

FIDGET

A VIGNETTE PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Bradley Hayward



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Kids are constantly being told to hold still. But that's impossible when all they want to do is move forward at warp speed.

Background

The following schools made considerable contributions to *Fidget*: Esterhazy High School directed by Matthew Degenhardt & Jeannine LeSann, Hanley Composite School directed by Leanne Griffin & Brandon Hutchinson, and Turtleford Community School directed by Colin Rudolph & Melanie Cochrane Turtleford, SK.

Playwright Bio

Bradley Hayward grew up in a small Canadian town, where the lack of things to do left him plenty of time to write his first play. Since then, he has written more than 50 published plays that have been produced in over 20 countries around the world. His one-acts geared toward high school students have been presented at thespian festivals across the United States and Canada. He currently lives in Toronto, Canada.

Synopsis

Fidget is a vignette play made up of short scenes on a theme. Each scene explores a different aspect of stress and staying focused in a world that constantly pressures us. Why is it so hard for kids to stop moving? From disputes with friends and troubles at home to negative self-image and unfortunate sugar highs, this vignette play explores the need to fidget in a world that gets more stressful every day.

Characters

AIDEN: A mostly silent character with anxiety dealing with a loud world.

BAILEY: Trying to figure it all out gender-wise. (Monologue)

CARSON: A hockey player no one wants to play with. Life zooms by. (Monologue)

DEVIN: A smart person who panics and doesn't know what's wrong or where to belong. On the spectrum. (Monologue)

EMERSYN: A foster kid trying to match brain to body and be noticed and failing. Attention deficit disorder. (Monologue)

FIDGET: Constantly spinning, trying to focus.

Ensemble

VOICE: Menacing and commanding. Also the voice inside Aiden's head.

FORWARD: Forwardly aggressive.

DEFENSE: Defensively trying to keep the peace.

GUM CHEWER

NAIL BITER

HAIR TWISTER

NOSE PICKER

ATTENTION

DEFICIT

DISORDER

HAIR: Judgemental about hair.

SKIN: Judgemental about skin.

WEIGHT: Judgmental about weight.

TRUCK: A broken truck with defined gender lines.

DOLL: A broken doll with defined gender lines.

RED: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

ORANGE: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

YELLOW: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

GREEN: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

BLUE: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

INDIGO: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

VIOLET: Part of the spectrum. Also part of a rainbow.

Themes

Adolescence, anxiety, self-image, body image, relationships, individuality, friendship, pressure, rejection, gender issues, happiness, obedience

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Is it hard for you to stay focused?
- ★ What helps you stay focused?
- ★ How do you handle stress?
- ★ How do you know when you're stressed?
- ★ Recall a stressful situation you have been in. What did it feel like to be stressed?
- ★ Do you consider yourself to be anxious? Recall an experience you've had with anxiety. How did it feel?
- ★ What societal pressures affect you? How do they affect you?
- ★ Do you have any bad habits? What are they?

Pre-Read Activities

Movement Exploration

- ★ Explain to students that they are going to walk around the space as if they are walking on a grid. They can only move in straight lines and can make sharp turns. None of the lines should be curved. As they walk around the space tell them to keep a soft focus on the room to avoid bumping into any people or objects in the space.
- ★ Have students practice walking on this grid and then tell them they are going to walk on the grid while exploring tempo. You will say a number from 1 to 5 and students will walk at that speed with 1 being the slowest and 5 being the fastest.
- ★ When calling out numbers you do not have to go in order. For example, students can begin walking at a 3 and then go to a 5 and then a 1. Make sure they are able to explore all the tempos at least once.
- ★ When the activity is finished discuss:
 - » What did it feel like walking on a grid? What changed when you added tempos to your walk?
 - » Was there a tempo you found it most difficult to walk at? Which one and why?
 - » Which tempo was the easiest for you? Why?
 - » Were you able to stay focused throughout the activity? Why or why not?

Destressing Exercise

- ★ Tell students to write a list of things that stress them out or cause them anxiety.
- ★ Discuss the list students created. Why does this cause them stress? What can they do to relieve their stress?
- ★ Afterward, tell students they are going to destroy their stress. They can color all over their paper, write what they want on it, and when they are done they can tear it all up.

- ★ Once students have done this discuss:
 - » What did it feel like to combat your stress?
 - » How did it feel letting your stress out?
 - » What can you do in your daily life to relieve stress?

Create Your Own Fidget Toy

- ★ Show students different examples of DIY fidget toys (e.g., paper infinity cubes, cardboard fidget spinners, fidget bracelets, bead snakes, stress balls).
- ★ Tell students that they are going to create their own fidget toys today to help them focus.
- ★ Provide students with the supplies to create the toys (e.g., beads, strings, construction paper, balloons).

Focus Disorder Research

- ★ In small groups students will research a disorder that affects focus (e.g., ADD, ADHD, depression, anxiety).
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Color Yourself

- ★ Provide paper and colored pencils for students.
- ★ Tell them that their first task is to draw themselves. They should use colors to represent who they are. What colors describe them? What colors speak to their personality?

- ★ Once students finish coloring, have them present what they drew.
 - » Why did they choose the colors they did?
 - » What colors do they identify with the most? The least?
 - » What did they learn about themselves through coloring?

Fidget Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau on the subject of fidgeting and focus.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The first picture will feature a group trying to focus, the second picture will feature a group fidgeting, and the third picture will show the aftermath of them fidgeting and not being able to stay focused.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: Do you find it easy to stay focused? How do you fidget? What stops you from being focused?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.

- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Fidget*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What happened to the teacher's bathroom?
2. What does Fidget compare herself to? How are they similar?
3. What game does Carson play with the ensemble?
4. What is the problem between Carson and Forward?
5. Where does Fidget say weirdos hang out?
6. How does Gum Chewer die?
7. Why can't Fidget focus?
8. How does Emersyn describe what being a foster kid is like?
9. How are Truck and Doll similar?
10. What does Bailey say is going to hold everyone back?
11. What does each color in the play represent?
12. What diagnosis do the colors give Devin? What does Devin say their problem is?
13. How does everyone come together at the end of the play?
14. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. How does the first scene set the tone for the rest of the play?
2. How does the playwright tie all the monologues in the beginning of the play together?

3. In your opinion, why did the playwright choose to share the subject matter episodically through scenes, rather than following one story from beginning to end?
4. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen to use a bare stage with cubes to stage the play? How would the lack of set impact the staging?
5. What is the significance of the line, "This is the story of my life"?
6. Analyze Fidget's use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
7. How do you think the playwright decided on the names for the characters?
8. How does the playwright use metaphors throughout the play? Cite an example from the text. How does the author use the stage directions to forward the story? Why are the actions written important to what is happening onstage?
9. How does the playwright use parallels in the play to forward character development? Cite an example from the text.
10. What is the importance of repetition throughout the play? How does it forward the story? Cite an example from the text.

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. What is the playwright trying to say about focus? Cite the text to support your answer.
2. If you were the director, how would you block the tap sequence on page 19? Explain your answer.
3. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with stress with what happens in the play.
4. In your opinion, why is the play called *Fidget*? What does Fidget represent?
5. In your opinion, what is the significance of the last scene? What does it represent?
6. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Did any scenes make you think about how you present yourself?
- ★ Did any of the scenes make you think about how you fidget?
- ★ What was your biggest takeaway from the play?

Post-Read Activities

Fidget Original Monologue

- ★ Using the format of the Fidget monologues in the play, have students write an original monologue. What stops them from focusing? What does focus mean to them? What pressure are they under? What anxieties do they have? What thoughts rush through their head?
- ★ Monologues should be half a page.

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize the play in a single image that would attract an audience? Would you use a box? What box would it be? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colors and textures would they choose?

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Character Exploration

- ★ Assign students one of the following four characters from the play: Nose Picker, Nail Biter, Gum Chewer, and Hair Twister.
- ★ Have students begin to walk around the space as that character. How do they walk? Do they look people in the eye or look down? How do they see the world?
- ★ As students explore this, tell them to begin to interact with one another. How does their character talk to others? Do they shake hands? Do they say hello? How do they interact with someone who has the same habit as them versus someone who has a different habit? What is their voice like?
- ★ After doing one round of this exploration, tell students to switch characters. Then repeat the exercise. You can do this for as many rounds as you find helpful for your class.
- ★ After you are done discuss as a class:
 - » What surprised you about your character exploration?
 - » Which character was the hardest to embody? Which was the easiest? Why?

- » What discoveries did you make as you walked around?
- » How did different characters interact with one another?

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play such as, “It’s easy to focus on things that are weird.”
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how they will visualize this line in a tableau.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Write Your Own Scene

- ★ Put students into groups and tell them they’re going to write their own 1–2-minute scene that they would include in *Fidget* as a vignette.
- ★ Once students finish writing, have them perform their scenes.
- ★ After the performances discuss:
 - » What was it like writing a scene for *Fidget*? How did you create your own scene? What inspired your scene?
 - » What stood out in the other scenes you saw?
 - » What was the hardest part of this process? How did you overcome that challenge?
 - » Did you enjoy being a playwright? Why or why not?
 - » What did you learn about yourself as you wrote the scene?

Sound Design Description

- ★ Vignette plays often use music to transition from scene to scene.

- ★ There is no specific sound design for this play. Have students write a description of their sound vision. What type of music fits the play? What sounds would you use to create an appropriate mood and atmosphere? How would you use music to transition from scene to scene?

Playwright Process

Playwright Bradley Hayward talks about his process writing Fidget. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for writing this play?

I was facilitating acting and writing workshops with Middle School students at a drama festival, when I asked the students for a list of ideas for a new play. I received over 500 ideas, all jumbled up on recipe cards in a bag. As I had students pick words at random from the bag, I noticed the kids in line waiting for their turn could not hold still. Whether it was anxiety, or excitement, or having to use the bathroom, I had no idea. Suddenly the workshop morphed into figuring this out with the kids, and the importance of holding still, and why it might be so difficult to do so. The ideas came fast and furious, and the kids were laughing hysterically, so I knew immediately this was my next play.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

I came across very few challenges writing *Fidget*. The scenes sort of wrote themselves, so I suppose the biggest challenge was being able to write them down fast enough. Very little changed from the first-read through of the play to the final manuscript.

What was it like to see the play performed?

I have seen this play done several times and no two productions are even remotely alike. It's very cool to see so many creative ideas adding to the words on the page. I feel like I get to see a brand new play every time it is produced.

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play and why?

My favourite moment in *Fidget* is actually a collection of moments – the scene transitions. Each scene is connected by a choreographed physical manifestation of what it means to fidget. They are all very unique. Some include many props, some include sound created by the actors, some are quieter than others, and some completely still. Each transition progresses the story of the play, which was something I really wanted to incorporate into this piece because oftentimes scene changes are merely a path from point A to point B. I wanted each transition to be a point itself.

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

I tend to do the majority of my rewriting as I write my first drafts. I can hear the play as I write it, and so that tends to be a very helpful skill. When I then see the play on stage and something doesn't work, I find those rewrites more difficult because the reason a scene doesn't work is usually because of something far earlier in the play, and not necessarily that particular moment, so the challenge becomes figuring out when things went awry.

What's your writing process like?

I write very quickly, and usually finish a first draft of a play in one or two sittings. Then I let it sit for a while without reading it and move on to something else. I want to separate myself from what I just wrote so that I do not become too precious about any one moment, or character, or line. It is far easier for me to edit when I re-read the play and it feels like I am editing the work of someone else.

What engages you about playwrighting?

I love letting my characters go loose in my imagination and discovering moments that I did not see coming. I always have an outline of what I want to happen before I begin a new play, but sometimes the characters have entirely different ideas of where they want to go, and listening to them as they break free from the constraints I thought they needed always makes me want to jump to my feet and act out the scene in my living room. I often act out the scenes immediately after I've written them, and adjust lines that fumble out of my mouth as I say them. It's these performances in my own home that I fondly remember, long after the play has been completed. I love watching others bring these moments to life because it creates an instant connection between myself and the actors, beyond the words I put on the page. It's so exciting!