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**C C T A**

Columbia Center for  
Theatrical Arts, Inc.

“To **THINK BIG** and to use our talents doesn't mean we won't have difficulties along the way. We will – we all do. How we view those problems determines how we end up. If we choose to see the **obstacles** in our path as **barriers**, we stop trying . . . However, if we choose to see the **obstacles** as **hurdles**, we can leap over them. Successful people don't have fewer problems. They have determined that nothing will stop them from going forward.”

—Ben Carson, M.D.  
from *Gifted Hands*  
by Ben Carson, M.D.,  
and Cecil Murphey

## Study Guide for teachers



### ***Ben Carson, M.D.***

Original adaptation by Carole Graham Lehan. Based on the books *Gifted Hands* by Dr. Ben Carson, M.D. & Cecil Murphey, *THINK BIG* by Ben Carson, M.D. with Cecil Murphey and *The Big Picture* by Ben Carson, M.D. & Greg Lewis.

Produced by:  
**THEATRICAL ARTS PRODUCTIONS (TAP)**

**TAP** is a professional nonprofit company of adult theatre artists that is dedicated to producing theatre for young people and adults to communicate educational and social values.





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# Ben Carson, M.D.

## Study Guide for teachers



### About the Play

*Ben Carson, M.D.* was adapted from: Ben Carson's autobiographies: *Gifted Hands* (by Ben Carson and Cecil Murphey), *THINK BIG* (by Ben Carson with Cecil Murphey), and *The Big Picture* (by Ben Carson and Greg Lewis) as well as numerous media interviews. This play tells of Dr. Carson's inspiring odyssey from his childhood in inner-city Detroit to his position as director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital at age 33 — "one of the

youngest persons ever to have such a position, . . . the only black person to have such a position at a world-renowned institution." Ben Carson is a model to all the youth of today. This is the dramatic and intimate story of Ben Carson's struggle to beat the odds—and of the faith and genius that make him one of the greatest life-givers of the century. Ben Carson is an American Hero!

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### From the Playwright

A few elements affect the choices made in this retelling:

**First**, there are only five actors in this play and yet there are **almost 50 characters**(#). Some are real (biographical): Ben Carson; his brother, Curtis; his mother, Sonya; Candy, his wife; several colleagues; and patients. Some are fictitious. We project slides from photographs so that the audience may view the image of the "real-life" person while an actor who plays multiple characters is portraying, say, his or her 15th character.

**Second**, the episodic nature of Ben Carson's journey lends itself toward *minimalistic staging*(\*). Scenes are often brief, so, few set pieces and props are used. Rather, *lighting* and *sound* play an important role in the definition of space and the journey of time.

**Third**, we're working in theatre, as differentiated from cinema. Not everything is specified visually. The audience must bring an *imagination*(\*) to the play.

**Finally**, working on Dr. Carson's story continues to impact my personal journey. I have found myself asking the questions, "*Am I the kind of adult I want my children to be? Am I providing them with good role models? Do I live and actively profess my values and beliefs as Dr. Carson's mother, Sonya Carson, did?*"

I consider both individuals, Ben and Sonya Carson, as modern day heroes(\*) and role models, not only for my two boys, but for myself. In a time when we, in the United States, are searching to articulate the meaning of the popular term, "*family values*," Sonya Carson in her *other-oriented behavior* and *defiance of the victim mentality* is able to raise a family with its values in place.

— Carole Graham Lehan

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Special activities/discussion questions have been developed to accompany this production, guided by the manner in which the playwright has presented the material.

(#) refers to the list of characters on page 5 of this guide.

(\*) refers to an activity in the Pre/Post Show Activities on page 4. These materials/activities have been chosen to span the age levels of students who will see this play. We hope that our guidelines are helpful to the adults who will be preparing and debriefing students who will experience, *Ben Carson, M.D.*

## *Ben Carson, M.D.*

### *Study Guide for teachers*



#### Pre/Post Show Activities

**1.** Ben Carson and his mother, Sonya, are American heroes. Use the following questions from the *A World of Difference* guide to examine the values that heroines and heroes represent:

- Ask the children to brainstorm about what makes a person “great”.
- Divide the students into small groups. Have them make a list of the 5 most important characteristics they think a hero or heroine should display.
- Ask the students to discuss why they selected these particular characteristics.
- Have the students find news stories on 5 current heroines and/or heroes. They should explain why they think each person qualifies for the title.
- Have students ask their parents or family members who their heroines and heroes are.

**2.** Discuss *minimalistic staging* - how has the playwright told the whole story with 5 actors (women are called actors, too) in one hour? How many parts does each actor play? How do the character transformations take place? What is the role of scenery in this production? Props? Costumes? Lighting? Sound?

**3.** Have students read *Gifted Hands*, and **THINK BIG**. Discuss the differences between this stage play and the original autobiographies. What are the essential characters and elements that cannot be changed? What is the “challenge” of bringing the book into a theatrical piece? What did the playwright have to do to adapt the book into a play one hour long?

**4.** Ask students to choose one character in the play with whom they would like to spend a day with. Why?

**5.** Using the story, the characters, and their relationships as examples, emphasize such values (from the Maryland State Department of Education Character Education fact sheet) as: Appreciation of Diversity, Reducing Disruptive Behavior, Being the Best they Can Be, Commitment to Learning, Community Service, Compassion, Democracy, Equality of Opportunity, Honesty, Integrity, Perseverance, Respect for Human Dignity, Respect for Self, Responsibility, Responsible Citizenship, and Self-Discipline.

**6.** Discuss the obstacles that discrimination (based on poverty, race, etc.) placed on Ben Carson. How did he overcome those discriminations? How did he turn those obstacles into hurdles?

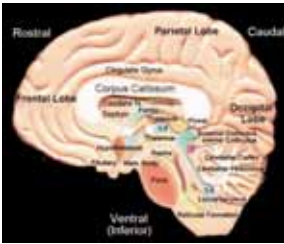
**7.** In order to prepare students for the *minimalistic staging techniques* used in this play, have the students play a form of charades.

- Divide the class into groups and assign each group a task; - i.e. cleaning up a kitchen, putting out a fire, baking a cake, making a bed, etc.
- Discuss body language and position, facial expressions and vocal qualities, if characters are allowed to make sounds, and other ways of changing character without benefit of elaborate costumes, make-up, etc. (Have students switch roles within the same skit with a signal) as the group is performing. This will help students to identify with the actors who switch roles many times in the play.
- Have each team present a skit and have the others guess what the team was trying to accomplish - all of this without benefit of costumes or props. Take the task further: as the group is performing, cue students with a hand clap to change character, such as from young to old, energetic to lethargic, competent to confused . . .

# Ben Carson, M.D.

## Study Guide for teachers

### Cross Curricular Ideas



#### Science

- Use the diagram of the brain. Learn the locations of the areas which control specific functions of the body.
- Using Ben Carson's books as well as other resources, have students compare the standard schedule for medical education and training with Ben Carson's career.

Have the students write and tell us what they thought of the play, the theater, the actors, and their experience, etc.

#### Language/Writing — Have students write about

- a “pivotal” moment in their lives - a time when their values were tested, or
- an important person who had great influence on them or something they've been able to do.
- Learn what an acrostic is. Have students develop their own credos and work out an acrostic.

#### Social Studies

- Identify and study heroines and heroes from other times in history and other cultures. Discuss the qualities that made them important in their times and places.

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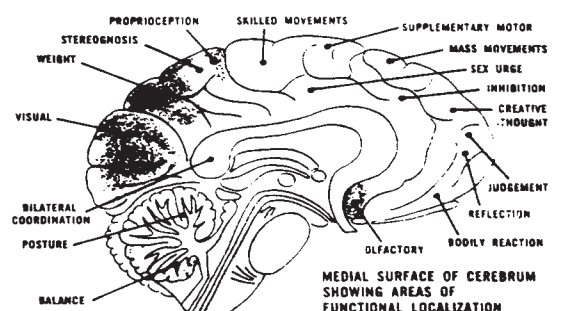
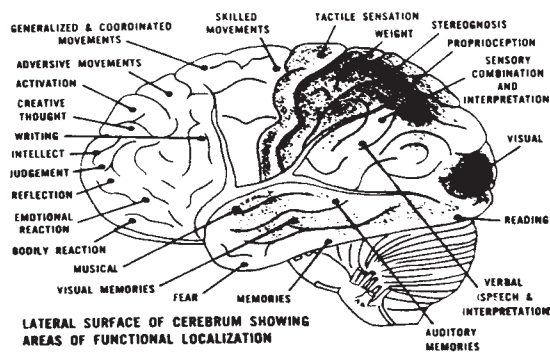
### Vocabulary

#### For General Preparation and Study of the Play

- ghetto
- Siamese twins
- neurosurgeon
- Boston
- paralysis
- resident
- radiology
- hemispherectomy
- brain damage
- inoperable
- plasticity
- Australia
- University of Michigan
- Detroit
- pediatric neurosurgery
- neurology
- Johns Hopkins Hospital
- seizure
- internship
- premed
- brain tumor
- mental retardation
- referrals
- cyst
- Yale University

#### For Extended Study

- stat
- scalpel
- domestic worker
- ROTC
- foramen ovale
- mortality rate
- respiratory therapist
- brain tumor model
- senior registrar
- brain stem
- agate, quartz, coal, obsidian
- undifferentiated/differentiated cells
- grand mal seizure/focal (half a grand mal)
- type-specific blood
- primary surgeon
- pathological temper
- College Bowl
- pre-op
- physiological psychology
- Rasmussen's Encephalitis
- teaching hospital
- evoked potentials
- pons



### THEATRICAL ARTS PRODUCTIONS

# Ben Carson, M.D.

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### Characters

(#) See reference in *From the Playwright* (page 2) as well as discussion topics having to do with *minimalistic staging* and adapting a story to the stage.

#### Biographical — real people in Ben Carson's Life

- Benjamin Carson
- Sonya Carson - Ben's mother
- Curtis Carson - Ben's bother
- Candy Carson - Ben's wife
- Aubrey Tompkins - choir director in New Haven, CT
- Mrs. Williamson - fifth grade teacher
- Terry Francisco - Maranda's (Dr. Carson's first hemispherectomy patient) mother
- Susan Warnick - Craig's wife
- Craig Warnick - patient with VHL - Von Hippel - Lindau Disease
- Bob - friend of Ben's who angers him - knife incident
- Timothy - fellow fifth grade student who taunts Ben
- Mr. Jaeck - Ben's fifth grade science teacher
- Jerry - fellow student angers Ben - lock incident
- Mr. McCotter - Ben's high school biology teacher
- Dr. George Udvarhelyi - Head of Neurosurgery training program at The Johns Hopkins Hospital

- Dr. Donlin Long - Chairman of Neurosurgery at The Johns Hopkins Hospital
- Dr. John Freeman - Director of Pediatric Neurology at The Johns Hopkins Hospital
- Bryant Stokes - Senior Neurosurgeon, Perth, Australia
- Mark Rogers - Director of Pediatric Intensive Care at The Johns Hopkins Hospital

#### Functional - fictitious people created by the playwright according to Ben Carson's accounts in his books.

- aides 1, 2, 3
- workers 1, 2
- cap kid
- Yale students 1, 2, 3
- x-ray technician
- surgeon
- reporters 1, 2
- teacher (2)
- students 1, 2
- photographer
- recruitment officer
- resident
- nurse
- supervisor
- wino

### About the Production

Theatrical Arts Productions, the nonprofit production company of The Columbia Center for Theatrical Arts based in Columbia, Maryland is a professional company of adult theatre artists dedicated to producing theatre for young people and adults that is carefully chosen to communicate educational as well as social values.

### About the Playwright

Carole Graham Lehan is in her 10th year as resident playwright for Theatrical Arts Productions (TAP). *Ben Carson, M.D.* is being mounted for its 9th consecutive season. Carole has also co-adapted several musicals for CCTA including: *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *Goldilocks and the Three Billy Pigs Gruff*, *Tapestry of Tales*, and *Tales from the Path*. Most recently she was commissioned to write a new piece for **The LABELS Project** entitled, *Stop Bully Me!* Ms. Lehan is active in many aspects of theater including performance as well as theater production. Her work has earned her Helen Hayes Award nominations in play writing, directing, and acting. Carole currently serves as Performing Arts Coordinator at Glenelg Country School and is a member of The Dramatist's Guild.

# Ben Carson, M.D.

## Study Guide for teachers

### About the Authors

#### Gifted Hands & THINK BIG

By Ben Carson, M.D. with Cecil Murphey

**Ben Carson, M.D.** is a graduate of Yale University and the University of Michigan Medical School. He is the director of pediatric neurosurgery at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. Dr. Carson and his wife Candy, and their three sons reside in Upperco, Maryland.

**Cecil Murphey**, who resides in Georgia, is a three time winner of the Author of the Year Award by the Dixie Council of Authors and Journalists.

Gifted Hands is the story of Ben Carson's life and career in an autobiographical form. The dedication in the front of the book reads:

**This book is dedicated  
to my mother,  
SONYA CARSON  
who basically sacrificed her life  
to make certain that my brother and I  
got a head start.**

If you can remember these things, if you can learn to **THINK BIG**,  
nothing on earth will keep you from being successful in whatever you choose to do.

### A Message From Dr. Carson:

We're all born with some type of adversity in our lives. We will all face obstacles. The difference in how we surpass those obstacles is perception. If I asked 50 people to walk across a plank, 9" wide and 3" off the ground . . . most of them would be able to do it. Some would even be able to walk backwards on it. But if I took that same plank and suspended it a mile up off the ground, very few people would be able to walk across it. The only difference is perception. If you tell yourself you can't do something chances are you'll prove yourself right. But if you tell yourself you can do something, in spite of obstacles, you'll be on the path to success. And once a person adopts that type of attitude there's nothing he or she cannot accomplish if he or she imagines it.

—For more information on Dr. Ben Carson, visit his website at [www.drben Carson.com](http://www.drben Carson.com).

—For more about the Carsons Scholar fund visit: [www.carsonscholars.org](http://www.carsonscholars.org).

THINK BIG is about unleashing your potential for excellence and is a follow-up to Gifted Hands. Dr. Carson prescribes his personal formula for success. With this acrostic, he spells out his philosophy of living:

**T** — **Talents** – Recognize them as gifts. Not just music or sports but intellectual talent, as well.

**H** — **Honesty** – Leading and honest life which uncomplicates life.

**I** — **Insight** – Which can be gained from listening, not to peers, but to people who have already been where you want to go.

**N** — **Nice** – Be nice to all people. Because if you are nice to people, after they've gotten over their suspicion, they'll be nice to you.

**K** — **Knowledge** – Which unlocks all the doors. If you have sufficient knowledge, people will beat a path to your doorway.

**B** — **Books** – not television. You can gain a lot more information by developing the mind with active learning.

**I** — **In-depth learning** – As opposed to superficial learning. Learning for the sake of knowledge itself, not for impressing people.

**G** — **God** – Don't get so big headed that you believe you are the end all.