

AMONG FRIENDS AND CLUTTER

A SERIOCOMEDY IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Among Friends and Clutter presents a montage of characters who experience the most important relationships in life: friends, family, and love.

Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator, and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

Among Friends and Clutter is a vignette play made up of short scenes on a theme. Each scene explores a different aspect of family, friends, and love. Starting with seven classmates, the play explores what they imagine their lives will be, and shows what their lives eventually become. They grow, succeed, and sometimes fail.

Characters

MELISSA [W]: A girl who thinks often about friends and friendship. An actor.

TREVOR [M]: A boy destined to go through a gauntlet of girlfriends. A lover.

JOANNE [W]: A girl whose perfect life will conceal deep cracks. A survivor.

ASHLEY [W]: A girl who struggles to get along with her mom. A dreamer.

ICABOD [M]: A boy who thinks girls are icky...and will for the better part of his life. A loner.

KATHERINE [W]: A girl who will live fast and never slow down. A runner.

BOBBY [M]: A boy who is kinder to others than he is to himself. A friend.

Themes

Adolescence, Childhood, Death, Friendship, Illness/Health, Love, Memory, Parenting/ Family, Divorce, Individuality, Jealousy, Obedience, Relationships, Self-Image, Suicide, Teen Pregnancy, Depression

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does it mean to be a friend?
- ★ How do friends make you feel?
- ★ Do you have a favorite memory with a friend? What makes it special?
- ★ Did you ever have an imaginary friend?
- ★ What makes a good friend?
- ★ How does your best friend make you feel?

Pre-Read Activities

Friend Monologue

- ★ Tell students that they are going to free write for five minutes with the prompt "A friend is..."
- ★ Once students finish their free write have them reflect on what they wrote. Tell students that they are going to write a monologue based on their free write. They can write the monologue as themselves or as a character saying the monologue.
- ★ Students will then present their monologues.
- ★ Once everyone is done presenting, discuss:
 - » What did it feel like to free write?
 - » What was difficult about this activity? What did you enjoy?

- » Did you learn anything about yourself through this exercise? What was it?
- » How did you overcome any challenges you faced during this free write?
- » Why did you decide to share the story you did?

Introduce Someone

- ★ Pair students up with one another. Ideally, students will be paired with someone they don't know well or don't talk to much in class. No one should be paired up with their best friend. You can either manually pair students up or have them pick a name out of a hat.
- ★ Have students pick who will be Person A and who will be Person B. Set a timer for 4–5 minutes and tell students Person B will begin by sharing fun facts about themselves with Person A. Person A cannot react to what Person B says but can take notes as Person B talks to remember as much information as possible.
- ★ Aside from fun facts, remind students to share their names and where they are from with their partner.
- ★ Once the time is up, have the students switch and Person A will share fun facts while Person B takes notes.
- ★ After both students have gone, have students present one another to the class.

Family Tree

- ★ Have students create a family tree.
- ★ Students should not only think about their relationship with their family, but they should also ask how their family has shaped them into who they are today. How has family affected their story? What do their family relations look like?
- ★ As a class, discuss the family trees together.
 - » What did they learn about their family?
 - » How has their family helped shape them?
 - » Is there a family member they particularly look up to?

- » How did they feel while creating the family tree?
- » How do they honor their family?

Group Project

- ★ Put students into groups of four and assign each group a topic: love, family, friends.
- ★ Tell them they are going to work together to create a mini journal on one of the topics. The journal can include pictures, writing, songs, etc. Whatever is in the journal should be representative of the topic to that group.
- ★ Give students a class period to complete the journal. Tell students if they need they can work on the journal as a group together after class and that they will be presenting their journal next class.
- ★ The next class period have students present and discuss their journal. Students should talk about why they chose certain things to put in their journal and what it means to them.
- ★ After each group has presented, discuss:
 - » What was it like working in a group?
 - » What challenges did you face? How did you overcome them?
 - » What did you learn about yourself from working in a group?
 - » Why is collaboration important in theater?
 - » How did you make decisions together as a group?

Secret Handshakes

- ★ Tell students to walk around the space. Remind them to spread out and not stay close to one another. Encourage students to walk in different patterns rather than in a circle.
- ★ Tell students once you say stop they should turn to the person closest to them and introduce themselves. After they introduce themselves the two will work

together to create a short secret handshake. Ask students to remember the secret handshake with this person.

- ★ After students have created handshakes, tell them to walk around again. If some students didn't finish, tell them it's okay and that they will get a chance to continue their handshake later.
- ★ Once again repeat the stop process and have students go to the person closest to them. This should be a new person. The students will once again create a short secret handshake.
- ★ Continue this process for as long as you would like/have time for.
- ★ If students begin to run into people they already have a handshake with tell them to do the handshake the way they remember it and add to it.
- ★ Once the activity is done ask students if any pair would like to share their handshakes.
- ★ Once students share discuss:
 - » How do handshakes help create a friendship?
 - » What was it like having to remember different handshakes?
 - » What surprised you about this exercise or about the handshakes you created?
 - » Did you learn anything new about your classmates when creating the handshake? What was it?

Friendship Scavenger Hunt

- ★ Give students a paper filled with different questions and categories. Examples are below:
 - » Been on a plane before
 - » Traveled outside the country
 - » Has a dog

- » Speaks two languages
- » Plays a sport
- ★ Tell students they are going to walk around and talk to one another about the categories. Students should put two to three names down under the categories.
- ★ Once all students have completed their scavenger hunt have them sit down and discuss:
 - » Did you learn anything new about someone in the class? What did you learn?
 - » How did you surprise yourself during this process?
 - » Did you treat the scavenger hunt competitively or did you engage in conversations with others as you completed the worksheet?
 - » How did you feel as you completed the scavenger hunt?
 - » How did this encourage you to engage with people? Were you able to make new friends?

My Timeline

- ★ Tell students they are going to create a timeline of their life. The timeline should include important moments in their life (e.g., birth, first steps, first words, first friend they made, etc).
- ★ Remind students to include memories with their friends and family in the timeline.
- ★ There are different ways a student can present their timeline:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

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 *Among Friends and Clutter*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is Mrs. Morton having her class journal on?
2. How long have Katherine and Millie known each other?
3. Why does Icabod say Kim can't be a girl?
4. What happens to Melissa's friend group in their scene?
5. How does Bobby feel about John and Joan?
6. Who went to visit Joanne in the hospital?
7. Why is Ashley screaming?
8. What does the line, "You are a fish in the pan" mean?
9. Why does Katherine get into a fight with her dad?
10. What was the Osmond incident? Describe it.

11. Why is Ashley's wedding dress red?
12. Why does Melissa's mom say she is driving her to an early grave?
13. How does Bobby feel about fishing?
14. Who is attached to Trevor's leg? Why are they attached?
15. How do Bobby and Kalia know each other?
16. What do Sarah and her mom disagree on?
17. What is everyone doing in the final scene of the play?

Read Two: How is it happening?

1. How do you think tempo affects the play? How would you describe the tempo? Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
2. Using context clues from the script, how old do you think Katherine and Millie are? Why do you think the playwright omits their ages?
3. Why do you think the playwright does not organize the play by ages? How would you organize the scenes if you were to reorder the script?
4. Describe the irony in Melissa's scene. How is the playwright using subtext to further the story?
5. Why do you think the playwright has Bobby repeat, "I have known John and Joan"?
6. How does the playwright use context clues to tell you why Joanne is in the hospital? Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
7. At a wedding people typically wear white as a symbol of innocence and purity. What do you think red could stand for?
8. How does the playwright use Mrs. Morton's class as a transitioning tool? How does the class set the scene and tone for the play? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.

9. Why do you think the playwright chose friends, family, and love as the three topics to focus on for this play?
10. Why do you think the playwright chooses to end the play with Letters ? What kind of meaning does a letter hold?

Read Three: Why is it happening?

1. How does the playwright want you to respond to the play?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about friendship? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about family? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is the playwright trying to say about love? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. What does love mean to the playwright? Cite examples of love the playwright showcases throughout the text. What does love mean to you?

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 your friendships?
- ★ What was your biggest takeaway from the play?

Post-Read Activities

Friendship Quotes

- ★ Put students into groups and share with them a quote about friendship. Examples are below:
 - » “When the road seems rough ahead and you’re miles and miles from your nice warm bed you just remember what your old pal said, yeah you’ve got a friend in me.” - Toy Story
 - » “A day without a friend is like a pot without a single drop of honey left inside.” - Winnie the Pooh
 - » “Friendship, friendship it’s the perfect blend ship...” - Anything Goes
 - » “To friendship every burden’s light.” - Aesop
 - » I would rather walk with a friend in the dark than walk alone in the light.” - Helen Keller
- ★ Now that students have read the play, tell them they are going to tie their quote into one of the scenes. How does the scene relate to the quote? What is the quote trying to say? How is the scene saying something similar?
- ★ Tell students together they will write a one-paragraph explanation of why that quote relates to that scene. They can cite examples from the text to support their answer.
- ★ Once students are done with their work, have them present their work with the class.
- ★ Once everyone has presented discuss:
 - » What was it like to analyze the text? Was it difficult? Why or why not?
 - » How would you describe friendship?
 - » What did you learn about the text when analyzing it? Did anything surprise you?

- » Why is text analysis an important part of the theatrical process?
- » How do parallels help you understand text?

Friendship Tableaux

- ★ Put students into groups of four and tell them they are going to create a series of three tableaux that showcase a friendship progressing over time. They should create transitions between each tableau.
- ★ The first tableau will demonstrate the beginning of a friendship at a young age. The second one will show friends in college or grad school. The third tableau will show the friends as full-grown adults or even grandparents.
- ★ Once every group creates their tableaux have them present:
 - » What did you notice about the tableaux you saw? What stood out to you?
 - » Did any of the choices you made surprise you? How so?
 - » Which was your favorite tableau out of the three you created? Why?
 - » What challenges did you face when creating your tableaux? How did you overcome these challenges?
 - » How did you decide on what stages of friendship to demonstrate? How did you age and create the characters?

Continuing the Scene

- ★ Put students into groups of 3–4 and assign each of them a scene from the play. You can either assign the scenes or have students pick the name of a scene out of a hat.
- ★ Tell students that this is a vignette play. The playwright wrote only snippets of each of these characters' lives. The vignette is just a moment in time. Now students are going to write what happens after that moment.
- ★ Tell students to continue the scene the way they think the rest of the scene would play out for the characters. Each group should write an extra minute or two to the scene.

- ★ Once students have written the scene, give each group time to rehearse and perform the scene with the new addition they created. Then, have each group perform.
- ★ After each group has performed, discuss:
 - » What was it like writing out the rest of the scene? What inspired your scene?
 - » What surprised you about this process? What was difficult?
 - » What challenges did you face while writing? How did you overcome them?
 - » What did it feel like to step into a character's shoes?
 - » Did you enjoy being a playwright? Why or why not?
 - » What surprised you about any of the scenes you saw? What stood out to you?

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?

Monologue Conversations

- ★ Put students into pairs and assign each of them a monologue from the play. You can repeat monologues with different groups.
- ★ Tell students they are going to write what they think the other person is saying in response. Students can either turn the monologue into a scene where the other person is responding or create a monologue in response to the monologue they were assigned.
- ★ Once students create their script, give them time to rehearse. After everyone has rehearsed, have each pair perform.
- ★ After everyone has performed discuss:
 - » What was it like creating another person in response to the monologue?

- » How did you create the other character? What inspired you?
- » Was it difficult creating a new character? Why or why not?
- » What challenges did you face while writing? How did you overcome them?
- » How did you surprise yourself throughout the writing process?

Write a Letter

- ★ Have each student pick the name of another student from the class. Tell students they are going to write letters to one another.
- ★ Remind students that these letters should be kind and no bullying will be tolerated. As the teacher you will know who each student is paired with so if something does happen you can address it.
- ★ If students are confused about what to write you can give them the prompt “Dear ____, I really like....” and see what they do with that.
- ★ After students are done writing their letters, have them come up to you to get an envelope. You will go over the letter with the student to make sure it is appropriate. Once you have done this you can give the student an envelope to “mail” the letter.
- ★ After everyone has their letters in their envelope you can collect them all and distribute the letters to each student at the end of class.

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?

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play such as, “You didn’t pay me a compliment at Christmas.”
- ★ 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 *Among Friends and Clutter* as a vignette.
- ★ Once students finish writing, have them perform their scenes.
- ★ After the performances discuss:
 - » What was it like writing a scene for *Among Friends and Clutter*? 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?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing Among Friends and Clutter. 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?

The inspiration was more logistics than idea. I was directing a play for a group but didn't get the right combination of numbers to cast the play I had chosen. Instead of letting go of those who had tried out, I decided that we would do an original work — we would improv scenarios based on specific themes, which I would then craft into a play. Each week I would come to rehearsal with one of the three themed sections of the play (friends, family, and love), we would have a discussion about the theme, and then break off into groups to improv scenes based on the conversation. Then I would observe, absorb, and write.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The biggest challenge is I had no idea what I was doing. Well, that's not totally true. I had immersed myself in theatre at that point for going on 10 years. I do think that this was an example of "ignorance is bliss." I was working with my friends, I had the opportunity to write and direct a play and I remember the whole experience as really fun.

What was it like to see the play performed?

When I think about where my career started as a playwright, it's with the first production of *Among Friends and Clutter*. I have a very clear memory of sitting in the audience for the play and listening to the audience in December in the middle of a snowstorm in 1991 and hearing people just laugh, react, be quiet and that's where I knew that writing, specifically playwriting was something I should do more of. I have seen the play performed many times over the years and I'm amazed it still holds up. The play is about character and relationships and that never goes out of style. And I just learned a school is doing it in 2023 — 32 years after its first production!

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

I love the characters when they're all in the 2nd grade. It's just so honest as only children can be when they talk about a topic. My favourite line is when Katherine says she has plants for friends because "they don't lie by saying they're your best friend and then go skating with Ashley Gordon 'cause she's popular."

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

I adore first drafts. The act of getting everything on the page without judgement is freeing and fun. I fully embrace messy first drafts with lots of plot holes and things that need to be solved. And then you actually have to solve those problems in the rewrites which is always more a challenge for me.

What's your writing process like?

I love to write initial ideas down in notebooks. I always start with pen and paper. I keep writing notes and ideas and characters until I feel that pen and paper is actually getting in the way of my progress. That's when I know I'm ready to move to the computer and start compiling a first draft. I often start my writing process thinking about the play and letting it roam in my head for a while. So after thinking and taking notes I'm ready to dive into something more tangible.

What engages you about playwriting?

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than be distant from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!