

THE BUTTERFLY QUEEN

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY
Christian Kiley



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

We all have the capacity to put another human being before ourselves regardless of the consequences. That is the theme of *The Butterfly Queen*, a touching ensemble piece where protection is as simple as a pair of wings.

Playwright Bio

Christian Kiley teaches Theatre Arts at Etiwanda High School (Etiwanda, CA). *Distance Learning* is Christian's newest play with Theatrefolk. It addresses the challenges, ups, and downs students face with virtual learning. His play *Chemo Girl* was the winner of the 2012 Rancho Cucamonga High School One-Act Festival. He wrote the *Chemo Girl* collection of plays when he was undergoing treatment for Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Christian is now in remission and grateful for the opportunity to continue to write and teach. He addresses issues in his plays that he thinks will be challenging and exciting for young actors to perform. He appreciates his students, colleagues, and Theatrefolk for their continued support. Christian's studies in Theatre Arts earned him an M.F.A. from California State University (Fullerton), and a B.A. from Gonzaga University. He completed a Shakespeare academy for educators at the Huntington Library.

Synopsis

The Butterfly Queen is a vignette play in which each scene addresses the concept of sacrifice, putting someone else ahead of ourselves regardless of the consequences. A teacher protects her class from danger. She uses hoodies to "protect" them, as she can not protect herself when danger enters the classroom. This extended metaphor is used throughout the play — we make sacrifices for others and those sacrifices can be passed forward. A bystander helps a timid person overcome a fear. A stranger saves another from a burning building. The impact we have on others can be immense. We all have the capacity to save a life.

Characters

As this is a vignette play, actors will play multiple roles in a variety of scenes.

TEACHER (Miss Victoria): A brave and selfless teacher. Her lessons reverberate through the lives of her students.

GREG: An inquisitive student. Sometimes disruptive, but never boring.

MADISON & DONNA: Girls in Miss Victoria's class.

WASP: The ever-present antagonist. A threat to caterpillars everywhere.

STUDENTS 1-17: Miss Victoria's Students. They help those around them however they can.

PEDESTRIAN: Get away from him! He's walking here!

DAD: Caught up in an argument.

MOM: Just wants the argument to stop.

CHILD: Caught between the two parents.

KID: Just a regular kid. Doesn't want trouble.

SIDEKICK 1 & 2: Repeats the bully's sentences for dramatic effect.

PERSONS 1-3: Caught in, or witness to a burning building.

TIMID: Has trouble crossing the street.

WORKER: Tries their best, despite criticism.

CRITICALS 1-8: If they can't say anything nice, why say anything at all?

JUMPER: A desperate person, at the brink of the abyss.

Themes

Bullying, Childhood, Death, Self-image, Relationships, Individuality, Suicide, School Violence, Morality, Personal Responsibility

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ How would you define the word “sacrifice”?
- ★ Have you ever sacrificed something for another person?
- ★ Has anyone ever sacrificed something for you?
- ★ Has anyone ever stood up for you?
- ★ Have you ever stood up for someone else?
- ★ Have you ever watched someone be bullied and not stepped in?
- ★ Have you ever watched someone be bullied and stepped in? If you haven't, do you think you could? Why or why not?

Pre-Read Activities

Original Theatrical Moment

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute theatrical moment using the following situations. These moments can be traditional dialogue, tableaux, music, movement, or whatever students think best fits the situation.
 - » Chryslids
 - » Attempted robbery
 - » Parental distress
 - » Bully retaliation
 - » Rescue

- » Workers' rights
- » Troubled crossing
- » Meeting
- » Jumpers
- » Maybe... eagle
- » Butterfly

Research Project: Sacrifice

- ★ In small groups students will research examples of people who have sacrificed and put others ahead of themselves.
- ★ What are the similarities and differences between the experiences?
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
 - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
 - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
 - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

Identity Chart

- ★ Have students make an identity chart for themselves. An identity chart visualizes different aspects of the question, "Who am I?"
 - » Students will need paper and something to write with.
 - » You may want to complete an identity chart for yourself as a model.
- ★ An identity chart starts with students putting their name in a circle or square in the middle of the page.

- ★ Then students draw lines from the centre. At the end of each line, students write one word or phrase that describes them (tall, girl, Canadian, drama club, piano). Possible categories include:
 - » Family identity
 - » Social identity
 - » Cultural background
 - » Physical appearance
- ★ Ask students to reflect on the final product. What shapes their identity?
- ★ Ask students to choose what they think is the most important part of their identity and write a paragraph describing why.

Identity Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of identity. How will you visualize, “Who am I?”
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present.

Sacrifice Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene on the theme of sacrifice. How will you visualize the concept?
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present.

The Lifecycle of the Butterfly

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene that uses the lifecycle of the butterfly as inspiration. They will not recreate the life cycle steps, but translate what happens to a butterfly into a character moment of growth and conflict.
- ★ Groups will rehearse and present.

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *The Butterfly Queen*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What is the name of the first scene?
3. Who protects the Pedestrian from Wasp?
4. How does Student #2 shield the Child?
5. How does Person #1 describe the person who saved them?
6. What is Timid afraid of?
7. What does Critical #8 call Worker?
8. What does Student #8 do after they get the sweatshirt from Student #7?
9. Finish this sentence: "You will climb down here and deal with the limitations of _____ with the rest of us."
10. Who is the Butterfly Queen?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. Why do you think the author chose to use a sweatshirt as a throughline in the play?
2. What do the sweatshirts represent in the play?
3. What is significant about the lifecycle of a butterfly dialogue at the beginning of the play? In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen to start the play this way?
4. Analyze Greg's use of language. What kind of words does he use? What can you infer about his character based on his vocabulary and word choice?
5. What is the significance of the line, "You deserve to be saved"?
6. What is the significance of the line, "Maybe a person who is afraid of the little things has courage when it comes to the big ones"?
7. In your opinion, why do some characters have traditional names, and others do not? What is the significance of this distinction in the text?
8. How would you costume Wasp? Use the text to support your answer.
9. What is the significance of the final visual in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *The Butterfly Queen*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about sacrifice? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about personal responsibility? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with sacrifice with what happens in the play.
5. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Which scene stood out to you the most?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?

Post-Read Activities

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
 - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
 - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
 - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Set Design

- ★ There is no specific set design for this play. Have students write a description of their set vision, or draw a colour rendering. How would you visualize the themes of the play?

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize it in a single image that would attract an audience? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

"Sacrifice Passed Forward" Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Have each group discuss the concept of "sacrifice passed forward" and what it means to them. Have they ever experienced or seen a sacrifice passed forward?
- ★ Based on their discussion and what they read in the play, have each group create their own theatrical moment which shows a sacrifice passed forward, in which a person receives help from someone and then turns around and helps another person in the exact same way.

"Sacrifice Passed Forward" Tableaux

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will discuss the concept of "sacrifice passed forward" and what it means to them. Have they ever experienced or seen a sacrifice passed forward?
- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how to visualize this concept in a tableau series.
 - » Tableau one will show the incident in which the first person requires help.
 - » Tableau two will show the sacrifice in action.
 - » Tableau three will show the sacrifice being passed forward.
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Playwright Process

Playwright Christian Kiley talks about his process writing The Butterfly Queen. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

1. What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

Like many people (students, parents, teachers, administrators, members of communities), I was and still am deeply concerned about the safety of our schools. There are so many challenges and obstacles already for young people. Having a safe place to learn and grow is critical. We have an obligation and duty to provide that for our children.

I started with an image of a teacher reading a story to their students. This is one of the most cherished memories from my own childhood and a tradition and practice I continue with my children today. Think about it for a moment: a teacher with a group of young children around them, holding up the colorful images of a storybook.

This pristine picture of students and their teacher has been shattered on so many occasions due to acts of horrible violence in our schools. I really wanted to find a way to honor those who continue to protect the safe and healthy learning environments for our children.

2. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The primary challenge for me was to try to tell the story in a theatrical way, with conceptual vividness, and still be honest about the situation. It was very important to look at the students years later and see the impact of their teacher's heroic action. I rewrote those vignettes several times experimenting with different reactions and emotions for the characters (not everyone is going to react the same way to a tragic event).

3. What changes, if any, were made during rehearsals?

I learned from Lindsay Price that plays need to be produced before being published. I know as writers we get pumped up about getting the play on the

page (with a colorful Theatrefolk cover on it) but the more I write for Theatre the more I follow Lindsay's advice of page to stage to page.

Specifically, for the stage direction for "Butterfly Queen" in the "years later" scenes. A lot of the movement was completely changed after seeing it in rehearsal. The Jumper scene comes to mind (pages 16-17) with the onlookers and Student #8.

4. As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

The interaction between Teacher and Greg at the end of the play. Aside from the courage and selfless bravery Teacher displays, this interaction speaks to the heart of why teachers teach.

GREG: Maybe I'm an eagle.

TEACHER: Yes. I think you are.

5. What was it like to see the play performed?

Gushing emotions. When we produced this at our local one-act festival and the cast moved into the final picture/tableau with Teacher outstretching their arms revealing the butterfly wings. It was a lot of emotion. They ended up winning. But that moment. That was what I will remember.

6. Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

I am getting better at rewrites. But definitely rewrites. A first draft is like a day off at an amusement park where you can try any rides and junk food you want and never get sick. The moment of truth is the next morning. It feels kind of like the bottom of a cotton candy machine after the circus leaves town. Cleaning that up.

7. What is your writing process like?

I am trying to be much more consistent, but it is tough. I would describe my process as bursts of productivity with bouts of reality in between. I am most productive as a morning writer. Get up, hydrate, eat, do a little yoga, and write until the tank is empty. Adulting gets in the way a lot. Don't quite have that figured out yet.

8. What engages you about playwriting?

It is a puzzle, but I get to determine the pieces and the final product, and it can change along the way. Missing a middle piece, change that part of the puzzle. It is my second language. I think I knew it the first time I saw a play. My hope for every human is that they find something that speaks to them like that. I am in a heightened state when I am engaged in the craft of playwriting, the art of theatre.