

Study Guide for *Perfect Storm*



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Introduction

Geordie Theatre is Montreal’s leading English-language professional theatre for audiences of all ages, entertaining and engaging the imaginations of children and their families since 1980! Over the course of eight months, our 2Play tour travels to schools throughout Eastern Canada, from Ottawa to the Magdalen Islands.

Geordie Theatre is located on the unceded Indigenous lands of the Kanien’kehá:ka (Mohawk) nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Tiotià:ke (known as Montréal) has existed as a meeting place of many First Nation peoples, including but not limited to the Abenaki, Anishinaabeg (Algonquin), and the Huron-Wendat. We extend our deepest respect to the elders of these communities and to all Indigenous peoples who carry the history of this island’s land and waters – caring for it and calling it home. We are honoured and privileged to share stories on this land. We wish to also acknowledge that we are grateful to those seeking sustainable solutions to our global climate crisis, so that we may continue to inspire and challenge our audiences near and far.

A note on acknowledging territory: As part of our visit to your community, a Land Acknowledgment is made at the beginning of the performance. This information is researched and customized for each region we visit and derived personally from our touring actors. For more information on indigenous teachings and guiding principles, visit pages 14 and 15 of the guide.

About the Study Guide

This study guide was created as a tool for teachers to help introduce young students to the world of theatre, as well as engage them more deeply with the themes and concepts developed in *Perfect Storm*. The guide contains a synopsis, character and setting information, a summary of the themes and concepts at play, as well as discussion questions and activities that can be implemented in the classroom before and after the performance.

While listed in a suggested order, we invite teachers to adapt activities based on the needs of their classroom and curriculum. The activities include presentations and handouts that are class-ready for easy distribution to students. Additionally, most activities can be adapted to an online-learning platform. Corresponding cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies from the Quebec Education Plan (QEP) are indicated for each lesson plan.

Please refer to the companion Slides document to help prepare your students for the performance.

Note on the Content & Resources

Perfect Storm features a young person, Max, who struggles with perfectionism. Known as “Perfect Girl,” or “PG” amongst her peers, Max feels pressure to perform well both academically and socially. When she starts drama class, a space where there’s no such thing as a perfect answer, but she still needs to be the best, Max becomes increasingly stressed and overwhelmed.

Resources for Supporting Students Dealing with Perfectionism

How to Help Kids Who are Too Hard on Themselves, Child Mind Institute
<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-who-are-too-hard-on-themselves/>

Perfectionism: Helping Handout, National Association of School Psychologists
<https://resources.finalseite.net/images/v1629919416/kcusdcom/kzrjwvqjfutqwye5dw/w9/Perfectionismhandout.pdf>

Self-Assessments for Children and Adults
<https://hewittlab.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2016/03/CHILD-ADOLESCENT-PERFECTIONISM-SCALE.pdf>

https://novopsych.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/fmps_assessment_form.pdf

QEP Competencies

English Language Arts

Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn

Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts

Produces texts for personal and social purposes

Cross-Curricular Competencies

Uses creativity

Cooperates with others

Communicates appropriately

Arts Education - Dramatic Arts Competencies

Creates dramatic works

Appreciates dramatic works

To invent and interpret short scenes

Arts Education - Visual Arts Competencies

To produce individual works in the visual arts

To appreciate works of art, traditional artistic objects, media images, personal productions and those of classmates

Physical Education and Health

To adopt a healthy, active lifestyle

Synopsis

Max and Kelsey have been best friends forever. Max, a perfectionist, is known as “Perfect Girl”, and Kelsey, a bit of a wallflower, is known as “Perfect Girl’s best friend”. Their friendship is challenged in drama class, where their roles are reversed. Kelsey seems to be a budding star, whereas Max can’t even play a basic improv game. It is here that both girls start to recognize their inner competitive voices that can never be satisfied. They think that the only way to satisfy their voices is to be better than their friend and get the spotlight. The tension culminates in a disastrous final play written by their drama teacher, whose dreams of Broadway never came to be. Sitting amongst the wreckage of their ruined play, it is here that Max and Kelsey realize that the only thing getting in the way of their friendship was themselves. They realize that the way to quiet their inner critic is to celebrate the success and specialness of their friend. It’s just that, sometimes, it is really hard to do.

Meet the Characters



Kelsey

Kelsey: Fourth grade student known as “perfect girl’s best friend”

Played by Meenu Atwal



Max

Max: Fourth grade student known as “perfect girl”

Played by Masha Mariia Bashmakova



Mr. B: An aspiring Broadway actor who starred as “the hand” in the 1995 Pepto-Bismol commercial and is now a fourth-grade drama teacher

Played by Sebastian Quint

The Sun and Cloud: Imaginary characters Max, Kelsey, Mr. B, and the audience can see and talk to. The sun appears when a character is happy, and the cloud appears when a character is experiencing difficult emotions.

Settings

An elementary school

- In the halls/on the school grounds
- The drama classroom

Themes/Concepts

Competition, Friendship, Mutual Support

Ancestral Teachings: Respect and Humility

Glossary

Broadway: A collection of professional English theatres in New York City, often referred to as a measurement for success.

“Break a Leg”: An English expression often used in theatre to communicate good luck.

Ingenue: A stock character or archetype for a young and innocent person, often the female leading role. Kelsey and Max compete against each other to play the ingenue character in Mr. B’s play.

Overview: Activities & Lesson Plans

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Ancestral Teachings

Brainstorming worksheet for Activity 1

Worksheets for Activity 6

Pre-Performance

Introduction

"Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born."

- Anais Nin

Activity 1 – Reflection on Play Themes

Ask students to reflect on and write some responses to the prompts below. To use the [worksheet](#) in class, we recommend printing on 8x14" paper.

- Self

What am I good at?

What do I like to do but I'm not good at?

What am I good at but don't particularly enjoy?

- Others

What is it I admire in others that I wish I could be as good as well?

What ability do others have that inspires me to improve?

- Friendship

What are my best qualities as a friend?

Am I a good friend to myself?

- Coping strategies

What do I do when I am sad?

What do I do when I see that my friends are sad?

- Teacher's choices

Did I ever wonder why my teachers have chosen their specialty or discipline?

What has drawn them to it?

What is it they like about it?

Activity 2 – Interview

In pairs, ask them to interview each other and then share their colleague's responses to the questions above with the class.

Activity 3 – Open-Ended Dialogue (pre or post-performance)

Print or project the dialogues on the following pages one at a time. Instruct students to work in pairs on the same dialogue. They need to fill in the open-ended dialogue gaps by choosing the characters' context and their motivations in the scene. They need to define the 5 W's, Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. First, they read it aloud, taking turns before deciding who plays A and B in the dialogue. Then, each pair perform for the class. Encourage students' feedback that is concrete to the situation presented with the aim of improving the acting or playwrighting.

Dialogue #1

A – Wow! What are you doing?

B – Oh, nothing, just _____.

A – I didn't know you could _____.

B – I've done this since _____.

A – Can you teach me how to _____?

B – Sure. Let's start by _____.

(Continue the dialogue filling in the gaps and finding an ending)

Dialogue #2

A – I cannot believe that we _____.

B – Me too! What were we thinking?

A – I guess we were not thinking.

B – Especially about _____.

A – Yes, we didn't think that _____.

B – I thought you meant _____.

A – And I thought you wanted to _____.

B – Well, I didn't.

A – Me neither.

B – Maybe next time we should try to _____.

A – Or _____.

Dialogue #3

A – We are running out of time.

B – I know. How are we getting out of this situation?

A – I have an idea! Why don't we _____.

B – Yes, and then we could _____.

A – But what about if _____.

B – If so, we could try _____.

A – Good one, let's go!

Dialogue #4

A – What happened? Are you Ok?

B – Yes, sure.

A – Really?

B – Yep, all good.

A – Do you want to _____.

B – Sorry, not now. I don't want to _____.

A – I see. What about _____?

B – Mmm. I'm not sure that _____.

A – I see. Why don't we _____?

B – All right, that sounds good.

Activity 4 – Playwriting, Directing, Acting, Producing!

Based on the dialogue they have created or on other stories, ask students to perform their scenes using puppets, stop motion, video recording, comic strip, shadow theatre, or any other medium they feel confident in or want to learn and experiment with. They can also use voice-over or narration to aid understanding.

Activity 5 – Developing Aesthetics Awareness

From the material they produce, take the opportunity to comment and discuss with the group the different genres (fantasy, realism, folktale, sci-fi, etc.) and their features. How might the setting inform or change the dialogue? Facilitate sharing stories from behind-the-scenes or making-of sessions so the students can articulate how they made their choices.

Activity 6 – Critiquing (pre- and post-performance)

Another good way to develop aesthetics awareness in students is to guide them into appreciating different aspects of the play. Here is a simple outline for a theatre critique. Students would have to produce a theatre critique after the play in the form of a journal article directed at future theatregoers of their age. They are expected to express their expert views and opinions about various artistic aspects of the play. Afterwards, their articles can be shared with the class, school, and even the company and will be much appreciated. They can also illustrate their favourite scene.

To help guide the critiquing process, see page 18 and 19

Post-Performance

Activity 7 – Internal monologue – Freeze/Action

Ask students to describe which moments are particularly tense or bring anxiety to them.

Choose one or two to begin with.

Set up the scene: (e.g., Spelling Bee) Someone can play the teacher; others play the contestants while others play the audience.

The scene can be paused by the teacher/facilitator calling – Freeze!

The teacher/facilitator can have a magic wand that makes us hear the character's thoughts.

While they all freeze, like in a snapshot or tableau, the character can be asked to verbalize their thoughts out loud.

The scene can continue to be played out when the teacher/facilitator calls – Action!

If the actor cannot think of anything to say, others can help by becoming a proxy.

Discuss what triggers such anxiety and discuss strategies to help or overcome them.

Activity 8 – Character and Play Analysis – Character on the wall.

Revisit the questions from Activity #1, but this time ask the student to answer them thinking of the characters Max and Kelsey.

Ask students to discuss in small groups, then hang a big poster with the characters' names on top and ask the students to post their answers on them.

- Self

What am I good at?

What do I like to do but I'm not good at?

What am I good at but don't particularly enjoy?

- Others

What is it I admire in others that I wish I could be as good as well?

What ability do others have that inspires me to improve?

- Friendship

What are my best qualities as a friend?

Am I a good friend to myself?

- Coping strategies

What do I do when I am sad?

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- Teacher's choices

Did I ever wonder why Mr. B chosen his specialty or discipline?

What has drawn him to it?

What does he like about it?

Activity 9 – Characters’ Arc

Discuss the changes that happened to each character during the play and how their answers to these questions might have changed thorough time. Project their future selves, by creating littles scenes following from the story told in the play.

Ancestral Teachings

Written by Dylan Thomas-Bouchier, Artistic Assistant

The Seven Sacred Teachings, also known as the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers, is a set of teachings on human conduct towards others. They are what was traditionally and still is to this day needed in order for communities to survive.

While we recognize that not all First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures and histories recognize The Seven Sacred Teachings or the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers our intention is to be as inclusive as possible.

-Excerpt from Empowering the Spirit, [Seven Grandfather Teachings First Nations Métis Inuit Student Education Resources Alberta Educators](https://empoweringthespirit.ca) (empoweringthespirit.ca)

The 7 teachings provide a structure for students to understand their own value and impact. These are ideas we are exploring this season at Geordie Theatre, using these as guiding principles in our offices and rehearsal rooms. They can also help us think about how the themes of our plays connect with the world around us.

Humility To recognize oneself in relation to others and all that sustain us.

Truth To speak only to the extent, we have lived or experienced.

Respect To honour one another and all of creation.

Wisdom To cherish knowledge and living with vision.

Honesty To understand oneself and how we carry ourselves through the world.

Courage To live with a solid, strong heart when facing our fears.

Love To know peace when carrying all teachings.

We invite you to use these teachings to guide reflection, whether written or in conversation. Consider how **Respect** and **Humility** is present in *Perfect Storm*.

Pre-Show Questions

What do you love about yourself?
How can your friends better understand you?
How can you be a better listener?
How do you support your friends?
What is one way your friends help you?

Post-Show Questions

Do Max and Kelsey respect each other? How could they be more respectful?
How does it make you feel when Mr. B wants to play the character of Monsieur Potato?
How could Mr. B be more selfless?
What was a time you felt overwhelmed like Max?

How to Write a Critique for a Theatrical Performance

A critique is an evaluation of a performance of a show. It should acknowledge the five components listed below. For older cycles, each component can be a paragraph.

1. Part 1—The Basics

Include the answers to the five W's:

- Who (the playwright, directors, and actors)
- What (the title of the play)
- Where (the name of the school or theater)
- When (when did you see it?)
- Why (In a few sentences, state the basic theme of the show)

2. Part 2—The Plot

Briefly summarize the plot of the show:

- How well did the story work?
- Was it interesting, entertaining?
- Did you like the actual script?

3. Part 3—The Acting

Reactions to the performers playing the characters in the play:

- Use their real names and character names
- Were they believable?
- How was their volume and articulation?
- Did their gestures and body movement stay true to the character?

4. Part 4—The Design

Set:

- Did it establish a definite mood and correct time period for the play?

Lights:

- Did they convey appropriate mood, emphasis, and brightness?

Costumes and Makeup:

- Were they true to the period of the show and to the characters?

Sound:

- How did the sound effects and music contribute to the show's mood?
- If this performance was a musical, what is your opinion of the orchestra's performance?

5. Part 5—The Reaction

What is the play's effect on the audience?

- Was the audience attentive?
- Was the audience interested?
- What was your opinion of the show as a whole?

Remember to:

- Back up all your opinions with valid reasons.
- Be objective, fair, and sincere.
- Evaluate the entire production.
- Be constructive. Indicate good points along with those you felt needed improvement.
- Enjoy the show—don't go to be overly critical.