

SCHOOL DAZE

A MIDDLE SCHOOL COMEDY
IN ONE ACT BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

School Daze is a middle school vignette play that looks at a day in the life of the first day of school.

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

School Daze is a vignette play made up of short scenes with a theme. Each scene takes place on the first day of middle school. What is it like to make that transition? How do you get from one class to the next in under seven seconds flat? What if you forget your locker combination? What if you wear the wrong t-shirt on the first day? Where do you sit to eat lunch? How do you walk the tightrope between being a kid and being a teenager?

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. In many scenes, characters are identified by a trait rather than a specific name.

Some of the characters include:

Big Kid 2: Proud of his evil laugh.

Forward Boy: Hates being treated like a kid.

Bully: Is a coward, as all bullies are.

Negative Girl: Hates school. Doesn't mind the flute.

Defensive: Doesn't have time for homework.

Pat: Wants to know if Sam is freaking out.

Themes

Transitions, Change, Identity, Self-Image

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What was your first day of middle school like?
- ★ Do you accept or resist change?
- ★ How do you see yourself?
- ★ How do you think others see you?
- ★ What makes up a person's identity?
- ★ Do you have the same personality as you did when you were younger? Why or why not?
- ★ Would you rather blend in or stand out? Why?
- ★ Do you judge people based on what they wear?
- ★ Do you equate clothes with personality?
- ★ Do you think the right clothes can solve problems?
- ★ What are you wearing today? Why did you choose it? What does it say about you?
- ★ Have you ever chosen not to wear a certain item of clothing? Why or why not?

Pre-Read Activities

First Day Assumptions Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau that visualizes the assumptions of the first day of school. What fears are there? What expectations? What's the worst that could happen? What words and images come to mind?
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The three pictures are three different assumptions about the first day of middle school. The pictures should escalate from least bad assumption to worst assumption.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: How many students had the same assumptions? Which of the assumptions came true? Which didn't?

First Day Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau that visualizes the first day of school.
 - » 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 depict first impressions, the second picture will depict lunch time, and the third picture will depict the end of the day.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: How did your emotions change from the beginning, to the middle, and then to the end of the day? Did any of the expectations from the beginning of the day materialize?

First Day Scene

- ★ Divide students into pairs. Partner A is really excited about starting middle school. Partner B is not excited at all and would rather stay a kid.
- ★ Create a one-minute scene in which one tries to convince the other to their side.

Opinion Poll

- ★ One aspect of identity is the choices we make. Ask students to share their opinion by standing to indicate that they agree with a specific choice. State the choices and then repeat the choices so students can stand. Each choice will have three options: the first choice, the second choice, or neither.
- ★ For example, if the choices are Summer or Winter, you would say: Summer, Winter, or Neither. Then repeat slowly: Summer (give students a chance to stand and then sit), Winter (give students a chance to stand and then sit), or Neither (give students a chance to stand and then sit).
- ★ Possible Options:
 - » Summer or Winter?
 - » Meat or Vegetables?
 - » Music or Reading?
 - » Music or Movies?
 - » YouTube or Instagram?
 - » Travel or Home?
 - » Family or Friends?
 - » Sweet or Salty?

Identity Collage

- ★ Create a collage that visualizes your definition of “My Identity.” How do you see yourself?

- » Brainstorm images, symbols, and words that represent your identity.
- » Decide what materials you will use to visualize your identity.
- » After you create your collage, write a one-paragraph description of the choices you made and why.

Identity Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of identity. How will you visualize “Who am I?” “How do I see myself?”
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present.

Clothing Reflection

- ★ Have students choose their favourite piece of clothing and write a reflection about it. What is it? Have students describe the clothing in detail. Why is it their favourite piece of clothing? Why and why do they wear it? What does this piece of clothing say about them?

Clothing Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group is to do a scene in which characters act and react based on the clothing someone is wearing.
 - » How do you judge/respond to what people wear?
 - » How do you think people respond to what you wear?
 - » Do people judge you unfairly based on what you wear?

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 *School Daze*, 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. What is wrong with Lacy's chin?
3. According to Jimmy, what is the perfect grade?
4. What does Fear Boy hate?
5. What is one of the things Backward Boy misses?
6. What is Locker 2 worried about forgetting?
7. During the morning announcements, who is the quote of the day from?
8. What is Ameer's real name?
9. What does Mary-Jean love?
10. What type of sandwich does Sam eat?
11. Finish this sentence: "The problem is, no matter what I do, it's_____."
12. What happens to the macaroni salad?
13. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose to share the subject matter episodically through scenes, rather than following one character's story from beginning to end?
2. In your opinion, why are some of the characters given names and some are identified by concepts (e.g., Fear Boy)?
3. There are a variety of styles in the play (monologue, comedy, tableaux, choral speaking, poetry). In your opinion, why does the playwright use different styles to theatricalize the subject?
4. In your opinion, why does the playwright suggest that there are no blackouts between scenes?
5. Compare Fear Girl from the beginning to the end of the play. What changes in her tone? Her language? How would you portray her physically?
6. Analyze the way Mary-Jean talks in her two moments. What is her tone? What words does she use? What is the significance of her line, "They don't know me. They don't want to know me and that's fine"? Based on her language, how would you physicalize her?
7. How would you costume Amee? Use the text to support your answer.
8. What is the significance of the line, "How am I supposed to make friends with zits all over my face?"
9. What is the significance of the line, "What if I choose an instrument that makes me look bad?"
10. What is the significance of the line, "It seems the more I try not to be seen, the more they see. The more they go after me"?
11. In your opinion, is there a common conflict throughout the scenes? If so, what is it?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *School Daze*? Why not *School Days*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about transitions? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about identity? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with identity with what happens in the play.
5. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with the first day of middle school with what happens in the play.
6. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about your own experiences?
- ★ Should anyone else be able to define your identity? Why or why not?
- ★ Did you connect to any one of the storytelling styles? Which one? Why?
- ★ Do you prefer a different storytelling style? Which one? Why?

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? 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?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play such as, "It seems the more I try not to be seen, the more they see. The more they go after me."
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how they will visualize this line in a tableau.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

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?

School Daze Transition Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups and have them create an original scene with the theme of transition, specifically the transition from elementary school to middle school.
- ★ The scene should use one of the styles explored in the play.
- ★ The scene should be one to two minutes.

School Daze Identity Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups and have each group create their own original scene based on the idea of finding your identity, but also wanting to fit in. How will they explore individual identity and group identity?
- ★ The scene should use one of the styles explored in the play.
- ★ The scene should be one to two minutes.

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing School Daze. 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?

When I'm writing or thinking about writing, my number one method of finding play ideas is observation. Looking at what's happening around me, listening to conversations, and most importantly, listening to my customers and my audience. At this point in my history as a playwright, I had only written plays for high school students and never considered middle school. After a trip to a conference in Texas, I met so many middle school drama teachers who were looking specifically for plays

written for middle school performers and dealing with middle school issues. And the big thing they told me middle school students didn't want was fairy tales or similar childish stories. I took on the challenge and this play was actually the first of many middle school pieces.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

As this was the first play I had written for this age group, I was really conscious about finding the balance of writing characters who weren't elementary students and also weren't high school students. They had to be authentic to the age.

Did you use anything from your own middle school experience in the play?

As a matter of fact I did! When I was in the 7th grade, I was in a home economics class where the teacher made us put the macaroni salad we had made in the freezer, and to this day I am completely confused by this choice. And the next week, it disappeared. And then Sam's desire to eat something comforting, if a bit weird (brown bread peanut butter sandwiches) is taken directly from my life — I loved that combo and didn't know it was weird until someone told me.

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

I love the race scene because it takes a typical middle school event, moving from class to class, to the extreme. It also gives actors a lot to play with — there's the humour of the characters and the physical action of the slow motion running. Every time I've ever seen the play, this scene has always been a highlight.

What is harder: coming up with ideas or rewrites?

Rewrites always! Ideas are fun because it's the brainstorming phase where everything can change. I don't feel that ideas are precious; they are just a starting point. Rewrites are specific and need to relate directly to moving the play forward. Sometimes, I can rewrite all day and hardly have anything to show for it because I'm trying to work on a moment or a character. But, while the idea stage is more fun, rewrites are more rewarding. Plays become the best they can be in the rewrites; they are never fully written or realized in a first draft.