

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE

***Waitress***

Book by Jessie Nelson and Music & Lyrics by Sara Bareilles

Based on the motion picture by Adrienne Shelly

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Image description: “WAITRESS” in bold, pink lettering across a shiny blue background.

**2024.2025 Season**

***Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage***

*June 12 – August 3, 2025*

This show is generously sponsored by:

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# **Welcome**

This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our Education & Community Engagement Coordinator, Mikenzie Page, **mpage@artsclub.com.**

This study guide was written by Stella Jack-Rennie and Mikenzie Page.

# **About The Arts Club Theatre Company**

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets. Now in its 61st season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, and the Newmont Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at artsclub.com.

**c̓əsnaʔəm: The Story of this Land**

The Stanley Industrial Alliance Theatre stands on the ancestral territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm Nation, and the former city of c̓əsnaʔəm, which was located at the mouth of the Fraser River. The city of c̓əsnaʔəm is an important historical site for Musqueam. It symbolizes the nation's resilience and its connection to the land. We honour the history of this land as a step towards recognition and respect to the Musqueam people. Just as Musqueam was named for the blooming flower məθkʷəy̓, we hope to grow our connection with the land and its people.

The Arts Club Theatre Company would like to acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm ,Sḵwx̱wú7mesh, and səlilwətaɬ Nations, the original stewards of this land on which we operate. We would like to ask those visiting or living here to share their thanks by supporting local Indigenous artists and communities. Acknowledging is always a start to supporting; as we step forward, we wish to be better partners, healers, and helpers to our Indigenous neighbours.

For further reading, click below to read more about Musqueam’s Story from the Musqueam Indian Band website:

[**Musqueam’s Story**](https://www.musqueam.bc.ca/our-story/)

**https://www.musqueam.bc.ca/our-story/**

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# **Learning Objectives**

After viewing *Waitress* and working through the following activities, students will:

* Reflect on theatrical works to examine complex issues, conflicts, and relationships and identify the importance of seeing diverse perspectives in developing meaningful personal connections and relationships.
* Gain an understanding of storytelling through music and reflect on how artistic and aesthetic choices can drive a story forward.
* Think creatively, critically, and reflectively about the role and process of theatrical adaptations from other forms of media.

**Show Content:**

**Genre**: Musical

**Show Dates**: June 12 –August 3, 2025

**Age Range**: Recommended for grades 10 –12

**Venue**: Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

# **Content Advisory:**

This production MAY contain flashing lights and water-based haze and fog. Please contact our box office for more information.

**Violence/Injury:**

●●●●**○**

Depictions of spousal abuse between Jenna and Earl. Including financial, emotional, verbal, and physical abuse.

**Alcohol/Drugs:**

●●**○○○**

Depictions of drinking onstage.

**Sexual Content:**

**●●●○○**

Infidelity, unwanted pregnancy (discussion of abortion that is quickly dismissed), and mild sexuality + implied off-stage affairs.

**Strong Language: ●●●○****○**

Raunchy jokes, and open discussion of sex.

**Death:**

●●**○○○**

Jenna reflects on her dead mother during her dream sequences. Another character dies offstage.

**SPOILER ALERT!**

Anything past this page may contain major plot point spoilers!

Read at your own discretion…

# **Brief Synopsis:**

Small-town waitress and expert pie-maker Jenna dreams of a new life outside of her tumultuous marriage. Facing an unexpected pregnancy that complicates her desires, Jenna sees winning the grand prize in a pie-baking contest as her lifeline. With pals from the diner and a new romance in her corner, will she find it within herself to take this gutsy leap of faith?

# **Detailed Synopsis:**

***ACT ONE***

The play begins in Joe’s Diner with the waitress Jenna in the mist of making a pie with flour on her face and singing the song *“What’s Inside.”* This song involves all the things that are needed to make a pie and is sung by both Jenna and the larger ensemble who hand Jenna the finished baked pie once they have finished singing. Cal, the main cook at the diner, discusses with Jenna what the pie is called (Deep Dish Blueberry Bacon) with a pun on the name. This leads to the other waitresses coming in and they launch into the song *“Opening Up.”* The other waitresses are introduced as Becky and Dawn. The scene changes as they sing about the routine of life at the diner.

Joe, the owner of the diner is in ordering his usual meal which is very specific. Jenna takes the order but is not feeling well and does not get the order correct upon repeating it to Joe. Jenna admits to being queasy and races to the washroom and the other waitresses follow her out of concern. Cal threatens to fire them as they are leaving the diner floor empty of employees. The waitresses are unconcerned about Cal and Becky tells Jenna she needs to take a pregnancy test (which she conveniently has tucked into her apron). They launch into the song *“The Negative.”*

Jenna takes the pregnancy test and is hoping for a negative result. It comes up positive that she is pregnant, and her husband Earl is the father. It is clear that there are problems with their relationship, and she claims that she has thought of a new pie called “I Don’t Want Earl’s Baby Pie.” Cal calls them back into the diner to resume working. Meanwhile, Earl enters the diner and tells Jenna that he is skipping work after a disagreement with his boss. He also tells her that he doesn’t think she should be working at the diner anymore. She should be at home baking him pies.

Jenna enters a fantasy where she bakes Earl a “My Husband’s a Jerk Pot Pie” and the ensemble puts a suitcase on the table and gives her a coat, indicating that she is leaving Earl. Her workmates tell Jenna that they do not like Earl but Jenna defends him and lets them know that she is too poor to leave him. Jenna starts singing the song *“What Baking Can Do”*. This transitions into a doctor’s waiting room with a new song called *“Club Knocked Up”* sung by the other pregnant women waiting.

Jenna now meets Doctor Pomatter who is new to her as her old doctor has retired. Jenna brings a pie meant for her former doctor. Dr. Pomatter is awkward and tries to be funny. The nurse who works with him brings in the test results that confirm that Jenna is pregnant and the doctor mentions that she is about 8 weeks in. Jenna gives the doctor the pie and he is transfixed with memories flooding in when he eats some of it.

Next, the scene changes to the diner and Jenna and Becky arrive late separately. Cal threatens to fire Becky and asks Jenna why Earl doesn’t buy her a car. Jenna says that Earl doesn’t want her going anywhere. They talk about the doctor’s visit and Jenna admits that she hasn’t told Earl yet. They discuss Dawn signing up for a dating site and writing a profile. They sing *“When He Sees Me”* about Dawn’s anxiety around dating. Joe returns to the diner and Jenna serves him again. He suspects that she is pregnant and then encourages her to enter the National Pie Bake Off in Springfield where the prize money is $20,000.

The next scene, Jenna is at the bus stop where she is imagining the moment where she wins the contest. Dr. Pomatter arrives at the bus stop as his car won’t start. They discuss her husband and where she works. The doctor tells her that the pie she gave him was the best he ever tasted. He launches into the song *“It Only Takes a Taste.”* Then Jenna’s bus arrives and they part.

In the following scene they are at Jenna and Earl’s house where Earl informs Jenna that he has been fired for being late too many times. Jenna gives Earl her tips once he requests them and he mentions that she will be paying the bills moving forward. Earl suddenly flies into a rage and tries to hit Jenna, but she interrupts this by telling him that she is pregnant. He is initially happy but warns Jenna that she better not love the baby more than him. He breaks into the song *“You Will Still Be Mine.”*

The scene changes to the diner where it is discovered that Dawn has a message on her profile and a date is set up. Jenna offers to make a pie for Dawn to bring to her date. Jenna tells Dawn and Becky that she is going to enter the pie contest. She also tells them that if she wins the prize money, she is going to leave Earl. She starts singing “*A Soft Place To Land.”* It is also revealed that Becky has a date, but she is coy about telling them who with. The scene transforms back to Jenna’s place where she is hiding some of the tips that she earns under the couch cushion.

Again at the diner, Dawn’s date Ogie is at a table and requests to be served by Dawn. Dawn discusses all the things about Ogie that she thinks is unusual and she initially doesn’t want to serve him. After both Becky and Jenna refuse to go serve him, Dawn goes over and she slowly realizes that they have a lot in common. Ogie breaks into song *“Never Getting Rid of Me.”* At the end of this, Dawn agrees to a date as they bond over Revolutionary War re-enactments.

Meanwhile, Jenna books another appointment with Dr. Pomatter as she mentions that she is bleeding a bit. At the exam room Jenna finds out that the doctor agreed to come in hours early to meet her. The Doctor says that Jenna’s symptoms are completely normal, but Jenna is still bothered by the fact that the Doctor went so far out of his way to set up the appointment. She decides that she doesn’t want him to be her doctor and starts to leave but forgets her purse. When she re-enters the room, she grabs the doctor and kisses him passionately.

This leads to the song *“Bad Idea”* sung by the both of them. The act ends with them embracing passionately.

***ACT TWO***

Act Two starts out in the pantry of the diner with Jenna in the rapture of making a pie which include “I Wanna Play Doctor With My Gynecologist’ Pie,” which transforms into “I Can’t Have An Affair Because It’s Wrong and I Don’t Want Earl to Kill Me Pie? Becky interrupts to tell Jenna that she herself is having an affair with Cal. They argue about the ethics of cheating and it turns into the song, *“I Didn’t Plan It”* sung by Becky.

The scene shifts to find Jenna back in Dr. Pomatter’s office with Jenna bringing a “A Little Wild, Wild Berry Pie.” The doctor asks the nurse to re-weigh another patent to get her out of the room so that he can speak to Jenna in private. Pomatter is concerned that Jenna has not contacted him for a month whereas Jenna wants to forget the whole thing. He promises it will never happen again. Then they quickly return to making out, but the nurse comes in and interrupts. But the nurse quickly leaves and Jenna and Dr. Pomatter resume making out which turns into a reprise of the song *“Bad Idea.”* This turns into a collage of future doctor office making out sessions with the nurse repeatedly interrupting while they continually try to disguise their actions. Dawn and Ogie, Becky and Cal and the development of their relationships are included in the collage/song.

Back at the diner, Joe is back and Jenna is waiting on him. Joe asks her about the affair and tells her which pie she should take to the contest (“Jenna’s Devil’s Food Oasis Pie.”) Then the three waitresses gather to discuss Dawn’s date; particularly the sexual nature of the relationship. Ogie arrives to pick up Dawn to bring her to meet his mother.

Once again, the scene changes to Dr. Pomatter’s office where the nurse informs Jenna that the he had to fly out of town with his wife to a funeral. The pie that she brings goes to the nurse instead and the nurse does the examination herself. Jenna starts a monologue addressing the baby about her concerns about raising the baby with the current situation with her husband and their lack of funds.

Weeks later, Dr. Pomatter pays a surprise visit to the diner and confronts Jenna in the pantry. Jenna expresses her desire to end their affair. As the doctor reluctantly leaves, he stops to offer her a golden pie plate with her name engraved in the back. Jenna is so moved that they start to bake a “Lonely Chicago Pie” together. Jenna briefly sings a song her mother taught her when making pies called *“Mama’s Pie Song.”* Jenna asks him why is moved to this town in the first place. He tells her that he is here because his wife is doing her residency in the town. Then he starts to sing the *“You Matter To Me”* song. The song evolves with Jenna duetting but directing her words to her unborn baby rather than towards Pomatter.

The play cuts to Ogie and Dawn’s wedding with design based on the Revolutionary War. Ogie and Dawn start singing the *“I Love You Like A Table”* song. Jenna brings in a pie called “A Big Slice of Live Your Life Pie.” At the wedding, Jenna thanks Cal for giving her time off to be in the pie contest. Becky gives her money. Joe approaches Jenna and gives her words of encouragement (in his curmudgeonly way) and starts singing the song *“Take It From An Old Man.”* Meanwhile, Earl crashes the wedding and demands that Jenna leaves to go home with him. Earl aggressively grabs Jenna by the arm and leads her away from the wedding.

Back at Jenna and Earl’s home, Earl finds the stashed money that Jenna has been saving. Earl says that if she deceives him, he will kill himself. He asks if it was being saved for the baby. Jenna says it was for a crib. Earl encourages this lie. Once Earl goes to bed, Jenna sings the song *“She Used To Be Mine”* and realizes that she can no longer attend the contest. She is saying goodbye to the girl that she once was. At the end of the scene, she feels her first contraction.

The scene changes to Jenna at the hospital with Dr. Pomatter. Joe surprisingly turns up as he is having an operation the same day. Joe brings Jenna a card and leaves. Earl enters and Jenna introduces the Dr. Pomatter to Earl, each at one side of the hospital bed. Dr. Pomatter’s wife arrives as well and gets introduced to Jenna. It is very awkward for all characters involved. Dr. Pomatter’s wife reveals she is here to view part of the labour due to her residency at the hospital. Finally, Jenna gives birth to a girl.

Earl warns Jenna not to love the baby more than him. This is the last straw and Jenna tells Earl that she doesn’t love him anymore as the ensemble starts singing *“What’s Inside.”* After an argument, Earl leaves and Jenna sings to the baby, *“Everything Changes.”* Jenna introduces the baby to her Godmothers, Becky and Dawn. She thanks Dr. Pomatter and says goodbye once again singing *“Everything Changes.”* Finally, Jenna opens the card that Joe gave her and it says that he is giving Jenna the diner.

The final scene is back at the diner. Cal, Ogie and Jenna’s child, named Lulu, are counting pie boxes. Jenna enters and they sing the final song together, *“Opening Up.”*

**- End of Play -**

# **About the Playwright:**

**Jessie Nelson (Book):** Jessie Nelson is an American director, actress, producer, and writer who has worked extensively in both theatre and film. She attended the University of California Santa Cruz, and started her career in New York at the Public Theater and Shakespeare in the Park.­­­­­­Notably, she wrote, directed and produced the 1994 film *Corrina, Corinna,* and the 2001 film *I Am Sam.* Other work she has done is *Stepmom, The Story of Us, and Love the Coopers.* In theatre, she co-wrote and directed the musical *Alice by Heart,* and wrote the book for the musical Waitress*.* She is Jewish and is the mother to the actor Molly Gordon.

**Sara Bareilles (Music & Lyrics):** SaraBareilles is an actress, a Grammy award winning singer/songwriter and Tony Nominated musical score composer/lyricist. She attended the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and after graduating in 2002 got signed to a record label to where she got her first hits with “Gravity” and “Love Song” in 2006/7. She continued to release music, tour, and act in small television roles as well as judge singing competitions and worked on writing the score of *Waitress* in 2013. Bareilles went on the perform in the Broadway and West End productions of Waitress through 2018-2021. She continued to do more acting with the live-filmed version of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, with her role as Dawn in the TV show *Girls5eva,* and The Baker’s Wife in *Into the Woods* on Broadway as well releasing music.

A person holding a video camera

Description automatically generated**Adrienne Shelly (Screenplay):** Adrienne Shelly was an actor director and writer who grew up in New York and worked in theatre, television and film. She appeared in many projects from 1989-2007 including starring in the movies: *The Unbelievable Truth, and Trust.* She wrote and directed the 1999 movie *I’ll Take You There,* and acted in off-Broadway shows, directed for Naked Angels and Angels and Alice’s 4th floor, and worked as an educator at NYU before her untimely death in 2006. For her last creative project, she wrote the movie *Waitress* when she was pregnant with her daughter, then directed, co-set and costume designed and starred in the movie. After her murder, her husband set up the [Adrienne Shelly Foundation](https://adrienneshellyfoundation.org/) to support women filmmakers with scholarships, grants, funds in her memory.

# **Settings:**

A diner in a small town off Highway 27, in a time not so long ago.

# **Characters:**

**Jenna**: A waitress and talented baker at a Joe’s Pie Diner in her small town. She processes the world around her through her baking, and it acts as her connection to her late mother. Jenna is a woman in her thirties that married her high school boyfriend, Earl.

**Becky**: The oldest of the three waitresses and has worked at Joe’s Pie Diner the longest. Becky doesn’t suffer fools, and she has biting wit and wisdom to her as she’s been through difficult periods but has remained the same person throughout. She is her husband’s caretaker.

**Dawn**: The newest and youngest waitress at Joe’s Pie Diner. She is nerdy and socially awkward but sweet and endearing. She is a fan of order and history. She has never dated anyone before.

**Dr. Pomatter**: Doctor Pomatter is in his early thirties. He is a gynecologist that has moved from Connecticut. He is awkward man who is warm and compassionate.

**Earl**: Jenna’s husband. They got together in high school and married shortly after graduating. He peaked in high school and is an unhappy abusive alcoholic who takes out the fact that he never achieved his musician dreams on Jenna.

**Cal**: The cook at Joe’s Pie Diner. He a guy’s guy who is gruff, unemotional but nice and charming.

**Joe**: The owner of Joe’s Pie Diner. He is demanding and grumpy on the outside but deeply empathetic on the inside.

**Ogie**: A nerd from Oklahoma who expresses interest in Dawn. He’s a fan of Revolutionary War re-enactments and magic. A chronic over sharer who will never give up on anything he sets his mind to.

**Ensemble**: Nurses, Customers at Joe’s Pie Diner, Pomatter’s Wife.

# **Connections to BC Curriculum:**

**Drama 10–12**

*Big Ideas*

* Collaborative drama experiences can build community and nurture relationships with others
* Drama offers dynamic ways to share/express identity and a sense of belonging.
* Individual and collective expression are founded on history, culture, and community
* Drama is a way of sharing and understanding tradition, perspectives, cultures, and worldviews
* Drama cultivates collaboration through critical reflection, creative co-operation, and the exchange of ideas

*Curriculum Competencies*

* Reflect on dramatic works and make connections with personal experiences (10,11,12)
* Reflect on dramatic/aesthetic experiences and how they relate to a specific place, time, and context (10, 11, 12)
* Examine/evaluate the social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal contexts of dramatic works (10,11,12)
* Describe, analyze, and examine/evaluate ways in which props, technologies, and environments are used in drama, using discipline-specific language (10,11,12)

**Literary Studies 10-12**

*Big Ideas*

* The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world.
* Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

*Curriculum Competencies*

* Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts (10,11,12)
* Recognize and understand how different forms, formats, structures, and features of texts enhance and shape meaning and impact (10,11)
* Recognize and understand personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts, including culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic factors (10,11,12)
* Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways (12)

## **Musical Theatre 10-12**

*Big Ideas*

* Musical theatre provides a unique aesthetic experience with the power to effect change.
* Interpretation of existing work is an opportunity to represent identity and culture.
* Musical theatre is informed by history, culture, and values.

*Curriculum Connections*

* Examine the impacts of culture and society on musical theatre.
* Reflect on personal and social responsibility associated with creating, performing, and responding to musical theatre.
* Explore educational, personal, and professional opportunities in the performing arts.

**Dance (including Technique and Performance, Foundations, Choreography, and Dance Company) 10/11/12**

*Big Ideas*

* Artistic choices communicate the choreographer’s intent.
* Dance engages us in artistic works from multiple perspectives.
* Dancers collaborate through critical reflection, creative co-operation, and the exchange of ideas.

*Curriculum Connections*

* Use the language of dance to describe, interpret, and analyze dance performances.
* Describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate dance techniques and artistic works using dance-specific language.
* Reflect on the influences of social, cultural, historical, political, and personal context on dance.

**Foods: (Culinary Arts 11–12 and Food Studies 10-12)**

*Big Ideas*

* Services and products can be designed through consultation and collaboration
* Personal design interests require the evaluation and refinement of skills
* Diner needs and tastes inform culinary service.
* Social, ethical, and sustainability considerations impact the culinary arts.

*Curriculum Competencies*

* Analyze and evaluate how land, natural resources, and culture influence the development and use of culinary ingredients, tools, and technologies (FS, 10-12, CA 11,12)
* Observe and research the context of a meal and/or recipe preparation task or process (FS 10,11,12)

**Interpersonal and Family Relationships 11 & Child Development and Caregiving 12**

*Big Ideas*

* Service design (A human-centred approach that may include creating services to address social challenges) interests require the evaluation and refinement of problem-solving skills.

*Curriculum Competencies*

* Critically reflect on cultural sensitivity and etiquette skills, and develop specific plans to learn or refine them over time (11,12)
* Examine how cultural beliefs, values, and ethical positions affect the development and use of technologies (11,12)
* Apply precautionary, safe, and supportive interpersonal strategies and communications, both face-to-face and digital (11,12)
* Identify and assess the skills needed, individually or collaboratively, in relation to projects, and develop plans to refine them over time (11,12)

# **Context: American Diners**

Described by the BBC as “The Ultimate Symbol of America”, the American diner has existed in some form since the 1870s. They started out as night lunch wagons, for the working class in Providence, Rhode Island created to feed those who were out past 8PM. It was viewed as a “middle ground” for men of all social classes. People would be able to order coffee, sandwiches, and pie any time they wanted, and for relatively low prices. The first permanent diner was created in 1913 by Jerry O’Mahony who created the infrastructure and would ship them all around the country. These diners started to create the famous iconography that we now associate with the American Diner today with their neon signs, steel walls, and colorful stripes.

During WWI, the 1920s, and WWII, diners began to rebrand to increase business and market to its newest customer base: women and families of the men who had left to fight in the wars. To create a softer, more welcoming environment, business owners would repaint the outside of the diner, add shrubs and flower boxes, and even include the word “Miss” in the name of the establishment.

By the late 1950’s diners were at their height of popularity, with over 5000 diners operating in America. The diner slowly transformed from a space for the working class to a space for the middle class, losing its roots as a space for lower income and working-class people as the prices increased and the spaces changed. The architecture of diners differentiated itself from other restaurants because according to Richard Gutman, author of *American Diner Then and Now, “*They were built by Italian tile-setters and marble-workers, by German sheet metal workers, and French-Canadian carpenters. It was a melting pot of these different cultures to produce a building that is uniquely American."

This melting pot however, seemed to only include certain cultures and people. Up until 1964, racial segregation against Black people was still written in law across the country, especially in the American South. Despite having the reputation of a place for *everyone*, women, BIPOC communities/People of the Global Majority, Queer people and anyone who didn’t fit the Eurocentric ideal were typically unwelcome and made to feel uncomfortable when at a diner.

Due to that change, as time moved into the 70’s the diners started losing traction as chain and fast-food restaurants gained popularity for their cheap, quick and reliable meals. White diner owners would sell their restaurants to newer immigrants and other People of the Global Majority who would incorporate their own cultural cuisine to try to get more business in an aspect of the food industry that food could not reach.

As the people who frequented diners as youth who grew up and became disillusioned with the lives they were living, the “American diner” became an idealized version of what they were. The architecture, which was an economic choice at the time, became an aspirational aesthetic rather than what people could afford. The diners played and even exaggerated the “retro” aspect of their business and became a marketing tactic of the businesses. Today, a diner is typically thought of as an occasional vintage experience to enjoy with friends, but it is no longer the working class or family staple it once was.

# **Context:** **Adaption, From the Silver Screen to the Broadway Stage**

“We all really wanted to preserve her legacy and her vision,” Sara Bareilles, stated ahead of the musical’s 2019 London debut, speaking of the late Adrienne Shelly’s original film that would inspire the stage musical.

*Waitress* started as a 2007 American comedy drama written and directed by Adrienne Shelly, an American film actress, screenwriter, and director. The film premiered at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, less than 3 months after Shelly’s life was brutally cut short during a robbery attempt gone wrong.

Days before her murder, Shelly had been waiting to hear back from Sundance and had joked with her producer, Michael Roiff, that they should be sending the Sundance judges pies so they didn’t have to make a decision on a empty stomach. Although the film had already been accepted by the judges, Shelly would not live to hear the news, and *Waitress* would premiere without her in January 2007.

*'Seeing Waitress at Sundance was an emotional experience. The typical format for the festival is that the director is introduced to say a few words before the film begins. It was painful from the beginning to see that there was no director to introduce the film, since Adrienne had passed away. So, the producer and Adrienne's husband Andy talked about how it had been Adrienne's dream to have a film at Sundance. It was very poignant.'*

* Nancy Utley, COO at Fox Searchlight

*Waitress* received positive reviews and went on to win five awards while receiving many more nominations. After her death, Shelly’s husband established the Adrienne Shelly Foundation. This non-profit organization focuses on supporting female filmmakers through scholarships, production grants, finishing funds, living stipends and more. The Women’s Film Critics Circle also created the Adrienne Shelly Award, which is given annually to the film that “most passionately opposes violence against women”.

In 2013, work began on a stage adaptation of the indie film, eventually premiering in 2015 with **Broadway’s first all female production team.**

The team included Diane Paulus (Director), Sara Bareilles (Composer & Lyricist), Jessie Nelson (Book), and Lorin Latarro (Choreographer). During the musical’s creation, Jessie Nelson worked with Andy Ostroy, Adrienne Shelly’s husband, to bring Shelly’s voice to the piece, as if she was another collaborator in the room. Ostroy even invited Nelson to look over his late wife’s unfinished manuscripts as she adapted the screenplay for the stage. In an interview with the BBC, Bareilles stated how she was drawn to the eccentricity and “messiness” of Shelly’s romantic comedy and “did a lot of talking to Adrienne” while writing the musical’s score.

“We really wanted to honour the essence of what she made and make her presence and contribution known,” said Bareilles.

# **Context: Domestic and Gender-Based Violence**

Underneath the sugary pies and sweet tunes, the underlying setting of *Waitress* is a home with domestic abuse. The audience also learns throughout the musical that Jenna’s mother also experienced spousal abuse which Jenna witnessed growing up. Jenna’s relationship with Earl mirrors her parents’ relationship while highlighting the intergenerational cycle of intimate partner violence.

The United Nations defines “Domestic violence” or “Domestic abuse” as any pattern of behaviour that is used to gain or maintain power over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, or psychological. **Anyone can be a victim of domestic violence, regardless of age, race, gender, sexual orientation, faith, or class.** *Waitress* specifically delves into gender-based violence, which is type of abuse experienced by women, girls, and Two-Spirit, trans and non-binary people.

Gender-based violence in Canada is a complex issue which often causes shame, guilt, and isolation for survivors. More than 4 in 10 women in Canada have experienced some form of intimate partner violence during their lifetime. Despite its severe impacts, it is estimated 80% of people who experience domestic violence will not report it.

As children, we learn many things from our families like values, habits and character. Whether we are taught directly by caregivers or we pick these traits up by observation, this knowledge has a deep impact on our lives. Our relationships and the way we handle situations all stem from the interactions we experience with our families.

When there is violence in a home, abusive behavior becomes the standard for relationships.

-Kayla Woody, CPN House of Hope Prevention Specialist, *“Intergenerational Cycle of Abuse”.*

The United Nations defines

**The inside of the wheel is subtler, continual behaviours that often take place over a longer period.**

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The Power and Control wheel is a diagram/tool that assists in the understanding of abusive and violent behaviours. It was created by the staff at the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (DAIP) with the input of focus groups and the stories of countless survivors to develop the sections of the wheel. The Power and Control wheel specifically represents the experiences of women versus a broader understanding of all violence in the home. This model interrogates men’s (in the case of *Waitress*, Earl’s behaviour) use of violence against women as learned and then reinforced through many social, cultural, and institutional systems.

*“Wait a minute. What if you start to love the baby more than you love me? Women do it all the time. They have a baby and then to hell with the man.”*

* Earl, *Waitress*

**The outside of the wheel represents physical and sexual violence.**

# It’s easy to simply question survivors about why they “didn’t just leave”. The Canadian Women’s Foundation offers the following reasons a survivor may not leave…

* **The most dangerous time for an abuse survivor is when they attempt to leave their abuser.** Women are six times more likely to be killed by an ex-partner and many women report violence escalates following the breakup.
* 60% of police reported violence happens **after** the relationship has ended.
* Domestic abuse can carry over into the workplace, threatening women’s ability to maintain economic independence, separate of their partner. This results in survivors being financially dependent on their partners.
  + 1.5 million women in Canada live on low-income.
  + 1 in 5 single mothers in Canada live on a low income
* Their immigration status may be dependent on their abuser, or their first language is not English, so reaching out for help becomes more challenging.
* **Women may stay if they grew up in a family where abuse was normal,** making it more challenging to identify an abusive relationship.

**CAL**

Why doesn’t your damn husband buy you a car already?

**JENNA**

Because he doesn’t want me goin’ nowhere.

*Waitress*, Act 1, Scene 3

# During the creation of *Waitress*, Jessie Nelson (book writer) worked with several psychologists and SAVI (the Mount Sinai Sexual Assault and Violence Intervention Program). Nelson aimed to create a realistic story for Earl that worked against the one-dimensional portrayals of abusers she often saw on theatre stages. In an interview with Playbill, Nelson stated “What SAVI taught me that is so important to our story is that [people like Earl] are so unhappy that they kind of chip away at your confidence because that’s threatening to them. *Waitress*shows that the strength you need to extricate yourself from that relationship is the very thing that’s been taken away from you by being in the relationship.”

**Everyone has the right to be safe and free from violence**. If you or someone you know has experienced gender-based violence, abuse in an intimate relationship, or domestic violence, see our resources on page 23.

# **Pre-show Discussion Questions**

1. Have you ever seen a live performance before? Have you ever seen a live adaptation before?
   1. What are your expectations going into this performance?
2. Are you familiar with Sara Bareilles and her music? How do you think this will influence your perspective of the show?
   1. How do you think the music of this show differs from other musicals?
3. What do you know about baking? What role do you think this activity will play throughout the piece?
4. Do you think people can change their circumstances when they are stuck in a bad situation? Why or why not?
5. What does a support system mean to you?

# **Post-show Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think the message of the show is? What is your takeaway?
2. How does the music and musical choices of Waitress impact the story? Does the music reveal anything about the narrative?
3. Theatre often tackles difficult and complex topics. Waitress dives into female friendship, infidelity, and domestic violence. Do you think the production effectively conveyed these issues? Why or why not?
4. Was there anything that stuck out to you about the show? Was there anything you didn’t understand?

**Activity #1: Bake a Feelings Pie like Jenna!**

*Suggested for English 10/11/12 and Culinary Arts 10/11/12 classes*

***Goal****: Increase students emotional awareness, critical thinking, and empathy building skills through relating emotions to a tangible object (e.g a pie).*

Throughout *Waitress,* Jenna has asides with the audience where she bakes a pie that represents her inner emotions (e.g. “I Don’t Want Earl’s Baby pie”). In this activity participants will explore how baking ingredients can be representations of cultural identity, religious symbolism, different belief systems and manifestations, emotional connections, and even personality traits by designing (and maybe even baking!) their own creation.

**Part 1: Research and Creation**

1. Students can work individually or work in groups of up to four. They can pick a character from the musical Waitress, or for English classes, students are invited to create a pie based on a character from the literature they’ve been reading in the course (e.g. Ophelia from *Hamlet*, Macbeth from *Macbeth*, etc.).
2. Get them to pick a scene or moment that their character experiences. From there have them begin to design and title a pie themed around that moment.
   1. Have students research different associations behind certain ingredients. Some fruits are associated with luck, knowledge, new beginnings, and love. Spices also can also have symbolic meanings, like cinnamon which is said to represent protection, prosperity, or healing
   2. The ingredients don’t need to be good! Students are invited to find other food symbolism that best fits what they are trying to express.
   3. Also consider **the amount** of each ingredient goes into the pie and what that will mean for how the taste/theme/flavour/aesthetic of the pie.
3. Once participants have an idea of what they want to create, have them design their pie. A sheet below has been included which contains an illustration a pie that can be printed and decorated, along with a “pie chart” where participants can further explain the measurements of ingredients.
4. Once they have completed their pie designs, have them title it with a signature pie name!

**Part 2 *(optional):***

1. For Culinary Arts classes, invite your students to bake their pies! Included below is a pie crust recipe that can be used.

**KEY INGREDIENTS**

Flour

Cold Butter

Salt

Sugar

Cold Water

[INSPIRED TASTE RECIPE HERE](https://www.inspiredtaste.net/22662/flaky-pie-crust-recipe/)

**Part 3: Reflection**

1. Let students reflect on what they’ve learned. This can be done in pairs, small groups, or a larger class discussion depending on classroom needs/interest.
   1. Why did you pick the ingredients you did? How do these ingredients represent your chosen character?
   2. What was the most surprising or interesting thing you discovered while researching food symbolism?
   3. What was the purpose of Jenna baking throughout the show? What does baking mean to you?

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# **Activity #2: Pitch An Adaptation!**

*Suggested for English 10-12, Drama 10-12 , Musical Theatre 10-2, and Film Studies 10-12*

***Goal:*** *Improve students research, writing, and presentational skills while increasing their greater perception of arts and culture.*

*Waitress* originally started as a 2007 indie comedy drama film, written by Adrienne Shelly. It was later adapted as a musical in 2015. In this activity students will be researching smaller, independent movies or stories, and pitching its musical adaptation. Students are invited to consider how a composer can influence the narrative while keeping true to the heart of the story.

**Part 1: Research**

1. Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups.
2. Have them pick a small, relatively unknown movie or story they would be interested in adapting as a musical. If there is limited time, teachers are welcome to assign each group a movie.
3. Have them research the original film, along with different composers/bands/musical artists that they think fit the style of the show.
4. From here, have them pick their “team” for the show. This can include a director, composer, playwright, choreographer, etc.

**Part 2: Creation and Presentation**

1. Get students to create a formal pitch, infomercial, or pitch package about their adaptation! This can be done in many formats (Sketch/skit, formal presentation, flyer, pamphlet, PowerPoint, set design, etc.)
   1. The pitch must include…
      1. **Three members** of the artistic team.
      2. **A sample of the style of music** you would like in the adaptation.
      3. **One mood board** describing the aesthetic of their musical.
      4. **One fun fact** about the original film.
      5. **Three reasons why this adaptation is needed now.**
2. Have students present their pitches! This can be done in small groups or to the whole class.

**Part 3: Reflection**

1. Reflect on the following questions.
   1. What stuck out while others were pitching? Were there any images, feelings, or choices that you were excited about?
   2. What was difficult about adapting an original story? Did you enjoy it?
      1. Why or why not?
   3. Why do you think there has been an explosion of adaptations in the last few years?
   4. What do you think makes a good adaptation?

# **Resources:**

**Salal Sexual Violence Support Centre**

Salal provides immediate crisis assistance and emotional support, information, and referrals 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The crisis line is free and confidential.  Salal SVSC’s 24-Hour Crisis & Information Line is the official Gender-Based Violence Crisis Line of BC.

**24 hour crisis and information line:**

**Lower Mainland:** 604-255-6344

**National Toll Free:** 1-877-392-7583

**Salal Connect**

Salal connect is a text and online chat support tool that allows survivors sexualized violence to receive accessible and confidential crisis support. This service is an extension of our crisis line and we are able to provide emotional support, referrals to community resources, and information on Salal’s services. Our text and online chat service is available Monday-Friday 9am to 5pm.

**Texting: (604)-245-2425**

**Website:** <https://www.salalsvsc.ca/connect/>

**Indigenous Support/Counselling:**

Salal’s no cost Indigenous Counselling Program provides short to mid-term one-to-one counselling for Indigenous people of marginalized genders. Including trans and cis women, trans men, non-binary, and Two Spirit individuals (peoples) seeking health, safety, and wellbeing. Indigenous Survivors can access free counselling by calling Salal at **604-255-6344** or toll free at **1-877-392-7583.**

**Website:** <https://www.salalsvsc.ca/indigenous-support-programs/>

**VictimLink BC**

VictimLink BC provides information and referral services to all victims of crime and immediate crisis support to victims of family and sexual violence, including victims of human trafficking exploited for labour or sexual services.

VictimLinkBC staff can connect you to a network of community, social, health, justice and government resources, including victim services, transition houses and counselling resources. They also provide information on the justice system, relevant federal and provincial legislation and programs, crime prevention, safety planning, [protection order registry](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/crime-prevention/protection-order-registry) and other resources as needed*.*

**Call or text:** 1-800-563-0808

**Email:** [VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca](mailto:VictimLinkBC@bc211.ca)

**Website:** https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/justice/criminal-justice/victims-of-crime/victimlinkbc

**Battered Women’s Support Services**

BWSS offers immediate, short-term help to survivors of violence in intimate relationships, childhood sexual abuse and adult sexual assault.

**Crisis + intake line:** 1-855-687-1868

**Email:** [intake@bwss.org](mailto:intake@bwss.org)

**Website:** <https://www.bwss.org/support/crisis-support/>

**DISTRESS HELPLINES**

If you are in a crisis, distress, or having thoughts of suicide, help is available. If there is an urgent safety concern, please call 9-1-1 or go to the emergency room at your nearest hospital.

9-8-8 National Suicide Crisis Helpline

Anywhere in BC 1-800-SUICIDE: 1-800-784-2433

Mental Health Support Line: 310-6789

Vancouver Coastal Regional Distress Line: 604-872-3311

**Additional and External Resources**

* [**YWCA Violence Prevention Programs**](https://ywcavan.org/programs/violence-prevention)
* [**WorkSafe BC Domestic Violence Resources**](C://Users/mpage/Downloads/domestic_violence_resource_list-pdf-en%20(2).pdf)

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