C.P.

**Booker T. Washington**  (1856-1915)  African American educator and spokesman for the work ethic as the formula for Black self-sufficiency.

**Rebel**  (Confederates)  Those Americans who during the Civil War chose to ally and fight for the retention of US slavery as a way of life.

**The Surrender**  (End of Civil War)  The actual giving up and yielding the control of rule by the defeated South and its army during the American Civil War. The Southern surrender of the Confederate Army took place at Appomattox Courthouse in Virginia in 1865.
The Story of the Story

- 1889 - Sadie is born.
- 1891 - Bessie is born.
- 1991 - Her article "Two 'Maiden Ladies' with Century-Old Stories to Tell" appears on September 22.
- 1991 - People at Kodansha America Publishers read the article and invite Amy and the sisters to do a book.
- 1993 - Having Our Say, The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years, is published. Sadie and Bessie, at 104 and 102, talk to the press and enjoy it very much.
- 1993 - By December 7, the book is on the bestseller list, where it remains for 28 weeks.
- 1993 - Producers Cosby and James and writer Emily Mann begin the dramatic process.
- 1994 - Dell Publishers releases the paperback. It enters the paperback bestseller list at No. 8, jumping up to No. 3, and remains on the bestseller list.

- 1995 - September 25, Dr. "Bessie" dies at her home in Mt. Vernon in her sleep at age 104.
- 1996 - Having Our Say plays Chicago for five months and goes on a ten-month tour visiting 58 U.S.A. cities.
- 1998 - January. Having Our Say leaves for a college tour visiting campuses in at least 34 more cities.
- 1998 - June. Having Our Say opens its first international date in Johannesburg.
- 1999 - January 18, production begins for the Kraft sponsored CBS movie of Having Our Say - to air April 18, 1999.
- 1999 - January 25, the remarkable Miss Sadie, 109, died peacefully at her home in Mt. Vernon.

- Camille O. Cosby, Judith Rutherford James

Frances Foster in the play.


Mykelti Williamson and Lnette Mcke in the film.
**Authors**

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**KAREN E. DATES** coordinates two youth programs for the city of Baltimore and teaches communications at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland. Dates earned a B.A. at Brown University and an M.S. at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism. She has experience in the public relations, advertising and writing fields.

**MARVA D. BELT** has extensive research experience at the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, Maryland and the Moorland Spingarn Research Center at Howard University in Washington, D.C. Belt earned a B.A. at Brown University and a Master of Library Science degree at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts.

*Educators Jacqueline Stromfeld and Herb Greenhut contributed editorial suggestions for this study guide.

**VICKI GOLD LEVI** (Historical Pictures Editor) is the co-author of *Atlantic City, 125 Years of Ocean Madness*, and she is the co-founder of the Atlantic City Historical Museum.
Dear Parent:

Soon, through the educational program of the DaimlerChrysler Corporation, your student will be viewing the film HAVING OUR SAY. Based on the best-selling book by Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth, it is a story of history, revelation and thought provoking significance. Sadie and Bessie Delany lived over 100 years and were witnesses and participants to 100 years of American history. When the Broadway show opened on April 6, 1995, the New York Times wrote: "Having Our Say is the most stimulating and entertaining family play to have reached Broadway in a long time." We believe this experience will be extremely worthwhile for your student, and even more so with your involvement.

The film suggests a number of activities that you might enjoy doing with your student. For example, the study guide asks that the student look for information and stories about the era in which his/her parent or guardian grew up. You might look at the time lines with them and tell them what you remember about certain years. (The centenarian Delany sisters have memories of every decade since the 1890's!) You can help your student interview old people in your family or neighborhood to compare their memories with the Delanys' memories on the time lines.

For example, in the film, the Delanys tell stories while they cook, do grocery shopping and visit. You might want to talk about your own recipes or family traditions in terms of your parents, grandparents or old friends of the family. In these ways, your student will see "history" as part of her own life, as creating history.

Lastly, after your student sees the film, we hope the rich experience generates family discussions about personal history, about how his or her views toward older people may have changed in light of the amazing Delany sisters, and how history includes all people and all perspectives.

HAVING OUR SAY is a celebration of America's people. We hope you and your student will join in.

Best regards,

Camille O. Cosby
Executive Producer

Judith Rutherford James
Executive Producer
Dear Teacher or Study Group Leader:

We are proud to give you this study guide for the film of HAVING OUR SAY.

This film was written by Emily Mann from the bestseller "HAVING OUR SAY, The Delany Sisters' First 100 Years," by Sarah and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearth.

When you have seen the film we know this study guide brought to you by The DaimlerChrysler Fund will continue the thought provoking experience.

Who is an American? When you think about an American what is the human image in your mind?

To answer the aforementioned questions, this study guide has been developed to celebrate all of America's people - regardless of ethnicity, religion or culture. Unquestionably, people are fully educated when they have knowledge of each other's similarities and differences. The challenge that all people must face is to make education a more positive and powerful means for equality in our democracy.

We hope this experience - the film, the message of the Delanys and this study guide - brings you great pleasure.

Best regards,

Camille O. Cosby  
Executive Producer

Judith Rutherford James  
Executive Producer
The Delany Sisters