

SPLIT

A SERIOCOMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Bradley Hayward



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Children of divorce react with humour and honesty in this day-to-day look at the subject.

Playwright Bio

Bradley Hayward grew up in a small Canadian town, where the lack of things to do gave 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

The play takes a look at the day-to-day reality of growing up in a family that's been torn apart. While divorce, for some, is an ordinary event, its impact on the lives of teens is far from ordinary. Divorce is a decision that teenagers don't make, and yet they have to suffer the consequences. In a variety of scenes, teens address this life-shattering "ordinary" event that includes new bedrooms, new siblings, and new responsibilities. How do they begin to put the pieces of their broken homes back together? The play explores how we need each other, how we can find families in nontraditional places, and how we must work together to succeed.

Characters

PRISS: Female. 13. Defining accessory is a tiara.

HYPE: Male or female. 12. Defining accessories are elbow and knee pads.

STRANGE: Male or female. 14. Defining accessory is a lab coat.

FLEX: Male. 15. Defining accessory is a basketball jersey.

HANDS: Male or female 17. Defining accessory is a tool belt.

FLAIRE: Female. 17. Defining accessory is a colourful scarf.

SNARK: Male. 16. Defining accessory is an oversized necktie.

CHILL: Male or female. 16. Defining accessory is a set of noise-canceling headphones.

BROOD: Female. 17. Defining accessory is a black hat.+

Themes

Divorce, family, relationships

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ In your opinion, what defines a “normal” family life?
- ★ Are you from a family of a recent divorce? What has changed in your day-to-day life?
- ★ Are you from a family of a past divorce? What changed rituals/events are now part of your “normal” life?
- ★ If you’re not, what do you think it would feel like to have your parents split up? What would change in your day-to-day life?
- ★ Do you know anyone whose parents have divorced? How does their day-to-day life compare to yours?

Pre-Read Activities

Character Types Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a scene using the following character types:
 - » Flair
 - » Strange

- » Brood
- » Flex
- ★ The point of the scene is to create characters with physical and verbal traits that bring to life the character type. Where are the four characters and why are they in the same room?
- ★ Create a one- to two-minute scene. Have each group share.
- ★ Discuss the similarities and differences between the way the different groups visualize the same characters.

Divorce Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute scene on the subject of divorce.
- ★ Each group will work on two versions of their scene. The first will have a dramatic tone. The second will have the same content, only with a comedic tone.
- ★ Have groups present. Discuss the differences between presenting divorce in a dramatic tone and a comedic tone.

Divorce Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss three words that come to mind when they think of the issue of divorce.
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau that explores each of the three words.
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Discuss the similarities and differences of the tableaux. What words did groups choose to visualize? Can those watching guess the chosen words?

Defining Accessory Monologue

- ★ Students will think about and choose a defining accessory. What is the object (tool belt), accessory (tiara), or piece of clothing (basketball jersey) that defines you?
- ★ Once students have picked their defining accessory, they will write a monologue from their perspective about the accessory and why it defines them.

Research Project

- ★ In small groups students will research the issue of teens and divorce.
- ★ 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)

Natural Disaster Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will discuss and decide on a natural disaster (flood, hurricane, tornado, volcanic eruption, earthquake, tsunami, wildfire, blizzard) as a metaphor for divorce.
- ★ Groups will create a one-minute moment of the chosen natural disaster as a metaphor for divorce.
- ★ Groups will choose a form for their moment: tableaux, spoken word, movement piece, original scene, song, film.

Perfect Family Tableaux

- ★ Discuss with students: What makes a “perfect” family? What makes a normal family?
- ★ How many students feel they have a normal family? How many feel they have an abnormal family? How many students are in a divorced family? Do they feel their family is abnormal or normal?
- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a moment demonstrating their version of the perfect family, whatever that means. It could mean a divorced blended family, it could be a single parent household, or it could be a unique family situation.
- ★ Groups are to choose a specific form for their moment: tableaux, spoken word, movement piece, original scene, song, film.

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 *Split*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is Hype's defining accessory?
2. What did Hands get for Christmas?
3. What number peroxide does Priss demand her stylist use?
4. Why can't Flair accept the part in the play?
5. Where does Brood visit her father?
6. Why does Snark get himself detention?
7. What is Flex's father's excuse for missing his game?
8. Describe Snark's new mom.
9. Who does the Sitter suggest is to blame for Hype's parents' divorce?
10. What do the characters bring on stage at the top of scene 6?
11. Is Brood going to prom?
12. Does Snark think his parents will ever get back together?
13. What do the characters build together?
14. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. The playwright has named the characters as types rather than traditional names. In your opinion, why has the playwright done this?
2. If you were going to give Flex a traditional name, what would it be?
3. While the play is clearly about divorce, the word "divorce" is never mentioned. Why do you think the playwright made this choice?

4. There is a lot of humour in the play. The play is called a “seriocomedy.” In your opinion, why has the playwright applied humor to this issue?
5. The playwright suggests the play could be performed on a bare stage. How would you stage the script? What would the set look like?
6. Each character has a defining accessory. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen a black hat for Brood’s defining accessory?
7. There is a moment where the ensemble experiences divorce as an earthquake with aftershocks. Why do you think the playwright chose this specific natural disaster?
8. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen to present the play in vignettes rather than follow one character for the whole story? What is significant about the form of the play?
9. Why does the playwright have the characters work together to build a house structure? How does this action connect to the theme of the play?
10. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Split*? Cite the text to support your answer.
2. What is the playwright trying to say about divorce? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. In your opinion, what is going to happen next for Strange?
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with dealing with divorce/family with what happens in the play.
5. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Would you end the play differently? Why or why not?
- ★ If Divorce was a character, what would it look like? Behave like?

Post-Read Activities

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design a costume based on their personality.
 - » What would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them?
 - » What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

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?

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? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

Set Design

- ★ Have students, individually or in groups, discuss and decide how they would design the set for this play. Based on the themes in the play, what colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour set rendering or write a two-paragraph description of the set.

Playwright Process

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

1. What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

My brother was going through a divorce and when I saw how it was affecting my nieces and nephews, I knew that it was a story that needed to be told. The play started as the story of one family going through a divorce, but quickly transitioned into a story about many different families. Then I had a moment of realization when I discovered that the real family I was writing about was a family of friends. While the characters come from vastly different backgrounds, they are sharing the traumatic experience of having their families split apart. This bonds them in an unexpected way, which led me to my second realization. I wasn't writing a play about divorce at all. I was writing a play about love.

2. What was it like to theatricalize an issue?

This was the fun part! I knew that I only had approximately 30 minutes to tell 10 different stories, so it was going to require a lot of visual imagery instead

of dialogue. The transitions between scenes became mini one-act plays. For instance, the scene where Hands directs the other characters around the stage as though he was an air traffic controller at an airport. Instead of the characters telling the audience how they felt tossed around from one home to the next, this showed it. When given the opportunity to show or tell an issue, I always show it.

3. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Telling 10 stories in 30 minutes turned out to be nearly impossible, so one of the characters had to be edited out. Given the subject matter of the piece, I felt terrible leaving one of my characters out. However, I ended up using that story as the launch pad for an entirely new play. Another challenge was making sure each character's story was clear even though they are told in bite-size snippets throughout. I deliberately left a lot of blanks for the audience to fill in, which allows people to come to some of their own conclusions.

4. This is a character-driven piece. What was it like to create these characters? Did any of them change in the writing or in production? Which character had the most impact?

It was a joy to give these characters voices. So often in a divorce the kids have no say in what happens to them, or their parents are so preoccupied that they do not hear what they are saying. Allowing them to open up to each other in various groupings also afforded me the opportunity to see how their attitudes might change depending on who they are talking to. The character that surprised me the most in the writing process was Strange. Because he has Asperger's Syndrome, his attitude changed very little, no matter who he was speaking to. His matter-of-fact observances ended up grounding the play entirely.

5. As a playwright, what is your favourite moment in the play?

The final moment of the play, when all of the characters feel safe enough to enter the home they built together, is my favourite. It chokes me up every time I see it because it shows how people need love and support from others to make a strong foundation.