

betweenity

A VIGNETTE PLAY BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

betweenity is a middle school vignette play that examines the beats, silences, and pauses in conversations.

Background

betweenity was premiered by Governor Simcoe Secondary School under the direction of Rassika Risko on May 15, 2012.

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

betweenity is a vignette play made up of short scenes on a theme. Each scene explores a different aspect of silence and how we act in it. What is the difference between a beat, a silence, and a pause? How does each one make us feel? Why do they happen? The play explores the spaces between words and what happens in them.

Characters

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

The play calls for 12 actors to play multiple roles such as:

- ★ Gap, Breathe, Beat, Hold, Space, Freeze, Thick

Themes

Adolescence, friendship, parenting/family, relationships, personal responsibility, self-image

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Have you ever experienced an awkward pause? What did it feel like?
- ★ How do you act in a pause?
- ★ How does silence make you feel?
- ★ Do you identify as being talkative or quiet?
- ★ How would you describe silence?
- ★ Do you enjoy filling in silences or living in them? Why?

Pre-Read Activities

Numbers & Silence

- ★ Tell students they are going to work together to count to 20 as a class.
- ★ The catch is that they cannot speak to each other and no two students can say the same number at the same time. Therefore they have to listen to each other and work on living in the silences rather than rushing.
- ★ Each time a student says a number at the same time as another student the class has to start over from 1.
- ★ Keep repeating the activity until you reach 20 as a class.

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.

Visualization

- ★ Have students find a spot on the ground they are comfortable in. Tell them they will be in this spot for a while, so they should be in a comfortable position.
- ★ Once students are ready, have them close their eyes and guide them through a visualization exercise. Feel free to use your own if you have one you prefer or use the examples below:
 - » Beach Meditation: Tell students to scan their body and release any tension they feel. Imagine themselves walking down the beach. What does the sand feel like against their skin? What does the water sound like? Are there other people on this beach? What sights do they see? What does the ocean smell like?
 - » Forest Meditation: Tell students to scan their body and release any tension they feel. Imagine themselves walking through a forest. At first it’s dark, but as they continue to walk they see a light. What does the ground underneath them feel like? What sounds can they hear? What changes as they approach their light? They cross through the path and are now in the light. What can they see? What do they feel?
- ★ Once you are done with the exercise, tell students to open their eyes slowly. Allow them to take their time as they come to an upright position.
- ★ Once your visualization exercise is over discuss with students:
 - » What did it feel like to live in the silence as you visualized? Were you able to relax?

- » What did you see in the visualization?
- » Have you ever done a visualization exercise before? Did this feel any different? How?
- » Were you able to stay focused throughout the visualization?

What I Wanted to Say Monologue

- ★ Give students five minutes to free write on the prompt: “What I wanted to say was...” Remind students that when they free write their pencil should never leave the page.
- ★ Once time is up tell students to create a monologue based on their free write. This monologue can be themselves speaking or a character.
- ★ Have students present their monologues.

Word Cloud

- ★ Give students three minutes to write down as many words they associate with silence as they can.
- ★ From there, create a list on the board of all the words students have written down. If a word is repeated, count how many times the class repeated the same word.
- ★ After the list is compiled, tell students they are going to work together to draw a word cloud on poster paper. The more times a word appears on the list the bigger the word should be drawn in the word cloud.
- ★ Once you’ve created the word cloud you can hang it up in your classroom and have students reflect:
 - » What word was the most common? Why do you think that is?
 - » What did you learn about silence throughout this process?
 - » After this process, what do you think betweenity means?

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

Read One: What is happening?

Remember! The names in the play will refer to multiple characters. You'll see the names come up several times in these questions but it's not all the same scene or the same character. Use your knowledge to figure out which character and which conversation the questions refer to.

1. Who is the only character who doesn't hear it?
2. Describe the relationship between Hitch and Hold.
3. What does Space think Freeze is going to do?
4. What is Still trying to do in their monologue?
5. Compare and contrast Breath, Stay, and Rest's monologues.
6. What happened between Hitch and their boyfriend? How does Hitch's mom react?

7. What do you think Stay is trying to say to Thick?
8. Why is Gap breaking up with Blake?
9. Who thinks they win in the play and who actually wins?
10. What happened to Breath's brother?
11. Why is Space upset with Breath and Beat?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose lower case letters for the title?
2. How does the author use the three pauses she describes on pg 3 to tell a story? Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
3. How does the author use the stage directions to forward the story? Why are these written actions important to what is happening onstage?
4. How do you think the playwright decided on the names for the characters?
5. Aside from pauses, how does the punctuation affect how you read the story?
6. What is the significance of the line, "It's the (*everyone snaps once*) in-between. The unsaid. The unseen."?
7. Pick a character. In your opinion, what is going on in their head during the silences?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *betweenity*? What does the inbetween represent?
2. What do you think the playwright is trying to say about silence? Cite the text to support your answer.

3. What is the biggest difference you noticed between the beats, the pauses, and the silences?
4. How does the author want you to respond to the play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question you still have about the play?
- ★ How did you feel within the silences of the play? Did you feel the same way any of the characters felt?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you address silence?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?

Post-Read Activities

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 colours 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?

Fill in the Blanks

- ★ Put students in groups and assign them a scene to analyze. Tell each group they are going to put together a scene where they say the subtext of the scene out loud.
- ★ Students will fill the silences in and speak the thoughts of the characters in the scene.
 - » What does the character want to say in the silence?
 - » How does the character's thoughts affect how they behave the rest of the scene?
 - » What is the character thinking in the silence?
- ★ Have each group perform and afterwards discuss:
 - » What differences did you notice between scenes?
 - » How did it affect you as an audience member when you heard the subtext?
 - » Was it hard to come up with the characters' thoughts or easy? Why?

Silent Tableau

- ★ Tell students they are going to work together as a class to create a tableau inspired by lines in the play. The catch is: they cannot talk when creating the tableau. They can only speak with their bodies. Here are some examples of lines you can use:

- » “Talking about it makes me think about it..”
- » “How will I know if I’m getting through?”
- » “We’re not talking.”
- » “Sometimes, I’ll fart in a crowded room, just to hear what people don’t say.”
- ★ Tell students they should come up one at a time to create the tableau. If two students get up at the same time, the whole class has to start over. Remind them that this exercise is about reading body language and silence.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Discuss with students:
 - » Was it hard to read body language?
 - » Did anything about the process surprise you? Did you surprise yourself?
 - » Was it hard to stay silent?

Silent Scenes

- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Groups will create a one-minute scene on the theme of silence. For example, they can show someone being silenced, how an awkward silence happens, or someone deciding to be silent while others talk.
- ★ Have students perform their scenes and then discuss.
 - » What was it like to explore silence?
 - » Did anything surprise you in any of the scenes? If so, what?
 - » Have you ever experienced an awkward silence?
 - » What does it mean to be silenced?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing betweenity.

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?

Before writing the play I had been working with a group of students who were having difficulty with pauses. They didn't want to take them. They didn't want silence on stage. That issue was eventually solved, but the thought never left me. What if I wrote scenes where the pause was the focus? What about the moments of uncomfortable silence in a conversation? From an angry parent? During an interview? That started the ball rolling and betweenity is the result.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Trying to figure out how long each pause should be was pretty challenging! Should be it a breath or 30 seconds? 30 seconds is a long, long time for no one to speak on stage; it's important not to overuse that length of silence. More often than not, all the pauses in the play were solved through character - what is the character doing in the moment and why are they pausing?

What was it like to see the play performed?

I love seeing this play performed. There's a skill to acting a pause and it's great to see casts and classes interpret the silence. I especially love when actors are okay with the discomfort of an audience. (Audiences don't like long pauses either). And further to that, when actors have clearly developed an inner monologue for the silences, it's awesome to watch. The acting doesn't stop when the lines do.

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

The opening. It's done almost in silence, so it's all visuals. Most of the actors have to stand, look at the audience, and wait. It's unnerving, but it sets up the whole play.

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!