

Arts Club Theatre Company

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE
The Orchard (After Chekhov)
2018/2019 Season



Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

MARCH 21 – APRIL 21, 2019

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Contents

Welcome	1
About the Arts Club Theatre Company	1
Learning objectives.....	2
Connections to New BC Curriculum	2
About <i>The Orchard (After Chekhov)</i>	4
Meet the Playwright – Sarena Parmar	5
Characters.....	5
Discussion Questions	6
Activity 1: Exploring Identity – A Role Playing Exercise	7
Activity 2: Family History – A Writing Prompt	7
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 the theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our group sales representative at 604.687.5315 ext. 253 or groups@artsclub.com.

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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 55th 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 Goldcorp 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 <http://artsclub.com/>

Learning objectives

After viewing *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* and completing the following activities, students will be able to:

- Think critically and creatively about representations of ethnicity, class, and gender on stage
- Reflect upon the nature of their own identities, as well as the identities of characters in the play
- Discuss and write about adaptation in the theatre from both a critical and a creative perspective
- Discuss and write about Trudeau-era multiculturalism—and its pertinence to today’s new-Trudeau-era multiculturalism—from a critical perspective

Connections to New BC Curriculum

Arts Education – Drama (11)

Big Ideas

- Individual and collective expression is founded on the history, culture, community, and value system in which that expression exists
- Drama offers dynamic ways of exploring and sharing one’s identity and sense of belonging
- Ideas and beliefs conveyed through drama can effect change in the actor, audience, and the environment

Curricular Competencies

- *Exploring and creating:* Demonstrate increasingly sophisticated application of dramatic elements, vocabulary, conventions, and skills through presentation or performance; Demonstrate creative thinking and innovation in drama using ideas inspired by exploration, imagination, and inquiry; Create personally meaningful work that demonstrates an understanding of contexts
- *Reasoning and reflecting:* Use appropriate terminology to describe, analyze, interpret, and respond to how props, materials, technologies, processes, techniques, and environments are used; Develop awareness of self and audience; Apply critical, creative, and reflective thinking skills in the exploration, design, creation, and refinement of performances
- *Communicating and documenting:* Document, share, and respond to creative works and experiences in a variety of ways and contexts; Express personal voice, cultural identity, perspectives, and values through dramatic techniques in a variety of environments; Demonstrate respect for self, others, and the audience in order to maintain a safe environment; Use drama to communicate and respond to environmental and social issues
- *Connecting and expanding:* Reflect on personal voice, story, and values in connection with a specific place, time, and context; Expand skills, processes, and inquiries by making connections with family, community, and the world; Explore ways in which cultures and society impact drama

English Language Arts – Literary Studies (11)

Big Ideas

- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world
- People understand text differently depending on their worldviews and perspectives

- Questioning what we hear, read, and view contributes to our ability to be educated and engaged citizens

Curricular Competencies

- *Comprehend and connect:* Access information for diverse purposes and from a variety of sources; Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts; Recognize and understand personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in texts, including culture, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status
- *Create and communicate:* Respectfully exchange ideas and viewpoints from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking; Respond to text in personal, creative, and critical ways; Demonstrate speaking and listening skills in a variety of formal and informal contexts for a range of purposes

Social Studies – Explorations in Social Studies (11)

Big Ideas

- Understanding the diversity and complexity of cultural expressions in one culture enhances our understanding of other cultures
- Understanding how political decisions are made is critical to being an informed and engaged citizen

Curricular Competencies

- Assess the significance of people, places, events, phenomena, ideas, or developments
- Infer and explain different perspectives on people, places, events, phenomena, ideas, or developments
- Make reasoned ethical judgements about people, places, events, phenomena, ideas, or developments

About *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*

Setting

The play is set in 1974 on the Basran family orchard in the Okanagan Valley. Between some of the scenes, “Orchard Interludes” take place. These are dreamlike flashbacks to (or memories of) various points in the 1960s, when the orchard was thriving and Griesha, Loveleen’s youngest child, was still alive. These interludes are characterized by a diffuse, unearthly light.

Synopsis

The titular orchard, a fertile plot of land located in the Okanagan Valley, has been in the possession of the Basran family for approximately 60 years. The Basrans are a Sikh immigrant family of Indian descent who have made their livelihood as orchardists, but are now finding it difficult to survive on the depleting profits of the orchard. Moreover, because of the “Land Freeze” of the early 1970s, they are unable to sell the orchard for a decent profit.

This is the tricky situation in which Loveleen finds her family when, at the start of the play, she makes her long-awaited return. Ever since her youngest son, Griesha, drowned five years before, Loveleen has been away in India. While abroad, she has been mysteriously out of touch with the family; her daughter, Annie, recently travelled overseas to find her mother and bring her home. Loveleen shares ownership of the land with her brother, Gurjit, and their family and employees occupy the orchard alongside the cherries and the peaches. There’s Annie; Barminder, their niece, whose mother remains in India; Kesur, their aged father; and their workers: Yash, who is South Asian, Yebi and Donna, who are Japanese, and Charlie, who is Indigenous. Also on the scene are the self-made businessman, Michael, who is an old family friend; Peter, a perpetual student who used to tutor Loveleen’s deceased son; and Paul, who owns the neighbouring property. These characters and their roles correspond with their counterparts in Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*. Details such as Michael’s last name, Lopakhin, tip the hat to Chekhov’s originals, while deliberately chosen deviations—such as recasting Chekhov’s critique of class relations as a critique of race/ethnic relations—make the play Parmar’s own.

Not only the characters, but also the plot and subplots of *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*, map neatly onto the earlier play. Everything from the difficult family dynamics to the ill-fated romances resonate with Chekhov’s original. Just like Chekhov’s, Parmar’s characters dither over how to rescue the orchard or, indeed, whether it wouldn’t be better to sell it entirely. They scrape together what little they can and scheme to save the place. They argue and dream of happier times and ignore the advice of their friend, Michael, who urges them to convert the orchard to profitable RV plots (whereas in the Chekhov, Lopakhin suggest summer cottages). Finally, they throw a party they can’t afford and Loveleen makes a decision. It’s no spoiler to anyone acquainted with the original to say that Parmar’s adaptation ends the same way—albeit, with somewhat altered thematic implications as a result of her unique treatment of land ownership and ethnicity.

Meet the Playwright – Sarena Parmar



Sarena Parmar was born in Prince George, raised in Kelowna, B.C., and later went on to graduate from The National Theatre School of Canada in Quebec. Her family is originally from Punjab, India. She has extensive film, television, and theatre acting credits. *The Orchard (After Chekhov)* has been developed over numerous years, and premiered at the Shaw Festival in June 2018. Sarena's plays have been workshopped at Cahoots Theatre, Summerworks, WhyNot Theatre, and Theatre in Her Shoes. Recently her play *Venus Rising* was produced at the Social Capital's Short Short Play Festival. Sarena is a recipient of the Elliot Hayes Playwright Development Fund awarded by the Stratford Festival. Recent acting credits include: *Winter's Tale* (Groundling Theatre), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Tarragon Theatre), *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (Stratford Festival).

Characters

Loveleen: Loveleen has been in India for 5 years, ever since her son and husband died. She shares the land ownership with her brother. Her nicknames are Lallie or Lovely.

Gurjit: Loveleen's brother. Gurjit and Loveleen share land ownership of the orchard. His nickname is Gus, and he loves cards.

Annie: Annie is Loveleen's daughter; she is the darling of the family.

Barminder: Barminder (nickname Barbra) is the niece of Loveleen and Gurjit. Her mother still lives in India.

Kesur: Father of Loveleen and Gurjit, in his 80's.

Michael: Michael is a self-made business man and an old family acquaintance of the Basrans.

Peter: Peter is a family friend of the Basrans and used to be Griesha's tutor.

Charlie: Charlie is a fruit picker for the Basrans.

Yash: The son of a family friend of the Basrans. He helps around the orchard and travelled with Loveleen to India.

Donna: She works for the Basrans in their fruit stand, and her Japanese name is Sanae.

Yebi: A handyman and fruit picker for the Basrans.

Paul: A family friend of the Basrans. He owns the neighbouring field.

Griesha: The youngest child of Loveleen; he drowned six years ago.

Freddie: Paul's brother.

Boy

Discussion Questions

These questions can be used as writing prompts, as well as prompts for small-group and large-group discussions.

Pre-show discussion questions:

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

- Have you seen any live performances on stage before? What are your expectations about what you will see on stage in this production?
- What do you already know about the play, including the plot, production elements (such as lighting, sound, costumes, and sets) and the characters? How do you anticipate that these elements will come together in the play?
- What do you know about the play, *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov? What aspects and/or elements of Chekhov's work might be apparent in this production?
- The play is set in 1970s Okanagan Valley area, after Pierre Trudeau's 1971 Multiculturalism Act was passed. How do you think that this context will inform the events in the play?
- Have you ever been faced with a very difficult decision? What was the situation, and how did you feel? How did you make your decision, and do you feel that it was the right choice?

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?
- What did you notice about the ways in which the characters communicated with one another?
- What did you notice about the ways in which the characters displayed their emotions?
- What did you think about the technical elements of the production: which elements stood out to you the most, and why? What effects did this have on your understanding of the play?
- 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 and elements in the production?
- What did you observe about the representations of ethnicity, class, and gender on the stage?
- What connections can you make between this play and Chekhov's play, *The Cherry Orchard*? What similarities and differences did you notice in terms of the plot and the characters?
- What do you remember about the "Orchard Interludes" (the dreamlike flashbacks) in the play? What effect did this have on your understanding of the characters and the story?
- Are there any particular characters that you can relate to? How so?
- Loveleen faces a difficult decision. What elements were contributing to this difficult situation? How does her family react, and what are their perspectives and opinions on the situation?

Activity 1: Exploring Identity – A Role Playing Exercise

Step One: Clear a large, accessible space. Ask your students to stand, sit, or lie on the floor with their eyes closed—whatever is most comfortable for them. Read them the following instructions:

Imagine your childhood bedroom. Maybe it is the same bedroom you're living in now, or maybe you've moved since and you can no longer go back to that place. What does it look like? What does it smell like? How does it feel to be in the space? What kind of furniture do you have? Is it brightly or dimly lit? Is it clean, or messy? Do you have many possessions in the space? What are they? Is your bedroom a private space, or a space you share with others?

Step Two: Ask your students to open their eyes. Ask them to write a short character description about the person that lives in their bedroom. It might be themselves, or, if they wish, it might be a fictionalized version of themselves: whatever they are comfortable with.

Step Three: Ask your students to trade their written character descriptions with each other. They are now responsible for a new character, a new bedroom, and a new experience. They are to turn the experience of this character into a short monologue, 50-100 words long.

Step Four: Finally, they are to perform these monologues (with an optional rehearsal time in-between). As audience members, the students are to see if they can recognize the monologues inspired by their own reflections.

Step Five: Facilitate a discussion for your students about the importance of place, belonging, and family influence on the creation of a person's identity. Ask them to relate it to those themes in *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*—with an optional written reflection afterwards.

Activity 2: Family History – A Writing Prompt

Step One: Ask students to reflect on their family histories. Where did they grow up? What is the history of their immediate and/or extended families? What is their ethnic background? How did they come to call themselves Canadian?

Step Two: Then, ask them to consider what would happen if all of their fortunes were reversed: if they had grown up somewhere else; if they had been born into a different family; if they were of a different ethnicity; if they were not Canadians. Would they still be the same person? Why or why not? How does one's personal and familial story—and one's place of belonging—inform one's identity?

Step Three: Finally, in light of these reflection questions, ask the students to think once more about what happens to the Basrans—and, alternatively, to Michael—in *The Orchard (After Chekhov)*. Do they see the events of the play in a different light? Why or why not?

Sources

Curriculum Documents

British Columbia Ministry of Education: "Arts Education: Drama 9." (n.d.): n.pag. Web.

British Columbia Ministry of Education: "Social Studies 9." (n.d.): n.pag. Web.

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