

HOME OF THE BRAVE

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Lee Cataluna



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Home of the Brave looks at how children in military families deal with their situation: constant moving, worrying about deployed parents, best friends whose families are transferred overseas, and never knowing how long they'll be in a particular school. What is home when home is always changing?

Background

Home of the Brave was originally commissioned by La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla, CA and Honolulu Theater for Youth, Honolulu, HI. It was inspired by interviews with hundreds of military dependents and their families, teachers, principals, and counselors as well as active duty and veterans from all branches of the service.

Playwright Bio

Maui-born Lee Cataluna is the award-winning playwright of many of Hawaii's best-loved and most-produced plays and musicals. She was commissioned by La Jolla Playhouse and Honolulu Theatre for Youth to write the 2018 POP tour play, *Home of the Brave*, based on stories collected through hundreds of interviews with children from military families. Named in American Theatre's 2018 list of Native writers, her work for the stage includes *The Great Kauai Train Robbery*, inspired by the true story of her great-grandmother's brother, Kaimiola Hali, who was wrongly convicted in Hawaii's only train heist. She has an MFA in creative writing from the University of California, Riverside and has taught writing at an elite prep school and in a maximum-security prison. Her writing has made marines cry, politicians tremble, and audiences laugh so hard the stage lights shook.

Synopsis

Jada and Johnelle are the “new kids” on the base. Jada wants to put up curtains and make their space a home; Johnelle doesn’t even want to unpack. Meanwhile, Marcus and Brady are dealing with their dad being deployed, and Ty just wants a friend who will remember him. Each must learn that home isn’t necessarily a place. Home is where your heart lives.

Characters

MARCUS: Sixth grader, navy family, a rascal

BRADY: Seventh grader, navy family, bossy, confident

JADA: Fifth grader, army family, sunny, spunky, optimistic

JOHNELLE: Eighth grader, army family, sensitive, tired of moving

TY: Eighth grader, civilian family but parent works on base

MOM: Marcus and Brady’s mom

DAD: Marcus and Brady’s dad, currently deployed

PRINCIPAL: The principal of the school

Themes

Family, friendship, pride, belonging, dealing with change

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does home mean to you?
- ★ If someone asked you, “Where are you from?” how would you answer?
- ★ How do you define friendship?

- ★ How many times have you moved?
- ★ What would you miss the most if you moved away?
- ★ Have you ever been “the new kid?”
- ★ Do your parents’ jobs affect your life in any way?

Pre-Read Activities

Military Acronyms

- ★ Ask students to infer what each of the following three military shorthand acronyms stands for. Then once you share the phrase, ask them to infer what each would mean in civilian terms.
 - » MOS means Military Occupational Specialty = job
 - » MWR means Morale, Welfare, and Recreation = fun
 - » PCS means Permanent Change of Station = to move
- ★ Ask students: Why does the military need a shorthand?
- ★ Divide students into groups and have them create their own shorthand acronym for something that they do during the day either at home or at school. They need an acronym, what the acronym stands for, and a description in civilian terms.

Family Interview

- ★ Interview one of your parents about their job.
 - » What is their job?
 - » How long have they been doing it?
 - » Why do they do the work they do?
 - » Would they change their job if they could?

- » Has the family ever been affected by their job?
- ★ Write a paragraph reflecting on what you learned, OR write a monologue from the perspective of your parent reflecting on their job.

Family Life

- ★ Divide students into groups and have them share what happens in their family first thing in the morning.
 - » What are your family's routines? What happens every morning?
 - » What's breakfast like in your family? Do you eat together? Why or why not?
 - » What would you like to change about your family's routine?
- ★ Groups will identify the similarities and differences and share them with the class.

Home Collage

- ★ Create a collage that depicts your definition of the word "home."
 - » Brainstorm the images, symbols, and words that represent the word.
 - » Decide what materials you will use to depict the word.
 - » After you create your collage, write a one-paragraph description of the choices you made and why.

Home Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss three words that demonstrate how they feel about the word "home."
 - » Alternatively, you could have a class discussion to come up with a list of words, and then groups can choose three words from the list.
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau for each of those words.

- » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Those watching should try to identify the words each group chose to depict.

Research Project: Base Life

- ★ In groups, students will research what life is like on a military base.
 - » What are the similarities and differences to living in a civilian community?
 - » What are the pros and cons?
 - » How does life on a base compare to how you live?
- ★ After completing their research students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene comparing base life to how they live
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene or oral presentation with visual component)

Friendship Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of friendship. For example:
 - » How would you demonstrate what it means to be “best friends?”
 - » How would you demonstrate what it means to move away from a friend?
 - » How would you demonstrate what it’s like to make friends when you are the “new kid?”

Friendship Tableaux Series

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Moving

- ★ If you can, record a couple of students who have moved some distance describing their experience. Alternatively, if they feel comfortable talking in front of the class, have them do so.
 - » Where did they move from and why?
 - » What was it like to move into a new place?
 - » What was it like to make friends?
 - » Do they keep in touch with their old friends?
- ★ Students will write and perform a 30-second monologue about a character who has had to move some distance. The content of the monologue is them talking to someone (a new friend, an old friend, a family member, a pet) about what they miss the most from their old home. How are they dealing with change?

“New Kid” Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss three words that demonstrate how they feel about the phrase “new kid.”

- » Alternatively, you could have a class discussion to come up with a list of words, and then groups can choose three words from the list.
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau for each of those words.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Those watching should try to identify the words each group chose to depict.

Constant Change

- ★ Play this improv game to give students the feeling of dealing with constant change.
- ★ Start with two players on stage. You will start as the person who calls out, "Change!" By calling this, you want the player to change what they just said or did.
 - » For example: If the player just said, "Hi Fred," and you call, "Change!", the player must backtrack and say something else – make a new choice. So again, "Hi Fred," "Change!", "Hi Velma."
 - » You can call out "Change!" multiple times (it often works to call out for a change three times). You're forcing students to keep thinking and going outside their comfort zones.
- ★ The scene then continues justifying the new information until the caller interrupts again.

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 *Home of the Brave*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions.

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. Where does the play take place?
3. What is the relationship between Jada and Johnelle?
4. What does PCS mean?
5. Who is Ava?
6. What branch of the military is Marcus' and Brady's family?
7. Is Ty's family a military family?
8. In the scene Awards Assembly, does Marcus' dad show up?
9. Why does Jada end up outside the principal's office?
10. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. Why does the author begin and end the play with a choral piece? How does this choral piece set up the world of the play?
2. Analyze Jada's use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
3. Based on the way that Marcus speaks, how would you visualize him? What is his physicality?
4. What is the symbolism of the box Jonelle decides not to open?
5. What is the symbolism of the curtains Jada wants to hang up?
6. What is the significance of this line: "Home is where your heart lives, not where you happen to be."
7. What is the significance of this line: "No matter where we're stationed, I know I'll make the team."
8. How would you costume Ty? Use the text to support your answer.
9. Why does the author include the scene "Navy Ball?" Why is it significant?
10. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Home of the Brave*?
2. What is the author trying to say about friendship? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the author's point of view on the word "home?" Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is going to happen next for Jada and Johnelle?
5. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with friendship with what happens in the play.

6. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

1. What is one question that you still have about the play?
2. Which character resonated with you the most and why?
3. Choose one relationship (family, friends) in the play. How do you relate to this relationship? How do you not relate?
4. Now that you've read the play, if someone asked you, "Where are you from?" how would you answer? Is your answer the same or would you change it?

Post-Read Activities

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?
- ★ Draw a colour 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?

Character Physical Action

- ★ As a class, discuss the personality traits of each character. Create a list of traits for each character.
- ★ Ask students: How do we physicalize personality? Use one character as a model.
- ★ For example, Brady is described as bossy and confident. How do confident people stand? How do they move? How do they gesture?
- ★ Divide students into groups and give each group a character, without letting the other groups know.
- ★ Each group, using the personality trait list for their character, must discuss and decide upon a stance, a walk, and a gesture for this character.
- ★ Each group will present. Each person in the group will enter the space with their walk, take a stance, gesture, and then walk off.
- ★ Those watching have to guess the character simply by looking at the physical action.
- ★ Ask students: Why do we need to give characters a specific physical action?

Choral Scene: Where I'm from

- ★ The playwright describes the final scene, "Where I'm from," as a choral piece.
- ★ Divide the lines up among your class. If possible, give one line to each student.
- ★ Give students time to repeat and memorize their line.
- ★ Discuss with students how they should stand or pose during the choral piece. Will they create thematic tableaux? Will everyone stand/pose the same way? When will their stance change in the piece and why?

- ★ Discuss with students how they should gesture during the choral piece. How can they create emphasis with the text through gesture? What do the gestures represent?
- ★ Practice the piece with students presenting their memorized line, and the stance and gestures they decided upon.
- ★ If possible, record the work so that students can review what they did. Then discuss the results. What moments had the most impact? What would students change if they could?

Playwright Process

Playwright Lee Cataluna talks about her process writing *Home of the Brave*. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

I do a lot of work with Honolulu Theatre For Youth, and the idea came from them. They like to program their season with plays that represent different cultures in Hawaii. Someone pointed out that they hadn't looked at the military culture yet and this is something that is significant in our community. I was brought on because I'm a journalist as well as a playwright. The company knew they wanted to interview students, not just "make up" a story. Before I even had the contract signed, I wanted in on this. It's not my story, I don't come from a military background but I moved around a lot as a kid. I had that emotional connection.

How long did the interview process take? What was your big takeaway from the interviews?

This was not a scientific process, I didn't go in with a set number of questions. I wanted to meet them and listen. I went to as many schools as I could and I made sure I went to schools that covered all military sectors. Even though I wanted the characters to be younger, I found that talking to high school students worked better because they had a bit of distance to remember their experience. They were able to talk with some reflection, they weren't "in" those moments. I remember their stories so clearly. I hear their words when I hear the play.

How did the interviews change your approach to writing the play?

There are as many stories about being a kid in a military family as there are kids in military families. That's frustrating as a writer. I'm writing a one act – what do I leave out? What do I keep in? I would come home from these interviews completely wiped out and I wanted to make sense of the notes that I took. I decided I should try to write scenes as I go, so I don't lose the emotions of the stories. So the play became episodic.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

Too many stories, and being okay with that. There was never going to be enough time. Knowing there was no way to tell one story all the way through. Taking all the different pieces and trying to make something that had shape.

One thing that helped is that I didn't just go to the school once, I went back and back and back with pages. I handed students my scenes and had them read the scenes out loud for me. And then they corrected me on a lot of details! That was a really important part of the process.

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment in the play?

I love the monologue "Pockets." I think of the girl who told me that story every time.

What was it like to see the play performed?

In San Diego, we had an invited dress for military families. The room was filled with marines. I sat on the side and watched the reactions. The kids were nodding in recognition. The marines were crying because this is the stuff that they don't see. They're not at home, they're serving. They don't like to think about it, they have to focus. It was a career high – I made the marines cry! And right after we had a dramaturgy meeting and the first thing I heard was, "the play is ten minutes too long, we have to cut ten pages. By tomorrow." But I survived. And the play survived.