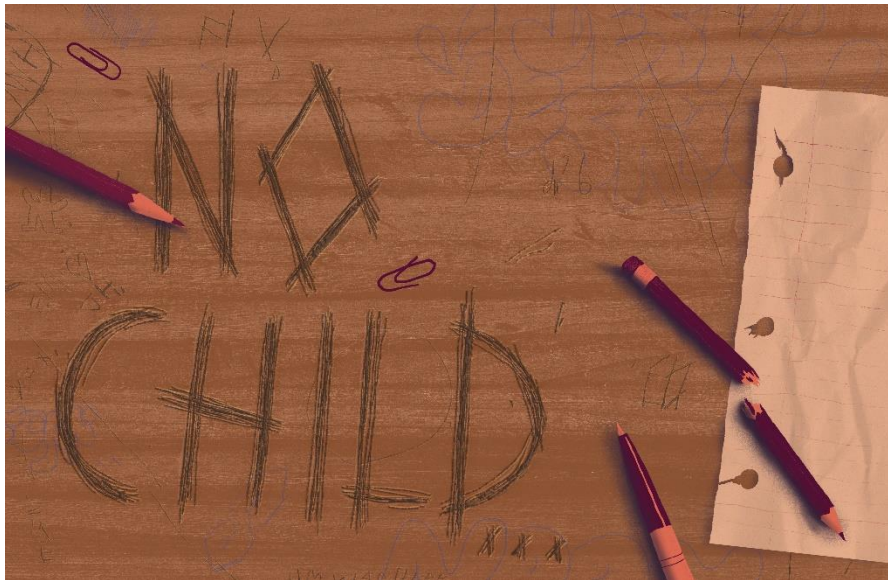




TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE



No Child...

By Nilaja Sun

2020.21 Season
Newmont Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre

SEPTEMBER 24–NOVEMBER 8, 2020

SPONSORED BY



Contents

Welcome	2
About the Arts Club Theatre Company	2
Keywords	3
Learning objectives	3
Synopsis: No Child	3-4
Characters list	4
Discussion Questions	4-5
Activity One: A Play-Within-a-Play	5-7
Activity Two: Transcending Academic Boundaries – Teaching Multiple Subjects through Drama	7-8
Sources	8

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 & Outreach Associate, Hila Graf, at hgraf@artsclub.com.

This study guide was written by Kevan Ellis and Hila Graf

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 57th 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

Keywords

* One-person show

* Drama Education

*A play-within-a-play

*Public School System

*Students and Teachers

*BIPOC communities

Learning objectives

After viewing *No Child...*, while working through the following activities, students will:

- Explore the process and impact of drama education
- Interact with the challenges of systemic racism in US and Canadian public schools
- Explore the form of a one-person show

Synopsis: *No Child...* by Nilaja Sun

Jackson Baron Copeford, a janitor at Malcolm X High School, introduces himself as the story's narrator. Setting the scene for the arrival of Ms. Sun, the protagonist, Baron mentions the school is situated in the poorest congressional district in the U.S., in the Bronx, where metal detectors and academically challenged youth share the space equally.

Before class, Ms. Sun has a conversation with her landlord about her late rent. She is about to teach a six-week workshop on *Our Country's Good*, a play about convicts putting on the play *The Recruiting Officer*. Ms. Tam, a newly appointed teacher, introduces Ms. Sun to her English class of foul-mouthed Grade 10 students.

Mrs. Kennedy, the principal, has booked their school's auditorium for the play's performance. Lessons begin: Ms. Sun teaches students to use theatrical techniques, like Method acting and vocal projection, to bring out the play's themes. She also privately muses on her choice of play, wondering if subconscious bias had resulted in her selection.

Baron reflects on being the first black janitor at the school, and the long history it has had through the political history of the U.S., from the pristine institution that it once was to the neglected structure it has become.

Ms. Tam quit after her bag was stolen, replaced by a new teacher, Mrs. Projensky. Jerome, a student in the class, acts out in response to this and flings chairs in anger. He incites classmates not to perform the play; two others, Phillip and Chris, still want to. Ms. Sun quits, saddened that she cannot help kids in the city she grew up in.

Jerome apologizes to Ms. Sun by proving he had his part memorized; she has a change of heart and returns. The class gets a new teacher, Mr. Johnson, who has managed to keep order. It is discovered that Baron had suffered a heart attack and died in his janitorial closet. He revels in his role as a dead narrator.

Ms. Sun tries to contact Jose, a student who has been absent; his grandmother reveals his brother had been killed by gangs. It is opening night of the play: Jerome can't perform last minute due to babysitting obligations, so Phillip offers to take his part. Jose makes it in time.

The show is a success. Jerome finally makes it but is too late; as he will repeat his grade regardless, he can be under Ms. Sun's tutelage again. Baron narrates the future fate of students and teachers in an epilogue.

Characters List

JANITOR BARON — 80s, narrator
MS. SUN — 30s, teaching artist
MS. TAM — 20s, teacher
COCA — 16, student
JEROME — 18, student
BRIAN — 16, student
SHONDRIKA — 16, student
XIOMARA — 16, student
JOSE — 17, student
CHRIS — 15, student
MRS. KENNEDY — school principal
SECURITY GUARD— Any age
PHILLIP — 16, student
MRS. PROJENSKY — Substitute teacher
MR. JOHNSON — Teacher
DOÑA GUZMAN — 70s, grandmother to Jose Guzman

Discussion Questions

These questions can be used as writing prompts, as well as prompts for group discussions.

Pre-show discussion questions:

The following questions have been included to spark discussions and to get students thinking about what they might experience prior to viewing the production.

- What do you already know about the play, including the plot, the characters, and the production elements (such as lighting, sound, costumes, and sets)? How do you anticipate that these elements will come together in the play?
- What acting techniques do you anticipate seeing in the play? How do you think the actor will be able to shift between all the characters she will portray?
- Examine the name of the play. Based on the name, what do you think the play will be about and why?

Post-show discussion questions:

The following questions are ideal for engaging students in reflection and exploration of the major themes, characters, and other elements of the production.

- What ideas or themes did the play make you think about?

- How did the technical elements of the show contribute to the story?
- Imagine that you could meet with members of the cast, crew, artistic team, or production team. What questions would you ask them about the choices made and elements used in the production?

Activity One: A Play-Within-a-Play

(Recommended for use in Drama Classes 10–12)

Rationale

No Child... uses the format of a play-within-a-play (within a play): it is a **play** about a teaching artist working on a **play** with high school students, which is about a group of prisoners rehearsing a **play** called *Our Country's Good*. A play-within-a-play is a well-known storytelling and theatre format—it is used in Shakespeare plays such as *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, in realistic plays such as Chekov's *The Seagull*, and in popular musicals and comedies like *A Chorus Line*, *Funny Girl*, and *Noises Off*.

This technique in art is also called **mise en abyme** (pronounced mee-zan-nah-BEEM), a French term which refers to an 'image-within-an image':



Photo by Emily Youlton

Using mise en abyme as a narrative strategy (a story within a story, a play within a play), creates an interesting mirroring effect, presents the characters in a parallel context, and can also be a way to examine art and storytelling thematically as part of a piece of art.

Key Questions

- What is the concept of a play-within-a-play?
- Where can we find this concept in other mediums?
- What is the effect this concept creates?

Lesson 1

1. Choose a character from a play you know.
2. Design a costume for this character and take a photo of yourself as the character.
3. Use your chosen digital or none-digital tool to design this photo as a mise en abyme—a photo within a photo. Make artistic choices and consider. What concept or frame connects the images? For example: is the character looking in an endless mirror or holding a photo or a newspaper? Think of the character's traits and the context of the play as you make these decisions.

Debrief

- What effects do mise en abyme and a play-within-a-play create?
- What did you learn about the character or the play from using this practice?

Lesson 2

1. Choose a medium (play, musical, opera, film, Instagram post, news report).
2. Create a piece in the relevant medium in the form of mise en abyme—that means the medium and form will match the content. For example, if you choose Instagram as your **medium**, you will create an IG post in which the **content** is about IG. If you choose opera, you will create a short opera scene that is about creating/performing/rehearsing an opera.
3. Present in class.

Debrief

- What were the advantages and challenges in using the medium you chose?
- What was the impact of using the mise en abyme form?
- What would be different if the content did not match the medium? (e.g. a film about a teaching artist working with a student on a play).

CONNECTIONS TO THE BC CURRICULUM

Drama (10 - 12)

- Develop a repertoire of dramatic skills and techniques through presentation or performance
- Experiment with a range of props, processes, and technologies
- Purposely select and combine dramatic elements and conventions

Activity Two: Transcending Academic Boundaries – Teaching Multiple Subjects through Drama

(Recommended for use in Drama Classes 10–12)

Rationale

In the play *No Child...*, the students learn more about their classmates, their environment, and themselves through the use of drama. The work of learning roles, lines, and preparing themselves to perform for their peers leads to transcendent moments for the students involved. This play illustrates the important role that drama can play in helping us understand each other and ourselves, particularly in challenging environments.

Key Questions

- What role can drama play in teaching and learning other subjects outside the drama classroom?
- Are there ways to help students in their comprehension of other areas of study by using drama activities and role playing?
- What kind of activities can we use to accomplish this?

Instructions

The teacher starts this activity by identifying a drama activity that can be used to teach the class a concept that may be unrelated to drama. Here are some brief examples:

Social Studies: Learning about the Treaty of Versailles. Have the students do a character development exercise by analyzing the motivation and stakes that are involved for the main world leaders who participated. Then have these characters interact with their arguments in the setting of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

Math: Choose a word problem math equation. Is there a way to act the problem out as a scene? Can aspects of the equation be represented by the students in different ways (students as numbers as well as the students representing the characters in the word problem)? Example - “Julie went on a picnic with friends. She brought 100 cherries to share with her friends. When she left the picnic, she still had

50 cherries left uneaten. If Julie shared her cherries equally with her 10 friends, how many cherries did each friend get?"

After demonstrating some examples, have the students think about what subjects that they would like to use to demonstrate lessons for the next class. Perhaps encourage students to choose lessons that they found hard when they initially learned them to see how effective it is teaching the same lesson as a drama exercise.

Have select students work out how to present the lesson through role-playing, rehearse with small groups, then perform these scenes for the class.

Debrief

- Did this process help with grasping the concepts that were taught? If so, how?
- Did this process work the same for each subject, or were there certain presentations that worked better than others in terms of coming away from the exercise with greater comprehension?
- How subjective was this exercise in terms of the levels of success?

CONNECTIONS TO THE BC CURRICULUM

Drama (10–12)

- Explore and create dramatic works to express ideas and emotion
- Develop performance skills in a variety of contexts
- Examine the influences of social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal context on drama
- Purposefully select and combine dramatic elements and conventions
- Examine the impacts of dramatic works on culture and society

Sources

Curriculum Documents:

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/arts-education/10/drama>

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/arts-education/11/drama>

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/arts-education/12/drama>

Other resources:

<https://mymovielab.com/blog/film-video-production-with-mise-en-abyme-technique/>

<http://www.hesherman.com/2011/01/03/an-awful-lot-of-plays-musicals-about-theatre/>