

THE REDEMPTION OF GERTIE GREENE

A DRAMEDY BY
Taryn Temple



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Gertie Greene and her fellow drama students bring to light the transforming power of kindness, and the importance of standing up for people who can't defend themselves.

Background

The Redemption of Gertie Greene was first performed on July 25, 2014 by the Take Two Players at Topeka Civic Theatre in Topeka, Kansas, directed by Taryn Temple.

Playwright Bio

Taryn Temple is a writer, educator, director, and actor in the Midwest. Her scripts include *The Redemption of Gertie Greene*, *The Super Non-Heroes*, and *The Princess Capers*. She developed her scripts by working with the summer youth program at Topeka Civic Theatre & Academy. Taryn also enjoys sparking kids' creativity by using storytelling and drama in her day job as a Spanish teacher.

Taryn has an MLA from Baker University and BAs in Spanish and Communication Arts with a Theater emphasis from Bethel College. She has been a member of Topeka Civic Theatre's improvisational comedy troupe Laugh Lines for over a decade. When she's not at the theater Taryn enjoys training dogs and dancing.

Synopsis

New student Gertie Greene is a bully. Gossip spreads like wildfire that she attacks kids in the bathroom, knocks down football players, and gets suspended all the time. Even teachers are afraid of her. Everyone's talking about it so it must be true. But is she really a terrifying monster?

In *The Redemption of Gertie Greene* the truth comes out in the most unexpected ways. Is Gertie really what everyone calls her: a freak, strange, stupid, clumsy, and mean? Or can Mrs. Fillmore's quirky drama students see past the scuttlebutt to discover the real person behind the rumors?

Characters

GERTIE GREENE [W]: The new kid in school, rumored to be a terrible bully. One monologue.

MRS. FILLMORE [W]: The drama teacher, kind, good-humored, and energetic. One monologue.

CURT [M]: Loves drama class but wishes he was good at sports to please his dad.

NICOLE [W]: Quiet and shy, drama class is her chance to finally come out of her shell. Four monologues.

ALEX [W]: Struggles in school, drama class is her only escape. One monologue.

RACHEL [W]: Outgoing, spirited, the kind of person you would want to have as a friend.

SHANNON [W]: The queen of sarcasm.

JESSIE [W]: Often caught up in gossip.

JACOB [M]: Energetic and enthusiastic.

C.J. [M]: An over-the-top dude who doesn't pay attention in class.

JEFF [M]: A theatre enthusiast, tries to keep the other guys on track.

ANNA [W]: Nerdy, over-eager, always has her hand in the air, oblivious to social dynamics.

BRYAN [M]: The class joker, has a pun for everything.

CASEY [M]: Fun and reliable friend.

BETH [W]: Drama class student, game to try anything.

REBECCA [W]: The fashionist of the group.

FOOTBALL JOCKS 1–4 [M]

MRS. HINCKLEBRICK [W]: The cruel history teacher. One Monologue

MRS. CRANBERRY [W]: The bubbly school counselor.; One Monologue

PETE MACKLESON [M]: The popular guy with a dark side.

GOSSIPERS 1–7

PIGS 1–3: Must be double-cast from actors who play students in drama class.

Themes

Adolescence, bullying, friendship, relationships, individuality, gossip, peer pressure, self-image, kindness, theatre

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Have you ever been the “new kid”? How did it feel?
- ★ Have you ever had to defend yourself from a rumor? How did you feel?
- ★ What would you do if you heard a rumor that was untrue about someone? Would you intervene? Why or why not?
- ★ Have you ever stood up for someone who was being bullied?
- ★ How do you describe yourself?
- ★ What is your safe space?

Pre-Read Activities

Identity Chart

- ★ Have students make an identity chart for themselves. An identity chart visualizes different aspects of the question “Who am I?”
 - » Students will need paper and something to write with.
 - » You may want to complete an identity chart for yourself as a model.

- ★ An identity chart starts with students putting their name in a circle or square in the middle of the page.
- ★ Then students draw lines from the center. At the end of each line, students write one word or phrase that describes them (e.g., tall, girl, Scottish background, drama club, piano). Possible categories include:
 - » Family identity
 - » Social identity
 - » Cultural background
 - » Physical appearance
- ★ Ask students to reflect on the final product. What shapes their identity?
- ★ Ask students to reflect on their identity. Are they in control of their identity? Is there anything they would like to change? What would happen if they did?

Rumors Spreading

- ★ Discuss the definitions of rumor and gossip with students. How would they define them?
- ★ Then tell students they are going to spread a fake rumor throughout the class. The rumor should not include the names of anyone in the class or anyone in the school the students know. It should be completely fictional. For example, it could be, "Did you hear the lion escaped from the zoo and went to the fair to get cotton candy?"
- ★ Students will then play a game of telephone with this rumor, whispering it from one end of the class to the next.
- ★ The last person to hear the rumor will say it out loud and compare it to what was originally said.
- ★ Through this exercise students will see how rumors can change and develop over time from where they started.

- ★ At the end of the exercise discuss:
 - » How did you notice the rumor change?
 - » What surprised you about the rumor when you heard it at the end?
 - » What did you learn about rumors and gossip through this exercise?

Rumor Monologue

- ★ Have students free write about gossip and rumors for five minutes. Students can write about how gossip makes them feel, a rumor they once heard, what it's like stopping a rumor, etc.
- ★ Once students are done free writing, tell them to write a monologue based on their free write. They can write the monologue as themselves or as a character. After students finish their monologues, have them present.

New Kid Scene

- ★ Put students in groups and tell them they are going to create a one- to two-minute scene about being the new kid in town.
- ★ The scene should have someone playing the new kid who faces a conflict.
 - » How do they overcome the conflict?
 - » What is difficult about being the new kid?
 - » How do they make friends?
- ★ After students have written their scenes, have them perform group by group.
- ★ Once everyone has performed have them discuss:
 - » What was different between what you saw and what you've experienced as a new kid?
 - » What is something that surprised you in the scenes?
 - » What is something you can do to help someone who is the new kid?

Safe Space Collage

- ★ Create a collage that visualizes your definition of “safe space.” How do you visualize safety?
 - » Brainstorm images, symbols, and words that visualize safety.
 - » Decide what materials you will use to visualize your safe space.
 - » After you create your collage, write a one-paragraph description of the choices you made and why.

Middle School Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Have them discuss what middle school means to them. What is challenging about middle school? What is exciting? How do they overcome the challenges? What does it feel like to be in middle school?
- ★ Based on their discussions students will create tableaux on different scenarios of what can happen in middle school. For example, one tableau can be about a rumor that goes around and another tableau can be about the cafeteria.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

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 *The Redemption of Gertie Greene*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What do the characters say is more frightening to face than middle school?
2. Where is the one place students are safe from Gertie Greene?
3. Who is the protagonist and who is the antagonist in Rachel and Beth's scene?
4. What does Curt confess in his monologue?
5. What class do the students dread?
6. Why does Alex start crying? What does Gertie do when she sees this?
7. How does Gertie Greene end up in drama class?
8. What rumor goes around about Nicole?
9. Why did Gertie Greene get suspended?
10. What is Nicole's fable about?
11. Why does Gertie Greene begin to cry?
12. Why does Gertie Greene thank Mrs. Fillmore?
13. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. After reading what the characters say about Gertie Greene, do you believe they are reliable narrators? Why or why not?
2. How does the playwright use Mrs. Fillmore to demonstrate empathy? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What can you infer about Gertie Greene based on her character language and the way she is described in characters' monologues? How would you physicalize her?

4. Is Gertie Greene a tragic hero? Why or why not? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. How does the playwright use parallels between drama class and Gertie Greene to develop her character? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. Identify the big shift in the play. How do characters develop after that shift?
7. In your opinion, why does the playwright only have us hear from Gertie Greene at the end of the play? How does this affect how you view her character?
8. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. What is the playwright trying to say about gossip and rumors? Cite the text to support your answer.
2. What is the playwright trying to say about being different? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. In your opinion, why do you think the playwright named the play *The Redemption of Gertie Greene*?
4. If the play were to continue, what do you think would happen to Gertie Greene? How would the character change and develop?
5. Compare and contrast your personal experience with rumors and gossip with what happens in the play.
6. How does the playwright want you to respond to the play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What did you learn after reading the play?
- ★ What teacher has impacted your life? How?
- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?

- ★ Which moment resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?
- ★ Would you end the play differently? Why or why not?

Post-Read Activities

Musical Pantomime

- ★ In the play, the characters do a musical pantomime with Mrs. Fillmore. Now you get a chance to try this exercise with your students! Through this exercise students will step into the shoes of the characters and create their own musical pantomimes.
- ★ Assign students a character from the play to embody. You can repeat characters since there may be more students in your class than in the play. Then tell students they will draw a musical from a hat and create a pantomime for that musical in the style of the character they were assigned.
- ★ Give students about five minutes to create their pantomimes, then have each one perform for the class.
- ★ As a class have students guess what musical the student is pantomiming and what character they are embodying.
- ★ This should be a fun, quick exercise for students to experience drama class the way the characters in the play do.

Inner Monologue

- ★ We do not hear directly from Gertie Greene until the end of the play, but instead hear others talk about her.
- ★ Have students write a monologue about Gertie's inner thoughts throughout the play. What is she thinking? How does she feel?

- ★ Give students five minutes to write their monologues and have them present once everyone is done.
- ★ Once everyone has performed discuss:
 - » What did it feel like to step into Gertie Greene’s shoes?
 - » What discoveries did you make? Did anything surprise you?
 - » How did it feel to reflect on what others were saying about Gertie Greene? How did this affect how you wrote your monologue?
 - » What stood out about the monologues that you watched?

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?
- ★ Draw a color 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?

Bystander Intervention Scene

- ★ Discuss the term “bystander intervention” with students.
 - » Bystander intervention can be defined as witnessing an event and choosing to get involved to create a positive outcome.
- ★ Put students in groups of three to four and tell them they are going to write a scene about bullying and bystander intervention. There should be a bully, someone getting bullied, and someone who is going to intervene in the scene.
- ★ The scenes should be about one to two minutes.
- ★ Once students are done writing, have them perform the scene. After every group has performed, discuss as a class:
 - » How can you help someone who is being bullied at your school?
 - » What surprised you about one of the scenes?
 - » What did you like and dislike about this activity?

Bullying Prevention Posters

- ★ Put students in groups and tell them that they are going to work together to create bullying prevention posters.
- ★ These posters should speak towards being a safe space and an anti-bullying space.
- ★ Students can include symbols that are important to them as a group and draw characters from the show on their posters.
- ★ Once every group is done with their poster, have students present them to the class. They should explain why they chose the symbols and characters they did.
- ★ After everyone presents you can hang the posters around your room to remind students that your classroom is a safe space.

Positive Affirmations

- ★ Have students walk around the space as themselves. Tell them when you say stop they should stop and pair up with the person nearest to them.
- ★ When students are paired, tell them to give a compliment/positive affirmation to their partner.
- ★ Once students do this, tell them to walk around the space again. You can do this for as many rounds as you would like. Each time students should find a new person to pair up with and compliment.
- ★ In the final round, tell students to stop and compliment themselves.
- ★ Once you are done with the activity discuss as a class:
 - » What did it feel like to compliment someone? What did it feel like to receive a compliment?
 - » What did you enjoy about this activity?
 - » Was it difficult to compliment yourself? Why or why not?
 - » Did any of the compliments you received surprise you? Why?