

# BOAT

A VIGNETTE PLAY IN ONE ACT BY  
*Lindsay Price*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## **Introduction**

Sometimes it's easy to see the world as your own personal sinking ship. It's way easier to look into our own whirlpool than look out at what's going on with others. I don't care about them. Why should I? They're not like me. They're wrong.

## **Background**

*Boat* premiered on March 28, 2017 by Owensboro Middle School (Owensboro, KY).

## **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**

In this one-act middle school vignette play, characters come face to face with the fact that there are other people in their boat. Some are different. Some only seem different. Who will learn to paddle together? Who will spin in circles? Who will realize we're all in the same boat and we always have been?

## **Characters**

As this is a vignette play, actors play multiple roles in a variety of scenes. The majority of characters are middle school students. Generally, each scene contains a set of characters that only appear in that one scene.

The play calls for 4 M + 7 W + 3 Any Gender, to play multiple roles. It can also be expanded to a cast size of 32. Themes

Adolescence, bullying, body image, friendship, illness/health, love, parenting/family, individuality, obedience, peer pressure, relationships, self-image

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does the saying “We’re in the same boat” mean to you?
- ★ Have you ever judged someone just by the way they looked?
- ★ What is something you think you have in common with others? What is something you think has only happened to you?
- ★ How do you show compassion to those you don’t know?
- ★ What do you do when you don’t understand what someone is going through? How can you be there for them?
- ★ What do you think makes someone “different”? Do you think you may have something in common with someone who is perceived as different?

## Pre-Read Activities

### What Do You Have In Common?

- ★ 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.
- ★ Put a timer on for 4–5 minutes and tell students to create a list of things they have in common. How are they in the same boat? Examples of things they could have on their list include:
  - » Favorite color
  - » Pets
  - » Favorite subject
  - » Something funny that has happened to them
  - » Something they dislike
  - » Something they love

- ★ Once students are finished have them look over their list and reflect together as a class:
  - » Did you find that you had more things in common than you expected?
  - » How are you two in the same boat?
  - » What surprised you the most about the list you created?
  - » How can you show compassion to those you don't know well?

### **Boat Tableaux Series**

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau based on the saying "We're all in the same boat."
  - » 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 the group on a boat, the second picture will feature someone trying to join the boat or a disagreement that occurs on the boat, and the third picture will show them solving their problem.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: What does it mean to be in the same boat? How did you solve your problem?

### **Draw Your Boat**

- ★ Tell students they are going to draw their own boat that reflects their lives and personalities. The boat should have two decks: a top one and a bottom one.
- ★ On the top deck they should write things people see above the surface. This can be how they look, how they present themselves, what people know about them, etc. On the bottom deck students should write things that are below the

surface that people do not see. This can be something no one knows about them, things they think people don't see, etc.

- ★ If students would like to share their boats, allow them to, but don't feel the need to have people share if they don't want to.
- ★ When all students are finished discuss:
  - » How did you decide what to put below the deck?
  - » What did you discover about yourself as you did this activity? Did anything surprise you?
  - » If students shared: Did you find you had anything in common with other boats? What was it?
  - » After doing this activity, do you believe we are all in the same boat? Why or why not?

### **Boat Monologue**

- ★ Give students a set amount of time to do a free write about their boat. It can be a figurative or literal free write.
- ★ Remind students that in a free write, they shouldn't go back and edit. It's a stream of consciousness where the pencil never leaves the paper.
- ★ Once the time is up, have students reflect on what they wrote. What did they learn about themselves through the free write? Any new discoveries?
- ★ Now have students edit their free write into a monologue. Allow them to create a character from their free write.
  - » How does this character feel? What is their boat like? Is someone else in the boat with them?

## Match The Idiom

- ★ Provide students with a paper that has idioms on one side and meanings of the idioms on the other side.
- ★ Put students into pairs and tell them to work together to match the idiom to the meaning. If they are unsure about an idiom, tell them to use context clues to guess the meaning. Examples of idioms are below:
  - » I'm feeling under the weather = I don't feel well.
  - » Go out with a bang = Finish by doing something great!
  - » Rock the boat = Do something that upsets the status quo.
  - » That's a tall order = That is a difficult task.
  - » Blow a fuse = Get angry.
  - » Leave a mark = Be remembered.
- ★ Once students are finished, discuss the answers as a class. Ask students: Which idiom was your favorite and why?

## **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 *Boat*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions.

### **Read One: What is happening?**

1. What do the advocates do to the two groups when they get onstage?
2. Why are the teams against playing tug of war?
3. What helps Jean when they begin to feel rage?
4. Describe Solomon and Parker's relationship.
5. What is the pause?
6. How does the class feel about Bob?
7. What does Logan ask everyone to say instead of "I'm sorry"?
8. Why does Krysta go after Tam?
9. Who doesn't want to try hugging themselves?
10. What is the key message of the play?
11. Do the advocates accomplish their goal? How would you describe their goal?

### **Read Two: How is it happening?**

1. If you were the director, how would you decide which characters are in the cool and warm groups? Explain your decision-making process.
2. What is the elevator a metaphor for?
3. What effect does the vignette with Bob have on you as an audience member when the teacher takes a metaphor literally? Why do you think the playwright wrote this scene literally instead of letting the metaphor speak for itself?
4. How do all the vignettes tie together? What is the theme of the play?

5. Does the playwright use ethos, pathos, or logos to get their message across? If you think they use more than one, which one appears the most? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. Why do you think the playwright chose the title “*Boat*”?
7. How do you think the playwright decided which metaphors to make literal and which to make figurative?
8. What is an idiom? How is “We’re all in the same boat” an idiom? Explain.

### **Read Three: Why is it happening?**

- 1) How does the author want you to respond to the play?
- 2) What is the playwright trying to say about understanding? Cite the text to support your answer.
- 3) What is the playwright trying to say about our differences? Cite the text to support your answer.
- 4) After reading this play, what is another way you could say “We’re all in the same boat”? Would you rename the play? Why or why not?

### **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?
- ★ What does compassion mean to you?
- ★ What is something you can do to help someone you don’t know well?
- ★ Did any scenes make you think about how you present yourself?
- ★ What was your biggest takeaway from the play?



## Post-Read Activities

### Exploring Tone

- ★ Put students into groups of four and assign each group a vignette from the play.
- ★ Tell them they are going to read and analyze the vignette in their group. Ask students to focus on the playwright's tone and voice in the vignette.
  - » How does the playwright's voice come through the text?
  - » What tone is the playwright using? How does that affect how you read the vignette?
- ★ After analyzing the vignette, have students go up and perform it. As they perform, tell them that you are going to shout out different tones for the vignette and they should change the way they portray their character based on the tone. For example, the vignette might have a dramatic tone and you can tell them to switch it to happy.
- ★ After each group performs, discuss:
  - » How does tone help tell a story? How does the tone of the vignette inform your character choices?
  - » Was it hard to switch into different tones for the story? Did switching tones affect the mood? How so?

### Gibberish Scene

- ★ Put students into groups of four and tell them they are going to do an improvisation exercise. Two of the students will create a scene speaking only gibberish and the other two will translate what the gibberish means.
- ★ Remind students that, like in Bob's vignette, word choice should be specific and intentional.

- ★ Have each group perform one at a time. After each group performs once, if time allows, have students switch positions so the people creating gibberish now translate and vice versa.
- ★ Once students perform discuss:
  - » Why are the words we choose to say important?
  - » Did you like creating gibberish or translating the gibberish more? Why?
  - » Did anything surprise you in the scenes?

### Idiom Scene

- ★ Have students get into groups of four and tell them they are going to create a 1–2-minute scene based on an idiom. Go around to each group and have them pick a metaphor out of a hat so it is randomized. Examples of idioms are below:
  - » They have bigger fish to fry.
  - » Stop beating around the bush.
  - » You missed the boat.
  - » Stop pulling my leg.
  - » That's the last straw.
- ★ Once students finish writing, have them perform their scenes. Then discuss:
  - » What was the process of adapting the idiom?
  - » What surprised you about the scenes you watched? What stood out?
  - » What challenges did you face as you wrote the scene? How did you overcome it?

## 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 *Boat* as a vignette.
- ★ Once students finish writing, have them perform their scenes.
- ★ After the performances discuss:
  - » What was it like writing a scene for *Boat*? 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?

## 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?

## Sound Design Description

- ★ Vignette plays often use music to transition from scene to scene.
- ★ There is no specific sound design for this play, aside from a whistle and some drums. 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 Lindsay Price talks about her process writing Boat. 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?**

*Boat* is the third play in a trilogy of vignette plays I wrote about middle school life – the others being *Hoodie* and *Box*. Middle school is a time when students are so focused on themselves and how they present in the world. To that end, for this play I wanted to put the emphasis on looking outward rather than inward and explore the concept of empathy. How do we empathize with others? How do we realize that we're all in the same boat and always have been?

### **What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?**

I went back and looked through my notes for this play and it seems I really struggled with whether or not the theme would be best served in the vignette style. At one point I was going to go all in on the *Boat* symbolism with a storyline on a boat in which the characters are literally and figuratively “lost at sea” on a school cruise ship from hell kind of thing. That did not survive the cut and it had a lot to do with time. I had to find a different way to introduce the theme quickly and get to the scenes. And it's pages and pages of writing too - sometimes you have to write a lot to know what works and what doesn't.

### **What was it like to see the play performed?**

So rewarding. I'm very proud of this piece and its message.

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

I love it when opposite characters are thrust into a situation and they have to interact. I also love it when you find out something about a character that seems to be a stereotype. This play has so many of those moments. Parker and Solomon in the elevator where they realize they have the same fear of falling, Tam and Krysta who would never be friends but bond over not being able to talk to anyone about their dad's dying. This is the power of theatre where you can allow characters who would probably never talk to each other in real life to do just that.

## **Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?**

I adore first drafts. The act of getting everything on the page without judgment 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!

