Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth

by Drew Hayden Taylor

January 26 to February 4, 2017 • SAGEBRUSH THEATRE

STUDY GUIDE

Thank you for participating in Western Canada Theatre's matinee programming! We would like you and your students to get the most out of your experience with us. Included in this package are some inside information exclusive to teachers and students, discussion questions, classroom activities, and online resources. We hope you find them useful before and after seeing the show.

Please take a few minutes to review appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. While clapping and laughing are most appropriate for the theatre, whispering, talking, and excessive movement during the show is distracting to others in the audience and our actors on stage.

Audience members are encouraged to get comfortable, remove coats, use the washroom and turn all electronic devices OFF before a show begins. Please remind your students that texting is not allowed during the show.

Remembering theatre etiquette makes the show more enjoyable for everyone!

Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth

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Production Personnel

Cast

Dakota Hebert	Janice
Taran Kootenhayoo	Tonto
Joelle Peters	Barb
Aren Okemaysim	Rodney

Creative Team

Lisa C. Ravensbergen	Director
Heather Cant	Associate Director
Jung-Hye Kim	Set Designer
Vanessa Imeson	Costume Designer
Rebecca Picherack	Lighting Designer
Doug Perry	Sound Designer
Melissa Thomas	Fight Director
Christine Leroux	Stage Manager
Leigh Robinson	Apprentice Stage Manager

Western Canada Theatre Staff

James MacDonald	Artistic Director
Lori Marchand	Executive Director

Administration

Ron Thompson	Financial Manager
Randy Chow	Accounting Assistant
Catrina Crowe	Marketing & Communications Director
Suzan Goguen	Growth and Engagement Director
Bryce Herman	Fundraiser and Marketing Consultant
Jessica Buchanan	Events and Outreach Assistant
Terri Runnalls	Education Coordinator
Carlin Bolt	Marketing and Research Assistant
Laura Michel Evans	First Nations Engagement Coordinator

Production

Ross Nichol	Production Manager
Heather Cant	Associate Artistic Director
Bill Chabassol	Production Technical Director
Brian St-Amand	Sagebrush Technical Director
Roya Mole	Sagebrush Assistant Technical Director
Cindy Wiebe	Head of Wardrobe
Rory Lynch	Head of Carpentry
Angela Frye	Head of Properties
Joel Feenstra	Production Assistant
Ken Wells	Scenic Painter
Liam Befurt	Technician
Laurie Harder	Carpenter (volunteer)
Kathy Schwab	Second Painter (volunteer)

Facilities

Heather Regan	Client and Audience Services Manager
Jean Choi	Volunteer Coordinator
Allison Clow	Front of House Manager
Jessica Buchanan	Guest Services
Carling Ryan	Guest Services
Carlin Bolt	Guest Services
Christina Poirier	Guest Services

Kamloops Live Box Office

Janet Riggs	Box Office Manager
Judy Day	Box Office Staff
Geraldine Penny	Box Office Staff
Michelle Chabassol	Box Office Staff

Behind the Scenes

Playwright: Drew Hayden Taylor

During the past twenty-five years, Drew Hayden Taylor has done many things, most of which he is proud of. An Ojibway from the Curve Lake First Nations in Ontario, he has worn many hats in his literary career, from performing stand-up comedy at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., to being Artistic Director of Canada's premiere Native theatre company, Native Earth Performing Arts. He has been an award-winning playwright (with over 70 productions of his work), a journalist/columnist (appearing regularly in several Canadian newspapers and magazines), short-story writer, novelist, and television scriptwriter. He has also worked on over 17 documentaries exploring the Native experience. Most notably, he wrote and directed *Redskins, Tricksters and Puppy Stew*, a documentary on Native humour for the National Film Board of Canada.

He has traveled to seventeen countries, spreading the gospel of Native literature to the world. Through many of his books, most notably the four volume set of the *Funny, You Don't Look Like One* series, he has tried to educate and inform the world about issues that reflect, celebrate, and interfere in the lives of Canada's First Nations.

From 1989-1991 Taylor worked closely with the De-Ba-Jeh-Mu-Jig Theatre group of Manitoulin Island under the mentorship of Larry Lewis. During this time he produced several plays and at the urge of Lewis, made his first forays into exploding stereotypes through a satirical lens of the Ojibway experience. This satirical technique is one that Taylor has taken a lot of criticism for, but he holds fast to its efficacy.

While Taylor has taken heat for his humorous or satirical style, his methods have proved not only illuminating, but revolutionary in the development of the Aboriginal presence in the arts, specifically in Canada. In 2004 he was appointed to the Minister's Advisory Council for Arts and Culture in Canada. He has found that despite the controversy surrounding the form and subject matter of his work, he has been able to deeply connect with his audience, specifically his Aboriginal audience.

Self-described as a contemporary story teller in whatever form, he co-created and for three years was the head writer for *Mixed Blessings*, a television comedy series; as well as, he contributed scripts to four other popular Canadian television series. In 2007, a made-for-TV movie he wrote, based on his Governor General's nominated play *In a World Created by a Drunken God*, was nominated for three Gemini Awards, including Best Movie. Originally aired on APTN, it opened the American Indian Film Festival in San Francisco, and the Dreamspeakers Film Festival in Edmonton.

Synopsis, Backstory, and Connection

Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth tells the story of Janice (birth name: Grace), a Toronto lawyer, who was raised by a white family after being removed as a baby from her birth mother on a reserve. Janice's sister Barb ventures to Toronto with her boyfriend Rodney and his brother Tonto to convince Janice to return to Otter Lake to pay her last respects to her recently-deceased birth mother, as well as to reconcile to some of her past. Janice was separated from her birth family when she was just a toddler in the "scoop-up", a known term depicting the removal of Native children from their families in the 1950's and 1960's. Janice agrees to return to say a final goodbye and begins to deal with her feelings of anger and resentment, as well as to seek forgiveness.

It is important to note that *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* is a companion piece to Taylor's earlier play, *Someday*, which chronicles the first meeting between the protagonist of *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* and her biological mother. Anne Wabung's daughter, Grace, was taken away by children's aid workers when the girl was only a toddler. It is Christmastime 35 years later, and Anne's yearning to see her now-grown daughter is stronger than ever. When the family is finally reunited, however, the dreams of neither woman are fulfilled.

Taylor is adamant that the two plays be able to be independent from, rather than co-dependent on, one another. His choice to expand upon this story is perhaps reflective of his own experience in coming to terms with his heritage. Taylor is aware that his father was Caucasian, but other than that, he has no information about him. He has stated that his ignorance of his father is a purposeful choice. Despite this choice, he still identifies as a "blue-eyed Ojibway" a term that both binds him to and separates him from his indigenous roots. Thus, Taylor's further exploration of these roots of identity in *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* is reflective of his own divided experience.

Although manifest as two separate characters, Taylor draws on the contradictory nature of his own experience in the process of reconciling the sisters. His respect for Janice is not only admirable but is biographically illuminating. It is clear that Taylor is well versed in the act of straddling two worlds and does justice to the complexity of that experience through his rendering of Janice.

The setting for the play in act one is a downtown condo in Toronto. In act two, the setting is a fictional Ojibway community, but could be any reserve in Canada where thousands of Native children were forcibly removed from their families.

Activities in the Classroom

Activity #1 – The Trickster, Nanabohzo, and Drew Hayden Taylor

Curriculum Connections

Drama	Historical and Aesthetic Context, Exploration
Arts Education	Social and Cultural Context
Social Studies	Cultural Expression
Fine Arts	Perceiving, Responding and Reflecting

What is a Trickster?

A Trickster is a legendary supernatural creature that features in the stories, myths, and legends of many of the different First Nations of Native American. Tricksters are mischievous mythical beings that take the form of animals, such as the coyote, spider, ram, hare and raven. The trickster, who is almost always male, represents uncertainty. The trickster disobeys normal rules and conventional behaviour and loves to upset things and spread confusion. The trickster can be fun, like a clown, but he can also have a cruel side. The Trickster can be a hero in one tale and a villain in the next tale. His outrageous and totally unconventional behaviour might include lying, cheating, tricking, and deceiving. These traits might be unconscious, due to the Trickster being a fool lacking in intellect, or may have the deliberate actions of a spiteful spoiler who lacks morality.

The Trickster has been brought to life in many tales, legends, and stories that are often morality tales and told to teach lessons about proper behaviour to children. Those who told the stories were free to change or add elements to the basic story to make them relevant to the subject being taught. The trickster tales are generated by human imagination and many are based on personal experience.

Nanabohzo

In Anishinaabe *aadizookaan* (traditional storytelling), particularly among the Ojibway, **Nanabozho** (also known as **Nanabush**) is a spirit who figures prominently in their storytelling, including in the story of the world's creation. Nanabozho, the Ojibway trickster figure and culture hero, most often appears in the shape of a rabbit. In his rabbit form, he is called **Mishaabooz** ("Great rabbit" or "Hare") or **Chi-waabooz** ("Big rabbit"). He was sent to Earth by Gitche Manitou to teach the Ojibway.

Have your class do a quick Google search on the Trickster and what it means to the Ojibway culture. Then show them the following images of the Trickster. Discuss as a class how these depictions could have come to fruition. Which one do they like best and why? How does each of the images depict the characteristics of the traditional Trickster?

Drew Hayden Taylor, a modern Trickster?

The historical figure of the Trickster is a shapeshifter and a co-creator of the world. The Trickster rebels against authority, makes fun of the overly serious, and creates long-winded schemes that may or may not work. He is sometimes his own worst enemy, but his purpose in Trickster Tales is to cause us to question orthodox routes and not accept things blindly.

The playwright Drew Hayden Taylor has often drawn comparisons to the Trickster. Aside from expanding the definition of what it means to be a contemporary Aboriginal theatre artist, Taylor has also challenged the form and definition of what it means to be a contemporary playwright in general. He pushes at these preconceived boundaries linguistically in how he defines himself. In this following excerpt from wordplay.com, we see the interesting comparison:

> "This plucky, sly way of representing his people bestows upon Taylor, in some ways, the culturally historic label of "Trickster": So too, Taylor may employ unconventional methods, but his form and philosophy have contributed to insular cultural evolution in the Aboriginal community, as well as to a broader cultural shift towards understanding the Indigenous experience to those outside the culture. Most importantly, Taylor has been faithful to his own experience of Indigenous life, an experience that is humorous and difficult, nostalgic and grounded".

Activity #2 – Anishinaabemowin

Curriculum Connections

Language Arts	Oral Language, Speaking and Listening
Arts Education	Exploring and Creating, Drama Forms, Strategies and Skills

Anishinaabemowin, or Language, is very important in *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth*. In the play, Barb attempts to teach Janice some simple words in their native tongue, the Annishnawbe Ojibway language (p. 88).

Janice is surprised to find out that Otter Lake`s most surprising inhabitant, Amelia Earhart, also speaks fluent Annishnawbe Ojibway. Barb retorts by saying, "Why wouldn't she? She's been here over fifty years."

Why is Language so connected to identity for both an individual and a community?
Pose this question to your class.

Ask if anyone in the class speaks another language that originated from their childhood. Ask if they would be willing to share some of it with the class. Ask that student if that birth language is spoken in their home or community or place of worship? How does it make you feel when you speak this language in those places? Does speaking this language give you a sense of home, security, and love, or does it bring out feelings of embarrassment or anger? Explain.

Break the class into smaller groups of 4 or 5. Have them discuss the following questions together:

- Why is Janice's loss of her birth language important to her character's history?
- Why do you think the playwright created a scene in which Janice takes interest in learning some of the Ojibway language?

The playwright also makes a conscious decision to have Janice speak Ojibway in the final line of the play.

- What does she say?
- What is the importance of including her language of birth at the conclusion of the play?

The following are some Ojibway greetings and numbers that Barb attempts to teach Janice in the play. Have your students do their best to pronounce them:

Hello – ahneen
I'll be seeing you – co-waabmen
One – Pashig
Two – Niish
Three – Nswi
Four – Niiwin
Five – Naanan
Six – Koodswaswi
Seven – Niizhwaaswi
Eight - Niizhwaaswa

COOL NOTE!

You may notice in the research that in the Annishnawbe language one word may be spelled in many different ways. The Annishnawbe language was originally oral, and therefore when put to ink was written in several different ways. Ojibway is a great example. It is often spelled Ojibwe or Ojibwa, as well.

Activity #3 – Dreamcatcher

Curriculum Connections

Fine Arts	Creating, Communicating
Social Studies	Identity, Society and Culture, Land and Relationships
Drama	Exploring, Drama Forms

The original web dreamcatcher of the Ojibway was intended to teach natural wisdom. Dreamcatchers of twigs, sinew, and feathers have been woven since ancient times by Ojibway people. They were woven by grandfathers and grandmothers for newborn children and hung above the cradleboard to give the infants peaceful, beautiful dreams. It was said that good dreams are clear and know the way to the dreamer, descending through the feathers. The slightest movement of the feathers indicated the passage of yet another beautiful dream. Bad dreams, however, are confused and cannot find their way through the web and are trapped there until the sun rises and evaporates them like the morning dew.

The following is one wonderful story of how the dreamcatcher came to be, from dreamcatcher.com:

"Long ago in the ancient world of the Ojibwe Nation, the Clans were all located in one general area of that place known as Turtle Island. This is the way that the old Ojibwe storytellers say how Asibikaashi (Spider Woman) helped Wanabozhoo bring giizis (sun) back to the people. To this day, Asibikaashi will build her special lodge before dawn. If you are awake at dawn, as you should be, look for her lodge and you will see this miracle of how she captured the sunrise as the light sparkles on the dew that is gathered there.

Asibikaasi took care of her children, the people of the land, and she continues to do so to this day. When the Ojibwe Nation dispersed to the four corners of North America, to fill a prophecy, Asibikaashi had a difficult time making her journey to all those cradle boards, so the mothers, sisters, & Nokomis (grandmothers) took up the practice of weaving the magical webs for the new babies using willow hoops and sinew or cordage made from plants. It is in the shape of a circle to represent how giizis travels each day across the sky. The dream catcher will filter out all the bad bawedjigewin (dreams) & allow only good thoughts to enter into our minds when we are just abinooji. You will see a small hole in the center of each dream catcher where those good bawadjige may come through. With the first rays of sunlight, the bad dreams would perish. When we see little asibikaashi, we should not fear her, but instead respect and protect her. In honor of their origin, the number of points where the web connected to the hoop numbered 8 for Spider Woman's eight legs or 7 for the Seven Prophecies".

Have your class research the usage of dreamcatchers in the Ojibway culture and share with the class images of ones that they found. Have them describe to the class why that certain dreamcatcher caught their attention.

In the play, Barb and Janice's mother, Anne, gives Janice a dreamcatcher as a present. Attached to it is a tag that reads:

"…Good dreams pass through the webbing, bad dreams are caught and dissolved by the early morning light. Usually given to newlyweds to hang over the window in their bedrooms or to the mother of a new born baby, to ensure her baby will only have pleasant dreams." (p.103)

Why is this such a symbolic gift for Janice? Create an open discussion with your class.

Extra credit!!

Log on to http://www.nativetech.org/dreamcat/dreamcat.html to find out how to create your own dreamcatcher! If you do not have time with your class to do so, have them sketch what theirs might look like. Have them share their dreamcatcher with the class and explain why they decided on their design. Does it have any family, community or spiritual meaning to them? If not, what could they include so that it will? Discuss these possibilities with your class.

Activity #4: Post-Show Discussion

Curriculum Connections

Drama	Defining, Recognizing and Analysing, Reflection, Discussion and Critical Analysis
Communications	Comprehend and Respond, Engagement and Personal Response
Social Studies	Colonialism, Land and Relationships

1) Discuss the play with your class. What did they like, what did they find challenging? Had they read the book before? Compare the two forms of the story. Which did they like better? Why? Have them give specific examples to generate a more intense conversation.
2) Talk with your class about each character. Why do you think the playwright chose to have only four character roles? What is the importance of all of the characters in the play? What purpose does each serve? Which character did you connect with the most? Why?
3) Janice's character was part of the "Sixties Scoop", a term that refers to the practice of taking ("scooping up") children of Aboriginal peoples in Canada from their families and placing them in foster homes or putting them up for adoption beginning in the 1960s and continuing until the late 1980s. This brings into mind another act of "cultural genocide", the Residential School System. The school system was in effect from roughly 1876 to 1996. Its purpose was to remove children from the influence of their own culture and assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture.

   Discuss with your class the effect this would have on the children and their families both at the time they were torn apart, as well as its lasting effect on the community as a whole today.

   Talk about Janice and how her actions and words in the play show the effects of this removal. Below is an excerpt from "Sixties Scoop", an article written by Erin Hanson. Reading this aloud to the class may be helpful in generating some discussion.

> "Residential schools systematically undermined Aboriginal culture across Canada and disrupted families for generations, severing the ties through which Aboriginal culture is taught and sustained, and contributing to a general loss of language and culture. Because they were removed from their families, many students grew up without experiencing a nurturing family life and without the knowledge and skills to raise their own families. The devastating effects of the residential schools are far-reaching and continue to have significant impact on Aboriginal communities. Because the government's and the churches' intent was to eradicate all aspects of Aboriginal culture in these young people and interrupt its transmission from one generation to the next, the residential school system is commonly considered a form of cultural genocide."

Resources Used

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