

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL

By Joan MacLeod



GREEN
THUMB
THEATRE



TOURING PROFESSIONAL THEATRE
FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES
SINCE 1975

RESOURCE AND ACTIVITY GUIDE

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Green Thumb's offices are located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the x̱w̱məθḵw̱əy̱əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱w̱ú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́ilwətaʔṯ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. As a touring company, Green Thumb Theatre's work often takes place throughout the traditional homelands of most of the Indigenous Nations and cultures across British Columbia and beyond.

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Green Thumb Theatre is committed to telling stories that spark empathy and provoke critical thinking and dialogue. This resource and activity guide is intended to help educators facilitate classroom discussions before and after the performance and to delve deeper into the themes of the show. This guide was first authored by Jas Uppal with additional materials contributed by Ellen Peterson, Shannon Maung, and Anita Rochon.

ABOUT GREEN THUMB THEATRE

Founded in 1975, Green Thumb Theatre creates, produces, and tours plays that explore social issues relevant to the lives of children, youth, and young adults. Green Thumb provides theatre that celebrates the language and stories of today's generation and culture to stimulate empathy, debate, and critical thinking. Green Thumb has performed for over 4 million people and has toured to every province and two territories in Canada, 36 US States, and 11 countries overseas. Original plays commissioned by Green Thumb have been translated into 9 languages and produced by more than 200 theatre companies worldwide. Green Thumb Theatre is a registered charitable not-for-profit organization. www.greenthumb.bc.ca

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CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Braidie

Sarah Conway

PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright

Director

Stage Manager

Set Design

Original Sound Design

Scenic Painter

Props Designer

Study Guide Author

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The Art Left Creative Group

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*Appears courtesy of the
Canadian Actor's Equity Association



ABOUT THE PLAY

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL BY JOAN MACLEOD

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL was inspired by the Reena Virk story: the real-life tragedy of a teenage girl killed by a group of teens on November 14, 1997.

What does it mean to be part of the in-crowd? In an imaginary letter to her absent older brother, Braidie struggles to understand news stories about the torture and murder of a local teenage girl and how the brutality she sees in the headlines is reflected in her own friend group. Revisiting memories, Braidie tracks her own complicity and participation in the bullying of one girl and considers what it means to go too far. **THE SHAPE OF A GIRL** challenges audiences to interrogate their capacity to both help and harm others and to be brave when standing up for what is right. As relevant as ever, Green Thumb Theatre premiered **THE SHAPE OF A GIRL** over 20 years ago, and the piece has since gone on to hundreds of productions worldwide.



PLAYWRIGHTS NOTES



I've only written one play that didn't include a teenage character. That play did, however, feature a hundred-year-old woman and I like to think she has the spunk, wisdom, and brashness of an adolescent. It seems that in the teenage world, the stakes are perpetually enormous – great terrain for any writer.

Bradie's voice started developing [in 1998], not too long after the murder of a fourteen-year-old girl by a group of teenagers, an incident that captured news headlines around the world. Writing about those sad events in Victoria was the last thing I wanted to do, so it took me another year to see a relationship between the two. I only knew Braidie had backed herself into a corner and I didn't know why. I also knew I had a play because I wanted to find out so badly.

This play is for teenagers, hundred-year-old women, and everybody caught in between.

-Joan MacLeod

***THE SHAPE OF A GIRL** premiered at Alberta Theatre Projects (Calgary), a co-production with Green Thumb Theatre (Vancouver), as a part of the PanCanadian playRites 2001 Festival.*

PREPARING TO WATCH A SHOW

Sometimes, when young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time, they may not realize how different it is from watching a movie or a television show. You can help them prepare for a live theatre experience by:

- Giving them a chance to use the bathroom or get a drink of water before the show begins.
- Reminding them that photos and recordings of any kind are not allowed.
- Reminding them that the actor(s) can see when they're moving around or hear if they're speaking during the performance.
- Letting them know there will be time to ask questions of the performers at the end of the show.
- Encouraging them to be active listeners by asking them to focus not only on the story, but the set, costumes, and sound design.
- Including the questions and activities from this study guide in your discussions before and after the show.



PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. Define and give an example of each of the following types of bullying:

- A. Physical bullying**
- B. Verbal bullying**
- C. Emotional and social bullying**
- D. Cyberbullying.**

2. Do you know of anyone who has experienced one or more of the four types of bullying noted in question #1?

3. What are three possible short-term and long-term effects of bullying on a victim? What kind of long-term effects do you think bullying has on the bully?

PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY #1: TEEN VIOLENCE

Research teen violence in Canada and make a list of important facts and statistics.

Naming your sources, find at least two different stories about teen violence. Where did they happen? How old were the people involved? What happened? What were the consequences? Include any other information you think is important to understanding the story. Include a link to, or a copy of, the story or article with your report.

ACTIVITY #2: YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

What year did the Youth Criminal Justice Act come into effect in Canada? BONUS: What was the name of the Act that preceded the Youth Criminal Justice Act?

Between what ages can you be tried under the Youth Criminal Justice Act Canada?

In your own words, what is the purpose of the Youth Criminal Justice Act?

List three organizations you found in your research that are trying to prevent teen violence. What do they do? How can someone get ahold of them? Include other information that you think is important.

ACTIVITY #3: MEDIA COVERAGE

What are some of the headlines from and around Canada this week?

How many of these stories are about (teen) crime or violence?

List some words used to describe: the crime, the offenders, and the victim.

Pretend you are the host of a local podcast or YouTube news channel. How would you tell the story of Reena Virk (or another story about a violent crime you found in your research) to the public?



POST-PERFORMANCE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following exercises and activities are provided as suggestions and starting points for further exploration of the themes brought up in **THE SHAPE OF A GIRL**. They have been designed keeping the BC Ministry of Education Curriculum Guidelines in mind and may be used in connection with other units that you are doing during the school year.

GENERAL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/SNOWBALL STRATEGY

Here are some questions to help structure a discussion in your classroom after the performance. These can also be jumping-off points for journaling or reflection activities. To encourage purposeful talk, try the Snowball Strategy: First have students discuss in pairs, then have the pairs make a group of four, and then have groups of four make a group of eight.

1. Does Braidie's story accurately reflect your experience with the issue of bullying? Why or why not?
2. Did Braidie's decision at the end of the play seem plausible? What finally convinced her to speak up? Was this a good solution to the problem?
3. How has media coverage of the tragedy influenced Braidie's perception of events? How has media coverage changed since this event took place?
4. What can a person do if they are being bullied?
5. Does Braidie's silence make her as guilty as Adrienne?
6. Discuss the symbolic significance of the setting, especially its proximity to the Blind Children's Camp.
7. What systems, if any, does your school have in place to deal with this kind of problem? What other steps could be taken?
8. Some experts believe that the solution to the problem of bullying lies with the "bystanders"; students who are not being bullied themselves but see it happening to others. Initiate a discussion with your group about how bystanders can help.
9. Discuss the significance of the title of the play.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY #1: OTHER PERSPECTIVES

THE SHAPE OF A GIRL is a monologue written from the perspective of the central character, Braidie. Through Braidie's narrative, she introduces us to many different characters, all of whom must have their own perspectives on the incidents that occur.

PART 1 – WHO ARE THE CHARACTERS?

Create a list with your students of the different characters referred to or suggested in the above excerpt. These may comprise characters in the play but also come made up ones as well. Consider the following as possibilities:

Trevor	Jackie	Someone from the blind camp	A class teacher
Mum	Amber	An adult walking on the beach	A police officer
Adrienne	Sofie	A teenager walking on the beach	Other class members
Adrienne's Mum	Sofie's Mum	A TV reporter	A psychologist working with any of the characters

PART 2 – CHARACTERS AND THEIR POSSIBLE PERSPECTIVES.

Working in small groups, allocate a different character to each group and have them discuss the possible perspectives that these characters may have. Ask the students to choose one of the characters listed and consider the following:

1. How might this character have reported the incident?
2. Would this character be shocked, mortified?
3. Would this character report the incident differently if they were speaking to a friend, a police officer, a TV reporter, etc.?
4. How would this incident make this character feel?
5. Would they feel they should respond? Why or why not?

Following the small group discussions, have each group share their insights and/or thoughts about the character's possible perspectives.

PART 3 – CREATIVE WRITING

Have students write a journal entry or monologue from the perspective of one of the other characters mentioned in the play from the list above. Have them describe one of the incidents in the play from their point of view.

POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY #2: TABLEAUX CREATION

Tableau: A still image that has been created to capture a moment in time. It is an image-based way to tell story. Relationships and events can be revealed in tableaux. When building a tableau, focus on how you are using the space, where an audience / onlooker may be positioned, body language and facial expression. It can be helpful to exaggerate body gestures and expressions of the character's emotional state or the focus of interest within the moment that is being illustrated.

INSTRUCTIONS

Divide the class into three or four groups. In assigned group, create three still images that show moments from the play. Encourage everyone to reflect on the play and include at least one moment that occurs either before the play begins or scenes we do not see. Everyone in the group should participate in each image.

Some examples of tableaux the students could illustrate:

1. All the friends playing ponies when they are 8 years old, discovering how Sophie, the new girl, plays.
2. Braidie's mom trying to get through to Braidie at the restaurant, after finding out she has been missing school.
3. The moment on the bus when Braidie realizes she is no longer aligned with Adrienne, when all that is left is "a shape of a girl".

The groups might speak aloud what key characters say in each image. Ask them to think about how this character speaks and who they are speaking to. You may want to encourage the other groups to give feedback to help strengthen the tableaux. A way of doing this is for the students to offer feedback on how someone is understanding an image and seeing if that aligns with the intentions of the presenting group. As a class, find solutions for how to refine or sharpen the image

ACTIVITY #3: READING AN OPINION PIECE

Ask your students to read the 'Erasing 'Race': The Story of Reena Virk' factsheet by Maya B., and have them answer the following questions:

'Erasing 'Race': The Story of Reena Virk' Factsheet:

<https://antiracisthistoryandtheory.com/factsheets/erasing-race-the-story-of-reena-virk>

1. What point is the factsheet trying to make?
2. Why does the factsheet highlight gender?
3. How does the factsheet see the role of the media in the Reena Virk case?
4. What is your opinion about the claims made in the factsheet?

RESOURCES

CBC – The Murder of Reena Virk and Trials of Kelly Ellard

A timeline of CBC’s news coverage about Reena Virk’s murder and Kelly Ellard’s trial between November 21, 1997, and June 12, 2005

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/the-murder-of-reena-virk-and-trials-of-kelly-ellard-1.792656>

The Canadian Encyclopedia – Background and overview of the murder of Reena Virk

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/murder-of-reena-virk>

Pink Shirt Day

Pink Shirt Day aims to raise awareness of these issues, as well as raise funds to support programs that foster children’s healthy self-esteem.

[Support for Youth: https://www.pinkshirtday.ca/support-for-youth](https://www.pinkshirtday.ca/support-for-youth)

PREVNet

PREVNet is a national research and knowledge mobilization hub that partners with researchers and organizations focused on fostering healthy relationships among children and youth.

What Teens Need to Know: <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/teens>

What Educators Need to Know: <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/educators>

Types of Bullying: <https://www.prevnet.ca/bullying/types>

HealthLink BC – Bullying and Online Safety

HealthLink BC is a source for trusted health information and services in British Columbia. This page can provide you with the tools you need to help youth cope with and combat bullying.

<https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/pregnancy-parenting/keeping-your-child-safe/bullying-and-online-safety>

Province of British Columbia – ERASE

erase is all about building safe and caring school communities. This includes empowering students, parents, educators, and the community partners who support them to get help with challenges, report concerns to schools, and learn about complex issues facing students.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/erase>

Public Safety Canada – Bully Prevention in Schools

Bullying Prevention in Schools is a study undertaken by the National Crime Prevention Strategy on the subject of school-based anti-bullying programs. This document contains seven sections: Defining the Problem, Promising Practices, Review of NCPC Projects, Recommendations, Highlighted NCPC-Sponsored Projects, Anti-Bullying Resources, and Appendices.

<https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/blng-prvntn-schls/index-en.aspx>

The Crisis Centre of BC – MindFlip

MindFlip is an online program for teens that provides practical and accessible knowledge and tools to support mental health and navigate life challenges. Youth educators, parents, and teachers are also welcome to access.

<https://crisis-centre-bc.thinkific.com/courses/mindflip-brain-science-tools-for-everyday-living>

YOU CAN Youth Services

YOU CAN Youth Services is a non-profit charitable organization dedicated to helping young people out of harm's way and onto a path of economic independence. They are dedicated to empowering youth, so they have the knowledge, support, and skills to remove themselves from at-risk lifestyles.

<https://youcan.ca/>

Youth In BC

YouthInBC.com and its chat services are operated by the Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention Centre of BC which is dedicated to providing help and hope to individuals, organizations, and communities. It connects youth with support, information, and resources spanning the spectrum of crisis support, suicide prevention, and postvention.

<https://www.youthinbc.com/>

Youth Against Violence Line

The Youth Against Violence Line (YAVL) are multilingual trained support workers who talk with youth and concerned adults every day about bullying, gang activity, harassment, intimidation, sexual exploitation, and many other issues.

<http://www.youthagainstviolenceline.com/> | Call 1-800-680-4264

Email info@youthagainstviolenceline.com

Kids Help Phone

Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, multilingual and confidential support to help all young people Feel Out Loud.

<https://kidshelpphone.ca/> | Text CONNECT to 686868 | Call 1-800-668-6868

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS & OPINIONS!

We love getting mail and your students' feedback!

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WRITE A LETTER!

Ask your students to write us a letter/email to share their thoughts and opinions on the performance of **THE SHAPE OF A GIRL** by Joan MacLeod. Send it to us at Green Thumb!

WRITE A REVIEW!

Have your students write a theatre review about this performance of **THE SHAPE OF A GIRL** by Joan MacLeod. Send it to us at Green Thumb! A theatre review usually includes the following:

- A brief summary of the story
- A comment on the quality of the play itself
- A description of the costumes and set and a comment on whether these were interesting and appropriate
- A comment on the actors' portrayal of the characters and on the director's skill at pulling the whole show together

There are many examples of reviews in newspapers and online that you could use to introduce the concept and format of a theatre review. For help getting started, take a look at "How to Write a Play Review" on Wiki How: <https://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Play-Review>

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