

EDUCATION NOTES

PREPARED BY AMY LABAN AND CLAIRE CHRISTIAN

La Boite presents

SINGLE ASIAN FEMALE

By Michelle Law



LA BOITE
THEATRE COMPANY



La Boite Theatre Company is supported by the Queensland Government through Arts Queensland



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Production Partner



PHILIP BACON
GALLERIES



This work was developed with the assistance of the Lotus Playwriting Project, an initiative of Presenting Australia and Contemporary Asian Australian Performance (formerly Performance 4a)

Image by Dylan Evans

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FEATURE TEACHER



AMY LABAN

Tagai State College
Thursday Island
Secondary Campus

**A favourite realism play/
production...**

Mrs Thally F by John Romeril - true crime theatre :) !

A funny thing that happened in her classroom...

I love playing human objects - it encourages people to work together, listen to what others are doing, see things from a different point-of-view and see even the small details as important. I can't think of only one funny thing. Each class is unique and has such wonderful things about the time we had together. I smile about all of them as I go back through the memories now.

Something she wishes teachers remembered...

I wish all teachers remembered that each of their students is worthy of love, respect and gentleness - it's not just a job.

ABOUT

An incisive new comedy skewering race and gender in contemporary Australia from Brisbane-based award winning writer Michelle Law. Step into the after-hours of a suburban Chinese restaurant and meet a family of whip smart women who are definitely talking about you in their native tongue.

Set on the Sunshine Coast this hilarious play answers what it means to be an Asian woman living in Australia. For Pearl, a Chinese migrant operating a restaurant, it means sacrifice and struggling to connect with her very westernised children. For Zoe, the eldest child, it means approaching a crossroads in her life where she's forced to choose between a career and a family. For Mei, the youngest child, it means being bullied at school and grappling with the desire to assimilate versus cultivating a unique identity.

Two sisters at odds with each other and a mother harbouring a secret that threatens to tear her family apart, this is Australian domesticity like you've never seen it before.

CAST & CREATIVES

Director: Claire Christian

Set & Costume Designer: Moe Assaad

Composer/Sound Designer: Wil Hughes

Lighting Designer: Keith Clark

Performers: Emily Burton as Katie, Alex Lee as Zoe, Patrick Jhanur as Paul, Courtney Stewart as Mei, Hsiao-Ling Tang as Pearl and Emily Vascotto as Lana.

ESTIMATED RUNNING TIME

(Please note this will be confirmed closer to the production): 2 hours 10 minutes with a 20 minute interval

CURRICULUM LINKS

- Contemporary Realism
- Comedy
- New Australian Writing

WARNINGS

(Please note these will be confirmed closer to the production):

- Occasional Coarse language
- Minor abortion story line
- Very short, implied, under the doona sex scene. There is no nudity – actors will briefly be in their underwear.

**If you would like to read the scene please get in contact with Youth & Participation Producer Claire, on clairechristian@laboite.com.au or 07 3007 8600.

PURPOSE, CONTEXT AND THEMES

Purpose: To entertain, challenge and empower.

Context: Cultural, sociological and political.

Themes: Family, belonging, gender and femininity, identity, family.

FORM, STYLE & CURRICULUM LINKS

Realism, comedy, contemporary political theatre, new Australian writing.

THINGS TO PONDER

- What is the difference between appreciating culture and appropriating culture?
- How do you know when a friend becomes a frenemy?
- Do parents really have a favourite child?
- Is there such a thing as reverse racism, or is it also, simply, racism?
- What defines a 'real' woman? What does she do?
- Do you have any siblings? How does your relationship with them impact how you feel about yourself?
- Do secrets always get found out?
- Compare/contrast the importance in a relationship: security or emotions?
- When does one generation 'retire' and the next generation take over?
- Is there such a thing as a 'sisterhood' among women? How would you define it?
- What is the process for immigration into Australia? How long does it take? (Google time!)
- Adults often withhold information from young people to protect them. Do you think this is fair? Explain.

CULTURE

The term 'culture' has multiple meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In this topic, it is not the growing of fuzzy little things in petri dishes.

The definition for this purpose is: the ideas, customs and behaviours of particular group in society.

Consider what groups may be defined as 'cultures'. Culture is often defined in terms of race, or ethnicity. We can group on a macro level such as 'Asian', 'African' or 'European'. Or, we may look further into society and label 'African-American', 'Torres Strait Islander' or 'Swiss'.

Culture can also relate to smaller groups within society. The ways of participating in them and

the languages used within them are usually very specific. For example, sports people would say "training" where theatre people may say "rehearsal". On a more micro-scale, you also have a family culture. How your family acts in certain situations, such as at Christmas, may be different to others within your own ethnicity.

So when we label people in groups, it is important to recognise that there is not one way of being, but many expressions of that 'culture'.

What does it mean to be Australian, a migrant, first or second generation, a refugee, an Asian Australian, a daughter, a sister, a friend? What is your cultural identity? What is Australia's cultural identity?

IDENTITY

All of the plays characters are trying to navigate their personal identity. Who they are and what they stand for. For the three central characters part of this is navigating their cultural identity too. What are the things that make us who we are? Beliefs, experiences, morals, likes, dislikes, politics etc.

FAMILY

Single Asian Female explore issues of divorce, the unique role you play in your family unit, growing up, parents and siblings, sister relationships.

BELONGING

What does it mean to belong? The play looks at the theme of belonging in a family, at school, in society and in Australia.

GENDER

The three central characters are strong women, it explores contemporary Australian women, stereotypes and feminism.

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA DISCUSSION POINTS

Element	Discussion
Role	There are a number of characters in the play who are played by the same actor.
Tension of relationships	This show focuses on the relationships between three generations of women.
Space	Imagine you had to put your whole house on stage as a set (it's a very large stage!). How would you do it? Where would you place the rooms? What kinds of materials would you use? How could you make the audience feel as though they were walking into your house?
Theme	This show addresses the way issues are woven into our lives in complex layers.

WRITER, MICHELLE LAW, DESCRIBES THE PLAY:

“Single Asian Female is a comedy that skewers race and gender issues in ways that will challenge how you think about our country and the people who live in it. It’s a play that speaks to the daily realities of my own life and the lives of many Australians who often feel voiceless and targeted.

Inspired by a blog I kept of the same name about my experiences of being single, Asian and a woman living in Australia, the play was born of my desire to tear into labels and the ways in which they can stifle us when we’re not given the chance to subvert them.

In Single Asian Female, you’ll witness three women grappling with specifically female issues, from the pressure of choosing between your fertility and your career, to navigating high school and girl gang politics, to trying to survive and be strong for yourself and others when you’re trapped in an abusive relationship. You’re going to see women grappling with distinctly female relationships, too: sisters at odds with each other, frenemies undermining each other, and a mother trying to overcome generational and cultural gaps to connect with her daughters. I also wanted to examine the narratives of women at three key stages of their lives: high school, one’s reproductive prime, and menopause.

So what can you expect from Single Asian Female?

Expect to see the Sunshine Coast and Australian domesticity like you’ve never seen it before, from the back rooms of a Chinese restaurant and from the perspective of outsiders, of migrants, who confirm all your fears that you’re being spoken about in another language. Expect to see women (and specifically women of colour) ... and to hear their voices, which are at once strong, irreverent, and hilarious. Expect to see a family in turmoil. Expect to see audiences who don’t normally go to the theatre, who don’t normally see themselves reflected on stage. Expect to see laughter, tears and kitschy karaoke in equal measure and be prepared to sing along.”

RESPONDING

- This quote by Michelle about the play could also be used as a great Responding Task quote to discuss contemporary political theatre, or the role of theatre in contemporary Australia.

“Theatre reflects us, it reflects our society, and the kinds of worlds, stories and faces that have dominated Australian stages for so long are ones that aren’t familiar and often exclusionary to othered Australians, including myself.”

– Michelle Law.

Other options for responding tasks could be:

- Looking at form and style and discussing contemporary realism
- Diversity on stage
- Female writers/characters

PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Brainstorm – separate the class into three groups and have them fill in a table on butcher's paper. Each group gets a different word from the show's title to write about: 1. Single 2. Asian 3. Female. Then write as much as they can under three sub-headings: a. The Stereotype b. The Reality and c. Questions/The Unknown. After they have had time to really discuss in detail, each group report back to the class what they discussed. Put the posters on the wall (warts and all!) to come back to after the show.

Example:

Asian

The Stereotype	The Reality	Questions/the unknown
Smart Tiger mums	A continent and islands where there are lots of different countries	How many languages are there across Asia?

2. Come to me/go away – this game plays on the tension of relationships. With the class sitting in a large circle (to form a boundary), choose two people to play come to me/go away. Choose which person is going to play the role of “come to me” and who is to be “go away”. At the teacher's instruction (this game needs to be closely monitored) the game begins. The two people are only allowed to say the title of their role.

- “Come to me” person says “come to me” and attempts to hold the hands of the other person.
- “Go away” person says “go away” and attempts to avoid having their hands touched

Encourage the students to stay in Realism – focus on their role.

Then, when they have been playing for some time (or if the tension is not building) the teacher indicates a swap or roles (using a clap, or saying swap or another loud sound). The two actors then swap to the other role. This can happen a few times, as long as the teacher can see the tension. Then swap to two other students and let them try. After it has happened a few

times (you'll sense when it's enough), lead the group in a discussion about the building tension. When was it strongest? When did it shift? How did the actors feel? How did the audience feel?

3. Research task – There are a number of references to Chinese (and other Asian countries) culture and language in the play. How many of the following do you know about?

Chinese New Year	Doraemon
Mah Jong	Ancestral Shrines
Cheung Fun	K Project
Cheongsam	Miyazaki
Cantonese	Chinese Tea Ceremony
Jook/Congee	Rilakkuma

4. Ideas forum - Separate the class into small groups. Give them each a social issue from the play (see ‘things to ponder’). Guide them in appropriate group discussion techniques – we may have differing ideas and opinions, but we can do so respectfully.

5. Ritual Tableaus - In groups of 3-5 tell the story of how your family celebrate weddings. For some, it may mean no celebration at all. Others may have large family gatherings with far too much food. Each person has 30 seconds to share their stories in the small groups. Then, as a group, decide on one story that was told to represent as a series of 3 tableaus/freeze frames.

For example

Tableau 1 – the proposal

Tableau 2 – bridal shower

Tableau 3 – reception with a feast

The teacher then facilitates presentation of the tableaus in front of the class, who watch each tableau, then deconstruct meaning from each image set.

POST-SHOW ACTIVITIES

1. Brainstorm Revisit - Revisit the Brainstorm activity from before you saw the show. Were any of your questions addressed in the show? Were you surprised with the way any of the three (Single, Asian, Female) were addressed? What did you learn that you didn't know before about each of them?

2. Set Design - Draw the set in as much detail as you can remember. Share your ideas about what was in the set – down to the small detail. As a class, produce a set design: either on paper or as a 3D model.

3. Who am I? - Choose three words to define who you are. Create a short scene where all three words are used in among other sentences, then see whether the audience can guess what your three words are.

4. Characters – The six characters in the play are all very different, they are all very much in direct contrast to each other. Discuss how this impacted the moments of conflict in the play. For example, Pearl keeping her secret from the girls, the way that Zoe and Mei feel about each other and their Mum, the way that Mei feels about Lana compared to Katie, how Paul reacts when he finds out Zoe's secret.

It may also be interesting to discuss the way that gender is explored in the play. What kind of man is Paul? What is important to him? What are his politics? Is he a feminist? Why do you think Michelle Law would write the only male character in the play like this? The women in the play are all navigating very different parts of their lives, high school and adolescence, middle age and making choices about motherhood and career, and being later in life with grow-up children. What do these five women represent about women in contemporary society?

5. In dealing with Pearl's situation the girls must reflect on what their Mum means to them. You could have students reflect on an adult in their life that they feel grateful for and why. These reflections could then be turned into monologues and shared with the group and then possibly turned into a whole class scene, taking sentences from each student's monologue and creating a performance of adult appreciation.

CHECK IT OUT

How you see me – ASIAN *“People always ask me: ‘where are you from?’... and I want to say Minnesota, but I know that’s not what they mean”*
#HowYouSeeMe

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTLjtGUGgN8>

Has your judgement ever been wrong? Tell my story by Soul Pancake.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeU8R2Qj83w>

Face to Face: Parents, Children Share Four Minutes of Emotional Silence

http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/face-face-parents-children-share-four-minutes-emotional-silence-n693196?cid=sm_fb

6 Things all immigrant kids experience

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oZq6GW5pkc0>

Children Of Asian Immigrants Reveal Sacrifices Their Parents Made

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1IDX0Izhd4>

Asian Moms And Their Kids Imitate Each Other

https://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_2464476137&feature=iv&src_vid=k1IDX0Izhd4&v=DIPL1ZMduOg

Asian Immigration in Australia

<http://mobile.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-14/pauline-hanson-maiden-speech-asian-immigration/7645578>

‘Cultural Enclaves’ Academic Study/Report

<http://priceschool.usc.edu/students/review-journal/2011-2012/ethnic-enclaves-sanctuary-or-impediment/>

Portrayal of Women in the Media

<http://www.startupsmart.com.au/advice/growth/innovation/if-she-can-see-it-she-can-be-it-does-hollywood-hold-the-answer-to-more-women-in-stem/>

Representing Women

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bumlt2pIRuw&sns=em>

The Value of Sharing Women’s Stories

<http://m.huffpost.com/uk/entry/8279930>

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

- Doors open 20 minutes prior to performance.
- Please brief your students about appropriate theatre etiquette before seeing the play. Due to the nature of the theatre configuration the students can be seen and heard by both the actors and fellow audience members.
- Photography and filming of the production is strictly prohibited due to copyright. Please ask your students to switch off their mobile phones inside the theatre. We also ask that all patrons refrain from taking food and drink into the theatre.
- Please do not bring school bags into the foyer and theatre.
- Please arrive at least 30 minutes prior to the show starting. If you are running late please call Box Office on 3007 8600 and let them know.