

## WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT JAMES LJAMES



James Ijames is an award-winning playwright, director, and educator. His play *Fat Ham* received the 2022 Pulitzer Prize in Drama and was a 2023 Tony nominee for Best Play. He has received numerous awards including a Steinberg Prize in 2022 and 2020, a Kesselring Prize in 2019, a Whiting Award in 2017, and two Barrymore Awards for Outstanding Direction of a Play. James was selected as a 2015 Pew Fellow for Playwriting. His works, which often explore race and sexuality, have been performed in other theaters across the country, including Broadway. He is currently based in Philadelphia, PA, where he is also an Associate Professor of Drama at Villanova University.



## QUESTIONS: FAT HAM (2021)

- How do you interpret Ijames's note about the play's setting?
- What stands out about Juicy's and Pap's first interaction? What do we learn about their dynamic?
- What are Tedra's reasons for marrying Rev? How does this affect our view of her character?
- What pressures does Juicy face from other characters?

## MAKING CONNECTIONS

As an adaptation of *Hamlet*, *Fat Ham* both maintains and subverts various elements of Shakespeare's play.

- What does Juicy already being familiar with Shakespeare mean for his character?
- When and why does Juicy directly quote from *Hamlet*? What do these callbacks signify?
- What traits are carried over from *Hamlet*'s characters, and in what ways are they reimaged?
- What characters are given the chance to explain themselves where their original counterparts were not?
- What other allusions does Ijames make to *Hamlet* throughout the play? How are these elements altered in this version?
- Why does Ijames change the story from a tragedy to a comedy? What is the significance of the ending?
- How does Ijames address issues related to the African American experience when compared to other authors such as Jesmyn Ward or Toni Morrison?

## COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [ICMGLI](#)
- [National LGBTQ Task Force](#)
- [NCADV](#)
- [SAMHSA](#)
- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [NAACP](#)

What about Opal and Larry? How do they deal with these expectations?

- What is the significance of Juicy's and Larry's one-on-one conversation?
- How do the fourth wall breaks contribute to the play's themes? What are other radical formal decisions Ijames makes in his script?
- Characters shift from conversational language to more poetic, sustained speeches. Why does Ijames contrast how the characters speak in these moments?

## LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- Are there any Juicys, Opals, or Larrys in your community? What can you do to support young people who are struggling with identity or familial tensions?
- Several characters in the play struggle with expressing their sexuality or face resistance when they do so. What resources are available for queer individuals living in unwelcoming circumstances?
- Ijames's play explores generational trauma, specifically around the African American experience. How can we help communities impacted by historical and systemic oppression?
- Where is toxic masculinity shown or called out in the play? How can we foster healthier forms of masculinity?
- How can we build spaces where people can be vulnerable, open, and truthful about themselves without fear of judgment?

## ADDITIONAL READINGS

- Lyndsay Faye, *The King of Infinite Space* (2021)
- James Ijames, *Kill Move Paradise* (2019)
- Barry Jenkins, *Moonlight* (2016)
- Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987)
- Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* (1966)
- Jesmyn Ward, *Sing, Unburied, Sing* (2017)