

# "Hair Waiting" by Niccole Nero Gaine's

## Directed by KJ Gilmer

### Study Guide by Melissa Barbour & KJ Gilmer



#### **"Hair Waiting" Summary**

The Pandemic has women of all cultures turning to YouTube and Tik Tok for hair advice. Tune into Monica's online tutorial waiting room. Monica's clients, Naomi and Sandra are surprised when Becky joins the hair tutorial. While waiting for Monica to get on the call, they discuss Becky's attempt at cultural appropriateness, Juneteenth celebrations, good hair, and hair discrimination. The women's bickering attracts the attention of Monica's Caribbean cousin Ma Bell, who crashes the tutorial, fixes their hair, attitudes, and outlook. Even in a virtual hair salon, the women find that they have more in common than they think, especially having good looking hair.

#### **Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)**

**Becky**- White, 20-30, tries to be an ally, she is awkward.  
Appointment: Fine limp hair and wants curls for her boyfriend Juneteenth celebration.

**Naomi**- Black, 20-30's, corporate, work twice as hard type, strong, defensive  
Appointment service: Root touch up on her straight relaxed hair.

**Sandra**-Biracial/Light skinned, 20-30's, an "I got my hair social, historical and political hair woes too" attitude, proud, edgy, has "good hair". Appointment: Double strand twists

**Ma Bell**-Black, late 30's-40s, Jamaican, a bit older than the other girls, Voice of reason, comic relief, natural, spiritual an old soul.

### **Offstage Characters**

**Monica**- Hairstylist that is forced to give online tutorials during the Pandemic. The play takes place in her online tutorial waiting room. She is Ma Bell's cousin from the Caribbean.

**Devonte**-Becky's African American boyfriend who has Dreadlocks hairstyle.

### **THE PLAYWRIGHT**



*Photo courtesy of 4loveproductions*

Niccole Nero Gaines is an acclaimed and prolific writer in several genres and mediums. She was born and raised in New York and whilst growing up she split her time between her father's home in Hollis, Queens, and her mother's home in Long Island. She is a graduate of Morgan State University where she earned a

B.A. in Theatre Arts. Ms. Gaines has written for the stage, television, and film with other writing credits including the staged productions, *HAIR-Itage*, *Last Dance*, *Brownstone Blues*, and *From the Heart of Hollis*. She was recognized with the Arthur C. Lamb Playwriting Award for *From the Heart of Hollis*. Outside of the stage, Ms. Gaines is known for her writing work on the web series, 'SexTea Ladies', and her ongoing children book series, *Emene the Elephant and Friends*. She is the director, writer, and producer for her brainchild, 4 Love Productions.

## **THEMES AND CONCEPTS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **GOOD HAIR**

***SANDRA: I grew up with “Good Hair” and I still use conditioner***

***NAOMI: “Excuse me, Sandra, what exactly do you mean by “Good Hair”?”***

What is Good Hair? Good Hair is hair that is wavy or straight in texture, soft to the touch and has hardly any shrinkage when wet. Good hair is considered desirable because it can grow long, requires hardly any manipulation of products or treatment to make it beautiful. The texture is close to white European ancestry which is the desired attractiveness and standard of beauty.

The “Good Hair” idea is deeply rooted in history which often holds up Black women who have the desired wavy soft to the touch hair, against Black women whose hair is hard to manage, coily, and coarse. Tightly coiled, coarse hair is a marker of Blackness. Coily hair has a large amount of shrinkage that give the appearance of slow hair growth.

### **NATURAL HAIR**

***NAOMI: I may be little defensive because I was teased about my hair growing up but now thick, coarse hair like mine is in popular demand.***

The rise of the “natural hair movement” or “Naturalistas” has been accompanied by a conscious rejection of dominant beauty standards and a celebration of natural hair. Natural Hair is hair that is not relaxed, permed, bleached, or processed in any way.

### **RACIAL IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

***SANDRA: I can be treated like I don’t understand what black people go through, because of my curly hair and mixed heritage...I do want to look more like my Black ethnicity.***

Sandra stands up for herself and her choice to embrace her Black ethnicity. She is quick to point out that she is Black and has struggles too. She was not treated any better by white society, and she brings up the history fact of ancestral rape of Black women by slave masters in her defense.

Sandra states that while trying to belong to the Black community, she was shunned and kept out, especially by Black women because of her looks which are closeness to white standards of beauty and belief of better treatment. The term “racial imposter syndrome” has been coined for people who are living at the intersection of different identities and cultures.

“Racial Imposter Syndrome” refers to a feeling where someone of mixed race doesn’t believe they have the right to truly claim any of the races within them. It’s a feeling of not being ‘black’ enough, or ‘Asian’ enough or ‘Latino’ enough and so on.”

“It’s believed that people of mixed race will try various means to find acceptance in their chosen race. For example, they may take a heightened interest in studying and appreciating the culture of one of their races, even more so than a monoracial person would, out of a fear of being labeled by others as an outsider or a fake. When a mixed race person joins a space reserved for monoracial people, their identity can feel performative especially if they are not fluent in the spoken language, if they do not have the same accent or if their complexion and features are significantly different.” (<https://nobasicgirlsallowed.com/racial-imposter-syndrome-finding-mixed-race-belonging-through-fake-racial-identity/>)

## **CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

***NAOMI: (to Becky) You mean more ethnic. You trying to appropriate on the low?***

The idea that Becky is adopting a curly hairstyle to attend a Juneteenth celebration. Becky’s boyfriend, Devonte’s sister sent her to Monica to get a curly hairstyle for the event. Becky does not see it the hairstyle as appropriating, but Naomi does.

**Culture’** “Culture is a system of knowledge, beliefs, patterns of behavior, artifacts, and institutions that are created, learned, shared, and contested by a group of people. Culture is our guide for understanding and interacting with the people and the world around us. It includes norms, values, symbols...as well as structures of power – including the media, education, religion, and politics.” (Guest, Kenneth J. *Essentials of cultural anthropology: A toolkit for a global age*. WW Norton & Company, 2017.)

**Appropriation**-The unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the customs, practices, ideas, etc. of one people or society by members of another and typically more dominant people or society. (Oxford Languages)

“Linda Martín Alcoff writes that cultural appropriation is often seen in a cultural outsiders' use of an oppressed culture's symbols or other cultural elements, such as music, dance, spiritual ceremonies, modes of dress, speech, and social behavior when these elements are trivialized and used for fashion, rather than respected within their original cultural context.”

(<https://www.historyisaweapon.com/defcon1/alcoffwhitepeople.html>)

## **ASSIMILIATION AND BLACK HAIR ALTERATION**

***SANDRA: You were accusing Becky of appropriating for wanting curly hair, but you want straight hair like a white girl.***

***NAOMI: I wear my hair straight for now, that which makes Southern men comfortable investing their money with a Black woman they might think is conformist.***

Naomi who has thick coarse hair straightens her hair not to appropriate but to fit in at her corporate investment firm. Naomi's experience and acquiescence to straighten her hair to make corporate Southern men comfortable.

Ingrid Banks writes in her article “Hair Matters: Beauty, Power, and Black Women's Consciousness” that “hair alteration practices by Black women can serve as an assimilation strategy as well as a representation of the lengths “black women in particular, have to go to in order to succeed. Rather than an action reflecting self-hatred, hair alteration can be a means of social and economic self-preservation.”

In her article, “Hair Alteration Practices among Black Women and the Assumptions of Self Hatred” Chanel Donaldson quotes articles by from Thompson and Badillo that state, “as an extension of the assimilation concept, hair alteration can also represent a woman's attempt to remain attractive in the job market. In the professional world, a Black woman with natural hair is often deemed unkempt and unemployable.”

([https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych\\_opus/hair-alteration-practices-amongst-black-women-and-the-assumption-of-self-hatred/](https://wp.nyu.edu/steinhardt-appsych_opus/hair-alteration-practices-amongst-black-women-and-the-assumption-of-self-hatred/))

## **Terms Mentioned in the Script**

**Sock curlers**- An effective way to curl your hair without heat. The is a simple way to curl hair which involves wrapping sections of damp hair around socks, securing

them with hair ties, and allowing the hair to dry overnight. This curling method results in defined, voluminous curls. In the play Ma Bell instructs Becky “to cut the socks long way into strips” and “use setting lotion” to curl the hair.

**Setting lotion**- Liquid styling product, much like gel. It is used to set the hair in a particular shape stops the hair strands from drying out when being **set** in rollers. The hair is coated with the product, rolled up in curlers or other hair shapers and air or heat dried to hold the shape.

**Mousse**- Styling foam used to style and strengthen hair. “Mousse” French for foam.

**No Justice, No Peace**- Political slogan that originated in protest of violence against African Americans by White Americans, though its precise meaning is contested.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No\\_justice,\\_no\\_peace#:~:text=%22No%20justice%20no%20peace%22,of%20mob%20of%20white%20youths.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_justice,_no_peace#:~:text=%22No%20justice%20no%20peace%22,of%20mob%20of%20white%20youths.))

**Reparations**- Reparations are broadly understood as compensation given for an abuse or injury. The colloquial meaning of reparations has changed substantively over the last century.

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations\\_\(transitional\\_justice\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reparations_(transitional_justice)))

**Double strand twist**- Double strand twists are made of two strands of hair crisscrossed or twisted together. The hand motion is similar to turning double Dutch or braiding hair with two sections instead of three; simply loop strands over each other over and over until you reach the ends of the hair. (<https://www.perfectlocks.com/blogs/all-tressed-up/135659143-the-ins-outs-of-two-strand-twists>)

**Relaxer (Perm)**- A relaxer is a type of lotion or cream generally used by people with tight curls or very curly hair which makes hair easier to straighten by chemically "relaxing" the natural curls. The active agent is usually a strong alkali, although some formulations are based on ammonium thioglycolate or formaldehyde. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Relaxer>)

**Juneteenth**- Dating back to 1865, it was on June 19<sup>th</sup> that the Union soldiers, led by Major General Gordon Granger, landed at Galveston, Texas with news that the war had ended and that the enslaved were now free. Note that this was two and a half years after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation - which had become official January 1, 1863. (<https://www.juneteenth.com/history.htm>)

**Laced up**- Used to describe a new hair cut that is quite fresh, or more specifically describing someone with a nicely-done shape-up.

(<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=laced%20up>)

**Online Hair Tutorial**-Tutorial on the internet used to show or demonstrate how to make, do, or build something.

**“Mayo”** short for Mayonnaise- Becky’s request for “mayo” is a reference to Black people’s aversion to the condiment. Films such as 2002’s *Undercover Brother* may be the culprit for modern-day scorn. In it, they joked that liking mayo was a path to passing for white. But Damon Young at *Very Smart Brothas* recently explained why potato salad—ahem, mayo—is a “black people” food. And on other forums online, some people argue that this perception of mayo just being white exists in one place only: On the internet. In response to the question “What is this myth that black people don’t eat mayonnaise?,” Spliz writes:

*“Every black person I know puts Mayo on some form of sandwich. Not including all the fuckin fast food restaurants that put Mayo on the burgers or chicken sandwich automatically. Scream black people don’t eat mayo while eating the mac sauce from Mcdonalds. Potato salad from yo grandma crib. Macaroni salad. Etc etc. I honestly believe that stupid stereotype came from Undercover Brother.”* (<https://melmagazine.com/en-us/story/the-rich-tangy-cultural-history-of-mayo>)

**To School Someone**- to showing someone how to do something or teach someone, something. It is based on teaching someone how to do it the right way like a teacher does in school. Schooling someone is pretty much making them know that your way of doing something is the best way.

(<https://neologisms.rice.edu/index.php?a=term&d=1&t=20286#:~:text=To%20school%20someone%20is%20a,something%20is%20the%20best%20way>)

**Ackee**- The fruit turns red on reaching maturity and splits open with continued exposure to the sun. Traditionally it is at this time that the ackees are harvested and the edible portion (the arilli) removed and cleaned in preparation for cooking. This delicacy is enjoyed by many at breakfast or as an entree. The canned product is exported to ethnic markets worldwide and continues to be enjoyed by both visitors to the island and Jamaicans residing overseas.

(<http://wwwchem.uwimona.edu.jm/lectures/ackee.html>)

**“Locs” shorten form of Dreadlocks**- A natural hairstyle that has historically been worn across several civilizations and cultures. According to Tharps, “the modern understanding of dreadlocks is that the British, who were fighting Kenyan warriors (during colonialism in the late 19th century), came across the warriors’ locs and found them ‘dreadful,’ thus coining the term ‘dreadlocks.’” Personally, I refer to my hairstyle as locs, having dropped “dread” altogether given its negative connotation. Although many may not know of the term’s dark history, the hairstyle remains widely contentious in America two centuries later.

(<https://www.vogue.com/article/locs-history-hair-discrimination>)

## BLACK HAIR DISCRIMINATION AND ADVOCACY



**Black hair discrimination**-neutral policies or practices that profile, single out, and disproportionately burden Black people for wearing natural hairstyles or protective styling intimately associated with the Black identity. These racial proxies are employed to limit the mobility of Black people in public and private spaces, strike at the freedom and dignity of Black people, and maintain the myth of white supremacy. (NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund)

**The CROWN Act**, which stands for “**C**reating a **R**espectful and **O**pen **W**orld for **N**atural Hair,” is a law that prohibits race-based hair discrimination, which is the denial of employment and educational opportunities because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including braids, locs, twists or bantu knots.([www.crownact.com](http://www.crownact.com))

**The CROWN Coalition** is an alliance of organizations, including founding members Dove, National Urban League, Color of Change and Western Center on Law and Poverty, that are dedicated to the advancement of anti-discrimination legislation across the United States. With the help of a diverse array of organizations in the social justice, business, legal, and education sectors, the CROWN Coalition has had tremendous success elevating the public narrative around this important issue and inspiring a movement to end hair bias and discrimination([www.crownact.com/about](http://www.crownact.com/about))

### SOURCES FOR MORE EXPLORATION

#### **History of Black Hair**

Byrd, Ayana and Tharps, Lori L., *Hair Story: Untangling the Roots of Black Hair in America*. New York. St Martins Griffin. 2014

#### **GOOD HAIR**

<https://perception.org/goodhair/whatisgoodhair/>



## **NATURAL HAIRSTYLE TUTORIALS**

<https://www.byrdie.com/all-about-twists-or-two-strand-twists-hairstyles-400274>

## **RACIAL IMPOSTER SYNDROME**

Racial imposter syndrome, finding mixed race belonging through fake racial identity by Millie Hall 2019, Vice Magazine

<https://nobasicgirlsallowed.com/racial-imposter-syndrome-finding-mixed-race-belonging-through-fake-racial-identity/>

NPR-The Code Switch Podcast: Racial Imposter Syndrome: Here are your stories

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/06/08/462395722/racial-impostor-syndrome-here-are-your-stories>

## **HAIR DISCRIMINATION AND BIAS**

<https://www.naacpldf.org/natural-hair-discrimination/>

<https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/LDF-Primer-on-Hair-Discrimination-Resources-FINAL.pdf>

[https://www.americanbar.org/groups/business\\_law/publications/blt/2020/05/hair-discrimination/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/business_law/publications/blt/2020/05/hair-discrimination/)

## **CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

PBS *What I Hear when You say*: Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation.

<https://www.pbs.org/whatihear/web-series/cultural-appropriation/>. November 10, 2020

PBS *What I Hear When You Say* Cultural Appropriation vs. Cultural Appreciation. Viewing guide PDF

[https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer\\_public/whatihear/9-Cultural\\_Approp-Viewing\\_Guide.pdf](https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbento-prod/filer_public/whatihear/9-Cultural_Approp-Viewing_Guide.pdf)

Alcoff, Linda Martin, "What Should White People Do?". *History is a Weapon*.

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Badillo, Casandra. (2001). Only my hairdresser knows for sure: Stories of race, hair, and gender. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 34(6), 35-37.

Banks, Ingrid. (2000). *Hair matters: Beauty, power, and Black women's consciousness*. New York: New York University Press.

Thompson, Cheryl. (2009). Black women, beauty, and hair as a matter of being. *Women's Studies*, 38(8), 831-856.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. Monica is a hair stylist that is forced to do hair tutorials on Zoom due to the Pandemic closures of hair salons. Who does your hair and how often do you get your hair done, cut, colored, styled, flat ironed, blown out, curled, relaxed, bleached, or braided to maintain your current hairstyle?
2. The ladies in *Hair Waiting* are in a Zoom hair salon waiting room. Have you ever used a YouTube, Tick Tock or Pinterest tutorial to style your hair?
3. How would you explain “Cultural Appropriation” to someone who has never heard the term?
4. Sandra is biracial, she wants to get double strand twists to show her “Blackness”. Does hairstyle define an individual and where do your hairstyle influences come from?
5. Ma Bell tells the ladies to burn or flush their hair. Do you or anyone in your family have superstitions surrounding hair?
6. Naomi straightens her hair to fit into her corporate investment position. Have you ever changed your hair to fit in? Have you ever been discriminated against because of your hair or hairstyle?
7. Naomi is getting a relaxer to straighten her thick, coarse hair. Are people with curly, straight, long, or short hair perceived differently depending on race, gender, regimentation, religion, occupation, occasion?
8. Dive Deeper: What is considered cultural appropriation in this example: A White woman wearing dreadlocks. A Black woman who straightens her hair. Why?

