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Dramatic Publishing

Black Sash

Drama

by

Sarah Grammar, Emily Overmyer,
Sarah Pendleton and Tonya Hays

“When Nelson Mandela eventually walked free from prison in 1990, he made reference to the Black Sash in his first speech, delivered at the Grand Parade in Cape Town. He said ‘the Black Sash was the conscience of white South Africa during the dark days of apartheid.’” —*BlackSash.org.za*

Black Sash

Drama. By Sarah Grammar, Emily Overmyer, Sarah Pendleton and Tonya Hays.

Cast: 4 to 7m., 7 to 21w. This play celebrates the work of the Black Sash women’s organization. This independent, nongovernmental human rights group organized by middle class white women living in South Africa worked tirelessly for justice and racial equality for more than 55 years. The play begins in 1955 with a night raid on a black South African home and transitions to six women meeting for tea and discussing the horrible disparity between the races. Their frustration with the high-handedness of the South African government leads them to the unprecedented decision to protest. Their commitment to nonviolence becomes legendary as they tirelessly protest against constitutional changes and forced relocations and work to pass new laws. Their sacrifices and the untenable racial core of apartheid are explored through incidents based on the stories of the women of the Black Sash as well as the grief and struggles of the black South Africans. Traditional music weaves the scenes together, as actors portray an amalgam of real and imagined characters. This historical drama enlightens and empowers audiences through the celebration of the organization’s victories, culminating in Nelson Mandela’s release from prison. *Black Sash* celebrates the difference that people can make in their society if they have faith, tenacity and passion. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, the Black Sash has focused on the promotion and protection of the hard-won freedoms, particularly in the areas of social and economic rights. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 55 minutes (easily adjusted for competitions).* Code: BL6.

Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN: 978-1-58342-988-4



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Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

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Black Sash

By

SARAH GRAMMAR, EMILY OVERMYER,
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SARAH GRAMMAR, EMILY OVERMYER,
SARAH PENDLETON and TONYA HAYS

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(BLACK SASH)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-988-4

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“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

This play is dedicated to the members of the Black Sash organization who continue their important and inspiring work in South Africa.

“The Black Sash believes that at this time in the history of South Africa, and of our organization, the most urgent issues to be addressed are the ongoing poverty and inequality afflicting the lives of the most vulnerable members of our society. South Africa cannot be free as long as the majority of its people continue to live under conditions of deprivation and injustice. We are affected and diminished by this ... We therefore commit ourselves to foster, support and encourage community initiatives to monitor, record and analyze the socioeconomic conditions prevailing in South Africa.”

—Black Sash Board of Trustees Statement
November 2012

Black Sash was premiered by the WINGS Performing Arts program in November 2013 at the Lynn Meadows discovery Center in Gulfport, Miss.

Joheevce/Little Boy	Joseph Jones
Mama/Woman/Elisa.....	Morgan Shavers
Policeman 1/Reporter 2.....	Cayson Miles
Policeman 2/Reporter 1.....	Peyton Glydewell
Ruth.....	Sarah Grammar
Jean	Delaney Williams
Johanna/Wife	Brielle Jordan
Cecilia	Abbey Whiten
Catherine/Sheena	Emily Overmyer
Agnes	Logan Tribble
Madge/Joyce	Morgan Doukas
Lily.....	Rachel Storey
Hilda.....	Jasmine Lindsley
Greta/Elizabeth	Mollye Ladner
Marsha.....	Jamie Zaffron
Priscilla/Little Girl	Noelle Cooper
The Minister.....	Patrick Odenwald
Assistant to the Minister	Emily Grammar
Husband/Reporter 3/Man.....	Alex Teets
David Diviti/Adam Johnson	Kenny McGravey
Jeremy/Nelson Mandela.....	Brandon Spann

Production:

Producer/Assistant Director	Tanya Prater
Stage Manager	Reily Tribble
Lighting Design	Rob Rettig
Lighting Tech	Kyle Overmyer
Sound	Ethan Worch
Costume Design	Logan Tribble
Technical Advisor	Joseph Williams
Musicians	Morgan Shavers, Joseph Jones, Brandon Spann
Costumes	Logan Tribble, Emily Overmyer, Kelli Overmyer
Props Mistress	Jaime Kendall
Visual Effects	Tyler Daneault, Bob Williams
T-Shirt Design/Advisor	Flo Williams
Tech Crew	Tori Wilson
Set Design	Sarah Pendleton
Projection Research	Sarah Pendleton
Kiss The Cast	Mary Rogers
Outreach and Concessions	Claudia Appel

Black Sash

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance.)

CHILD / JOHEEVEE / BOY: native black. Also appears as
Dominick Lesidi.

MAMA / WOMAN / ELISA: native black

POLICEMAN 1 / REPORTER 2

POLICEMAN 2 / REPORTER 1

RUTH

AGNES

JEAN

CATHERINE / SHEENA

CECILIA

JOHANNA

HILDA

GRETA / ELIZABETH

MARSHA

JANE

LILY

MADGE / JOYCE

ANN

PRISCILLA / GIRL

REPORTER 3 / MAN / HUSBAND

MINISTER

ASSISTANT

DAVID DIVITI / ADAM KOPANO: native black

JEREMY LESEDI / NELSON MANDELA: native black

Some of the characters are based on actual people. Several are an amalgam of women over many years.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET: The original production was staged in an alley with one end of the alley representing the white world and one end representing the native black world. The native black world contains instruments, a simple wooden bench, cardboard and crates. This can be modified for proscenium staging. The set pieces are very simple, consisting of furniture pieces only. Projections are optional and can be used as historical reference.

COSTUMING: Costumes reflect the various years as they progress. The show can be done with basic pieces and selective changes to indicate periods. Black sashes are used by Black Sash women throughout the show after their initial appearance.

PROPERTIES: Listed by scene in the back of the book.

MUSIC: The use of music in the show is suggested. The show is meant to move fluidly from one scene to the next. Basic percussive instrumentation can be used as transition music. For instance, African drums, rattles and an African bell are used between scenes. Percussion was used throughout to heighten emotion and cover transitions. Some or all of the native black characters can remain onstage at all times to provide these percussion elements.

Other music in the show is traditional or in public domain: “Shosholoza” (traditional), “Once to Every Man and Nation” by Russell Lowell, “Chay Chay Koo-lay” (traditional), “Christmas Is Coming” (traditional), “Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent” (ancient chant), the South African national anthem (lyrics by C.J. Langenhoven, music by Enochson tonga).

PROPERTIES

Scene: The Raid

- Lantern
- 2 flashlights

Scene: The Tea Party

- Coffee table
- Tea set
- Sofa
- Three chairs

Scene: Phone Tree

- Chairs
- 11 phone receivers

Scene: The Protests and Hauntings

- Black sashes
- Long protest sign with a stick at each end
- Petitions
- Marching drum

Reporters

- 3 hats with press cards on them
- 1 camera
- 2 notepads & pencils

Scene: Minister and Assistant

- Clipboard
- Pencil
- Desk and chair
- Letter
- Briefcase
- Protest signs

Scene: Apartheid Acts
Alice in Wonderland book

Scene: Advice Office
4 chairs
2 clipboards
2 pencils

Scene: Husband and Wife Scene
Coat rack
Jacket
Purse
Black sash

Scene: Free the Children
Balloons
Punch table, ladle, clear cups, 3-4 mugs
Platters for fruit, meat and cakes
Christmas centerpiece
Tablecloth
Napkins
Two pillowcases

Scene: The Abolition of Apartheid
Radio
Small table
Podium

Instrumentation (throughout):
Congas
African drum
Calimba
Shaker
African bell

Black Sash

The Raid

(The stage is dark. We never see the faces of the actors in the scene except when illuminated with a flashlight.)

CHILD. Mama, I'm afraid.

MAMA. Just be very quiet, child. You have to be brave.

CHILD. But what if they take you away again?

MAMA. They won't find me this time. I have a good hiding place.

CHILD. But Mama, you said your papers aren't right.

MAMA. No, my papers are not in order ... but I am good at hiding. We have to keep our family together ... They won't take me this time. Shhh.

(Pounding is heard on the door.)

POLICEMAN 1. We know you're in there. Open the door.

CHILD. What should I do?

MAMA. Don't open the door yet.

POLICEMAN 2. Open this door, or I will break it down.

(Pounding gets louder.)

CHILD. They're breaking down the door, Mama. Mama, what should I do?

(We hear loud sounds and crashes as the door breaks open.)

POLICEMAN 1. What took you so long? You hiding something, kaffir?

CHILD. No, please ... I was asleep.

POLICEMAN 2. Where are your parents?

CHILD. I d-don't know.

POLICEMAN 1. Your're lying to me, boy.

CHILD. She might be working.

POLICEMAN 1. What kind of job does she have at two in the morning?

CHILD. She's a kitchen girl, nkosi.

POLICEMAN 1. Does she have her pass book?

POLICEMAN 2 (*walking back from another part of the stage after checking for the parents*). There's no one here. We're wasting our time. Just a baby sucking its thumb in the back of the shack. We won't get any fine money out of this garbage heap.

POLICEMAN 1. Next time you let us in, or you'll be very sorry ...

(POLICEMAN 1 and 2 exit. There is silence.)

CHILD (*whispering*). Mama, mama, where are you?

MAMA. I'm under the boards under the bed. Come help me out ...

CHILD. Mama, I'm so glad they didn't take you like last time. We got so hungry, and I can't feed baby Sipo ...

MAMA. There there, child.

CHILD. Will Daddy ever come back, Mama?

MAMA. You know as soon as he is released, he will be here. He will get a job, and things will be better.

CHILD. I hope it is soon. There is always more food when he is here ... and we won't have to search through the trash for scraps.

(They exit.)

The Tea Party

(MUSIC UP: Congas and Calimba for actors entrance R into a preset tea party area. Lights up. It is Thursday, May 19, 1955. RUTH is the host of the tea. She enters and walks towards the table. She has a full tea pot in her hands. She proceeds to pour each woman a cup of tea. AGNES, JEAN, CATHERINE, CECILIA and JOHANNA are seated at the tea table. All talking over one another. Their voices are slightly raised, though they do not yell. They are saying things like, "It's an outrage!" "It's a travesty to deny the natives their rights!" "How can we stand for this?" etc. Not one woman's voice should be heard over the others; RUTH finally interrupts the banter.)

RUTH. I see you all have read the *Sunday Times*. *(She serves them.)*

AGNES. It's a complete nightmare, Ruth.

JEAN. A dirty game of politics! From 48 members in the Senate to 89? All by appointment? No voting involved? Where is the democracy in that?

RUTH. The Senate Bill, enlarging of the Senate, takes away all the rights of the natives to vote. They must be represented by whites.

CATHERINE. It is the start of an unsafe nation riddled with inequality.

CECILIA. It is the twilight of parliamentary procedure.

JOHANNA. What shall we have next? No women on the voter roll, too?

CATHERINE. Well it's only a matter of time.

JEAN. We'll soon become the next Cuba or Russia—a dictator mandating our very lives.

AGNES. Our government is changing the rules to win the game. Not a fair tactic in my eyes.

RUTH. It's not a fair tactic in anyone's eyes, Agnes.

CATHERINE. Well our dear Prime Minister seems to think it's fair.

JEAN. Well our dear Prime Minister, Catherine, is an idiot.

RUTH. Don't get too brash, Jean. It is not stupidity that motivates Strijdom. It is the quest for power. But we can't sit still and do nothing—I don't know what we can do, but we must do it. We must act. There have to be thousands like us, and we must get together

AGNES. And it's got to be soon, very soon.

JOHANNA. We do have to do something, Ruth.

CECILIA. I agree. We can't just idly watch these injustices.

CATHERINE. But we're women. We have privilege, yes, but we do not have a voice.

AGNES. We have a vote.

RUTH. For now. We must band together and stand up for the rights of the people.

CATHERINE. And how shall we do that? Stand up for those rights?

JEAN. We join together in protest.

AGNES. Protest? Are you mad, Jean? You're a City Councilor! What would the rest of the council think if you joined violent protest?

JEAN. I'm not batty, Agnes—and we won't engage in the violent sort of protest. We protest honorably and in the name of justice for all the people of South Africa. I simply refuse to be a passive citizen. I want to act on behalf of those affected by this nonsense.

RUTH. I agree with you, Jean. I read the other day that Gandhi said, "Non-violence is the most active force in the world. It is a tool not for cowards but for the strongest and bravest." The time has come for us to do something, regardless of what others think of us, before more rights are stripped away from all of us.

JOHANNA. But we're just privileged women of Johannesburg—ladies meant to stay silent and follow the will of our husbands. No one will listen to us.

JEAN. We make them listen.

CECILIA. When will we protest? Where?

AGNES. Yes, Jean. Where? How can we make ourselves heard?

JOHANNA. Maybe we can start a petition.

JEAN. I've got it. We can petition the Mayor's office and then march outside of city hall. (*Beat.*) This Wednesday, May 25th, 1955. Let's make it a day they will never forget.

(Muffled dissent.)

CECILIA. March in front of City Hall?

AGNES. THIS Wednesday? How will we gain the support in time?

CATHERINE. There are only six of us. Who will listen to six white women of the Burg?

JOHANNA. No one. That is why this won't work. We need far more support than those of us here in our tea group, Ruth. Our voices alone will not be enough.

RUTH. We are the most influential women in the province. Jean is a City Councilor. Agnes' husband is a well-known businessman. We are more than just six women of the Burg, Catherine. We are six respected women of Johannesburg, and we have more of a voice than you may think, Cecilia. But you are right. The few of us by ourselves is not enough.

JEAN. And as Ruth said earlier—there have to be more women like us in the Cape. We find those women and organize.

JOHANNA. We all have our individual circle of friends. Why don't we organize a phone tree and each call five women ... and tell each of those five women to ring up five more women, and so on and so forth.

CATHERINE. I'd imagine we'd reach half of Johannesburg by Sunday.

RUTH. Perfect. We'll get the word out.

(Pause.)

JEAN. I know it seems like a large undertaking, but who else will stand against this bill? We must act, as citizens of South Africa and as mothers of this nation.

AGNES. I suppose it shall just be us ladies—it's unlikely the men in power in this nation will do anything to protect and defend our constitution.

CECILIA. All right. I can call Elizabeth, Joan, Marge and a few other of my neighbors. Marge can call the ladies of her church.

JOHANNA. I'll call the women in my church, too. And the women in my suburb in Edenvale.

AGNES. I will call all the women I know, too. Whatever it takes to get the word out.

CATHERINE. I can ring up the women who live on my street. That's at least 12 supporters right there.

JEAN. Quite wonderful. We've got a plan, a date, a cause—and we'll get the support we need through our connections. I am confident that we can take action.

AGNES. There's only one thing left, I suppose. *(Pause.)* What are we to call ourselves?

(MUSIC UP: Shosholozza sung by the native black characters.)

NATIVE BLACK CHARACTERS.

SHOSHOLOZA, KULEZO NTABA,
STIMELA SIPHUME, SOUTH AFRICA.
SHOSHOLOZA, KULEZO NTABA,
STIMELA SIPHUME SOUTH AFRICA.
WEN'UYABALEKA, KULEZO NTABA,

STIMELA SIPHUME, SOUTH AFRICA.
WEN'UYABALEKA, KULEZO NTABA,
STIMELA SIPHUME, SOUTH AFRICA.
SHOSHOLOZA, KULEZO NTABA,
STIMELA SIPHUME, SOUTH AFRICA.

(This scene flows into the Phone Tree scene with a simple movement of chairs and transitional music. The scene is an overlapping scene with multiple persons speaking simultaneously.)

Phone Tree

(RUTH, AGNES, JEAN, CATHERINE, CECILIA and JOHANNA, who are all on telephones, are joined by HILDA, GRETA, MARSHA, JANE, LILY, MADGE and ANN. Lights illuminate RUTH and then the remaining stage area as the scene progresses.)

RUTH. Hello? Hilda? How are you this evening? Doing pretty well myself. Oh, you know, been busy as usual. Yes, I've heard. I'm very sorry about Buster. He was a good dog. Ah, well Jeanie and the girls came over for tea this afternoon. Just got back. Actually called you to ask you a favor.

JEAN. I just can't seem to find the best way to get a grease stain out. Washed it six times already! Anyway, Marsha, I was meaning to call you and ask you for a favor. No, no, nothing too terribly troublesome. Just something Ruth, Aggie, and we girls were chatting about over tea today.

AGNES. Greta! So good to hear from you. Yes, I've been well. Your girls alright? That new baby boy of yours' not giving you a whole lot of trouble? That's good, that's good. Your day going swell? Have you read the paper lately? Heard anything about those motions in the Senate? You have. Good. I have a favor to ask of you.

RUTH. It's an outrage.

JEAN. We just can't stand for this.

AGNES. So please help us get the word out.

HILDA, GRETA & MARSHA. All right—I'll call my friends.

MARSHA. Hey!

GRETA. Hello!

HILDA. Hi, It's Hilda Tapper.

MARSHA. Jean Sinclair just called. Yes, the city councilor.

GRETA. Just got a call from Agnes.

MARSHA. She's all right, and you?

HILDA. Well, see, I have a favor.

GRETA. I've a tiny favor to ask.

HILDA. Could you be there at noon?

MARSHA. I know it's such short notice.

GRETA. But won't it be a sight! Us ladies protesting?

MARSHA. And could you spread the word?

HILDA. OK, I'll see you soon.

JANE. Lily? It's me Jane. Oh, well I'm good, how about you?

HILDA. Well you know it's only Wednesday—but we could really use your help.

JANE. Yes, please get the word out.

LILY. Wednesday at noon? I'll call all my friends!

MADGE. Hello? Ann? Just got off the phone with Jane Goode.

ANN. Yes, there's a meeting.

JANE. At noon!

ANN. Could you call your bridge group?

LILY. Oh please join us! We need all the support we can get, and you can surely help.

RUTH. There's to be a ... gathering, of sorts, amongst the ladies we meet with for tea. And I know how involved you are in humanitarianism with the church.

JANE. Just us ladies—doesn't that sound grand?

JEAN. So I was just wondering, if you'd maybe like to join us?

HILDA. Oh don't be alarmed.

AGNES. No, no, nothing too terribly dangerous. It's just our way of saying "no" to the old hacks in the Senate.

CATHERINE. Yes—we're calling ourselves "The Women's Defense of the Constitution League." Doesn't that just have a splendid little ring to it?

(Murmurs of all the ladies.)

JOHANNA. And we're going to have signs—

RUTH. And we're going to march—

JEAN. And we're going to get our voices heard.

HILDA. That sounds fantastic.

ALL. Yes. This coming Wednesday, May 25th, at noon.

JEAN. Down at City Hall! We need your help

ALL. We'd love to have you join us. *(Beat.)*

RUTH. So will you do it? *(Beat.)*

ALL. Good to hear!

(All put their phones down.)

RUTH. We the women of this nation shall be heard by our government.

JEAN. We are the mothers of the next generation who will grow to be the South Africans of tomorrow.

RUTH & JEAN. We will not see our children suffer the inequities of their fathers.

RUTH, JEAN & LILY. We must take a stand.

CECILIA & AGNES. We have witnessed this government's refusal to listen to its people.

CATHERINE. We are the grandmothers and mothers.

CATHERINE, CECILIA & MADGE. We are the sweet-hearts and wives.

CATHERINE, CECILIA, MADGE, LILY, & ANN. We are the professional women and we are the home-makers.

ALL. We are the young women envisioning a peaceful South Africa. We are joining together to take action.

JEAN. We will challenge this government to acknowledge the injustice it has created in this nation.

RUTH. We invite all women.

JEAN. Of all backgrounds

ALL. To join us in solidarity and upholding the tenants of liberty and freedom.

(The chairs are rearranged and removed as needed for the next scene while AGNES marches onstage with a drum. MARSHA and LILY are carrying a large banner that says, "Defend the Constitution" or "Women Defend Your Children's Future.")