The purpose of this document is to provide Queensland educators with information and resources for Queensland Theatre Company’s production of *God of Carnage*. The activities and resources contained in this document are designed as the starting point for educators in developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Katie Stewart is seconded to Queensland Theatre Company from Education Queensland as an Education Liaison Officer.
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How to Act at the Theatre (when you’re not on stage)

- Be in your seat five minutes before the show starts
- Food and drinks are not permitted in the theatre
- Be respectful to other audience members
- TURN OFF all electrical devices before entering the theatre
- Save discussion for AFTER the show
- Feel free to laugh, cry and applaud
Synopsis — God of Carnage

Two young boys, a stick and some broken teeth are the catalyst in this tale of two families. Véronique, a writer, and Michel, a company wholesaler, are parents to Bruno. Annette, a wealth manager, and Alain, a lawyer, are parents to Ferdinand. The two couples meet to discuss the misdemeanours of their sons.

The evening begins quite amicably, with apple and pear clafoutis, and the four parents intending to resolve the situation diplomatically. However, as their hopes for this begin to splinter and disillusionment sets in, the evening deteriorates from one of mild unease and discomfort, into a deluge of accusations, recriminations, jealousy and rage. There is drinking, fighting, vomiting and the destruction of some rather lovely tulips.

Boys will be boys, but can the grown ups be grown up enough to resolve their differences without losing sight of right and wrong? The façade of civility shatters as the God of Carnage wreaks havoc in the living room and all hell breaks loose.

Artistic Team

Andrew Buchanan  Alain Reille  
Jodie Buzza  Annette Reille  
Benj D’Addario  Michel Vallon  
Veronica Neave  Véronique Vallon  

Michael Gow  Director  
Robert Kemp  Designer  
Bernie Tan-Hayes  Lighting Designer  
Tony Brumpton  Composer/Sound Designer  
Morgan Dowsett  Assistant Director  
Guy Gimpel  Assistant Sound Designer  
Sarah Kenyon  NIDA Lighting Design Secondment  

Sue Benfer  Stage Manager  
Kathryn O’Halloran  Assistant Stage Manager
**Curriculum Connections**

**Themes / Ideas**
- Adults behaving like children
- Conflict resolution
- Social comment on modern life and preoccupations

**Performance / Dramatic Elements**
- Black comedy
- Contemporary Western Drama
- Unseen characters

_The God of Carnage_ is about two middle-class couples who meet to discuss a fight that occurred at school between their children. The play takes a look at the complexity of marital relationships, dissecting modern urban manners and seeing selfishness in its varying forms.

[R] 75 mins, no interval
[L] Occasional coarse language
[V] References to violence
[S] References to sex

With a satirical dissection of two middle-class marriages at the core of the play, this very funny production contains adult themes and is therefore recommended for Year 11 and 12 Drama and English students.
About the Playwright — Yasmina Reza

Yasmina Reza is a French playwright and novelist, based in Paris, whose works have all been multi-award-winning, critical and popular international successes. Her plays, Conversations After a Burial, The Passage of Winter, ‘Art’, The Unexpected Man, Life x 3 and A Spanish Play, have been produced worldwide and translated into 35 languages.

Her latest play, God of Carnage, opened on 8 December 2006 at the Schauspielhaus in Zurich, directed by Jürgen Gosch; in Paris on 25 January 2008 at the Theatre Antoine, directed by the author, with Isabelle Huppert; in London on 25 March 2008 with Ralph Fiennes; and on Broadway in March 2009 with James Gandolfini. This production is the Australian premiere. Yasmina’s novels include Hammerklavier, Une Desolation, Adam Haberberg, Dans la Luge d’Arthur Schopenhauer, Nulle Part and L’Aube, le Soir ou la Nuit. Yasmina has also written the screenplay for the film Le Pique-Nique de Lulu Kreutz, directed by Didier Martiny.

H&K/Carole Bellaiche
Describe your role as lighting designer?

As a lighting designer my role is to support the actors and text by providing;

- Illumination
- A sense of place and time
- Atmosphere
- Emotion

What is appealing to you about the story of *God of Carnage*?

The story of *God of Carnage* appeals to me because it demonstrates the fact that despite race, sex, occupation or relations, we all live our lives according to our own unique system and order of values. The consequences of not being able to communicate our values in the terms of other people’s values are often devastating.

What is your creative process when considering the lighting design?

When considering the lighting design, it is most important to always serve the play. I go through several steps, some of which include;

- Read and get to know the play
- Extract information like times, places etc. relevant to lighting
- Watch and participate in the actors rehearsal process
- Draw a lighting plan
- Talk in depth with the director and designer regarding the lighting cues
- Focus and plot the lights in the theatre
- Make adjustments to suit changes in blocking etc.
- Watch the previews and check for timing
- Open the show!
Actor’s Insight — Jodie Buzza

Describe your character and what do you find appealing about her?

Annette is a wife and mother and works in wealth management. She is anxious and polite and desires to please, but she has issues with her husband’s mobile phone and his patronising tone and one or two possible food allergies.

What I find interesting about her is that she undergoes a cathartic transformation and finds her voice and she lets rip.

What is your process in developing your character as an actor?

Look at the text and ask myself the following questions; What is the story about? What part does my character play in it? How does she affect others and they her? What has happened to her leading up to the moment in the play? Collect as much information about her to create her story.

When on the floor in rehearsal I listen hard, try to find as many clues as I can in the moment and I keep working on my inner monologue.

What has been a challenge for you during rehearsals and how have you overcome it?

My character has some cathartic moments in the play, one of which depended on a device being made which in the end we decided against using and went for the option of giving me total control of its outcome. The challenge for me is making it look believable, so drilling it moment by moment helps give me the confidence that I can make it work.
Article — Yasmina Reza on writing a play that can rival ‘Art’

When Yasmina Reza returned last year to London’s West End with her new play God of Carnage, she gave one of her rare and insightful interviews with The Independent

Friday, 21 March 2008

Around halfway through an enervating morning, Yasmina Reza flops back on the over-stuffed brocade sofa in the drawing room of the impossibly chic Covent Garden Hotel and declares, in dramatically accented English, “I suffer a lot.” The causes of the petite Parisian’s suffering, it emerges, are manifold, if not a little surprising for one of the powerhouses of European playwriting in the past decade: they include, in no particular order of awfulness, productions of her plays (“I don’t want to be in a situation of suffering – that’s why I never go and see them”), translations of her plays (“As soon as I see a translation in English, I suffer”) and the audiences who watch her plays (“I have no tolerance for them at all”).

All in all, being Reza must be rather difficult. But not half as difficult, one surmises, as working with Reza must be. Nevertheless, since the earliest days of her break-out hit, Art – which ran for eight years in the West End and has been translated into 35 languages – distinguished actors from Richard Griffiths to Ralph Fiennes have clamoured to appear in her plays.

Meeting Reza, who notoriously spurns interviews and has a formidable reputation for snobbery and being difficult, is, then, a daunting prospect. But today, the 48-year old is unexpectedly good company. Dressed casually but elegantly in a grey cardigan layered over a silk camisole, with artfully mussed jet black hair and heavily lidded dark eyes, she is at once fiercely guarded and refreshingly candid, frequently breaking into charming peals of laughter. She is, in many ways, the embodiment of the spirit of her plays – both darkly enigmatic and wickedly funny.

She began her career on the stage. Having completed “some studies of no interest” at the University of Nanterre, she enrolled at the renowned Jacques Lecoq theatre school and spent a few years acting in Molière and Marivaux. But the waiting around for work irritated her – “You are not the master of your own destiny” – and she soon turned to the more independent pursuit of writing, producing her first screenplay for Jusqu’à la nuit, directed by Didier Martiny, her now ex-partner, with whom she has two children.

In 1987, she wrote her first play, the Molière Award-winning Conversations After a Burial. An elegant countryhouse dissection of sibling rivalries, it set out very clearly her distinctive style as a writer of ‘funny tragedy’. “Most of the reviews – which were the greatest I’ve ever had – said it was very Chekhovian,” she says, leaning in conspiratorially. “My reaction was, ‘I must go and read some Chekhov!’”

It was Art, her hilarious Beckettian tale of three mutually dependent friends who fall out over the purchase of a very expensive all-white painting, which made her name – and her fortune. In the Parisian audience was Sean Connery’s wife Micheline, who immediately suggested to her husband that he buy up the film rights. Reza, characteristically, said no. “It’s not a question of principle, I’m not against a film. I’ve just never had a project in front of me that convinced me.”

Nothing daunted Connery, he went on to co-produce the London theatre premiere and a smash hit was born. In its eight-year West End run, it showcased 26 casts and went on to win the Olivier for best new comedy.
God of Carnage takes a superficially similar form, pitting two couples against each other. Whereas her earlier plays focused mercilessly on vampiric, suffocating male relationships, these later works probe marriage and parenthood. “For a long time, I was more obsessed with relationships between men. And it was easier for me to write through a man’s voice because it hid me like a mask,” she says. “But I think I’ve made progress now. More and more I write better parts for women. I’ve improved.”

In God of Carnage, the couples' conversation is dominated by a particularly brutal playground fight between their respective sons. “Parenting is an inexhaustible subject,” Reza says. “I’ve been a normal parent, I’ve met parents, I’ve stood at the school gates.” Her 20-year-old daughter is studying to be a lawyer, and her 15-year-old son wants to be a singer. Neither has professed an interest in the theatre (“Thank God!”). There is, she says, nothing autobiographical in this latest work, unlike Life x 3, in which the demanding child was based on her son. “When my son came to see it in Paris, he was the same age as the child in the play,” she tells me, suddenly giggly and maternal. “At the end he turned to me and said, ‘The child is terrible. I could do it much better.’”

The new four-hander is Reza’s most uncomfortable work yet, as an initially cordial occasion descends into an Albee-esque nightmare of boozing, recrimination and neuroses. As usual, there are larger themes lurking beneath the immaculate soft furnishings and barbed chitchat, but this time round the view of humanity is particularly bleak (including an inexplicable act of cruelty involving a hamster) and futile, as fruitless demands for an apology bring to mind the messy aftermath of the war in Iraq and the stalemate in the Middle East.

To Reza’s chagrin, this abstract tackling of big ideas from the comfort of the sofa has seen her plays labeled as quintessentially Gallic. “If they were so typically French, they wouldn't go all around the world,” she argues, reeling off influences as diverse as Dostoevsky and F. Scott Fitzgerald. “Maybe the characters are typically French, but the writing is not at all. It's inherited from my way of speaking, from my family. It's a Jewish way of thinking – very fast, sharp, funny and self-mocking. For me, the French language is a new country. No one in my family, apart from my parents, who had accents, could speak French. I wanted to be French. When you are from nowhere, you want to lay claim to somewhere.”

Reza’s mother is Hungarian and her father was an Iranian Jew born in Moscow. They met in France, and Yasmina, the eldest of three daughters (one of whom died in infancy), was born in Paris in 1959. She is fiercely proud of her origins and her peculiar, deracinated writing style. “There are lots of words and phrases that I more or less invent, which in English are so flat, so poor. If – and I’m totally incapable of doing it – I could write directly in English, I would never write in the way the translations are written. As soon as I see a translation in English, I suffer. And Christopher [Hampton, her English translator] suffers too – I make him suffer.”

Ideally, she’d like the audiences of her plays to suffer a little more, too. While her plays appear to pander to the middle-class sensibilities and sense of humour of those watching, the playwright has frequently slammed their cozy impression of being in on the joke, “laughter congratulating itself for being intelligent enough to know why it’s being laughed”.

But she must realise that her “funny tragedies” are likely to produce just such a reaction? “I have nothing against laughter. On the contrary. But they are not pure comedy, not nonsense. I hope that they have a deep, profound meaning.” She sighs. “Most of the time I don’t agree with the reaction to my plays. It’s very contradictory. Pierre Arditi (who starred in Art in Paris) once said the most wonderful thing: ‘If we had to choose the audience according to your criteria’,” – her dark eyes light up with glee – “‘We’d play in front of 12 people.”

Extracts from article by Alice Jones reprinted with kind permission of The Independent
Article — The Art of Translation

Yasmina Reza’s work in London has been translated from French to English exclusively by Christopher Hampton since her smash hit Art first opened in London’s West End, in 1996. The following extracts regarding their working relationship are from Al Senter’s program article ‘Friends Reunited’ for the Theatre Royal Bath production of God of Carnage which opened in February this year.

It was through his agent, Peggy Ramsay, that the name of Yasmina Reza first reached Christopher Hampton’s ears, and it was a name that would re-surface years later on one of Hampton’s regular writing trips to Paris.

“Art was playing at a theatre around the corner from my hotel and I was strolling past the entrance one day when I noticed the title of the play and the name of the writer on the poster. I was intrigued. I remembered that Peggy had sent me Yasmina’s first play, Conversations After a Burial. So I went to the box office and tried to buy a ticket for Art, but I was told that the play was sold out for the next month. However, I managed to get a return and so I saw the play. I was extremely impressed by how wise and how funny it was.”

Hampton remembers the early days of their working relationship. “Even when Yasmina’s command of English was not as good as it is now, it was apparent that she kept a very close eye on the translations of her work. She was very concerned that we wouldn’t get away with anything and that her work was presented as closely as possible to the original production.”

In any profession, interpersonal chemistry is essential for a fruitful working relationship and Hampton reports that: “We all had a very good time working on Art so there seemed no reason why we couldn’t continue. When we work together, I often find myself being reined back from giving the audience too good a time. I remember us watching an early preview of Art and Yasmina was completely taken aback by the amount of laughter there was from the audience. ‘What have you done?’ she wanted to know. ‘Why is there all this laughter?’ I had to explain that among the philistine English, modern art is generally a subject for comedy.”

Hampton is inclined to see Reza’s plays as satires on bourgeois values, behaviour and hypocrisy. It is clear that there is undoubted humour in the plays and a humour that has successfully crossed the English Channel as well as numerous other frontiers around the world.

For Hampton, preserving the humour in the translation is a matter of patiently weighing each element of the text. “You have to arrange the lines in a certain way and sometimes it’s simply a matter of changing the word order. Yasmina writes in a heightened language, she has a very distinctive voice and her plays could not be written by someone else. I’ll often say to her that she has come up with an unusual turn of phrase and she tells me that she has invented it. So you have to find a theatrical way of expressing such invented turns of phrase and in a way that will make people laugh. It’s not an easy exercise but it’s certainly fun.”

Al Senter is a London-based theatre journalist and interviewer on alsenter@yahoo.co.uk
Article — Gods of Carnage

“You see Véronique, I believe in the God of Carnage. He has ruled, uninterruptedly, since the dawn of time...”

Alain, God of Carnage

If theatre has a primitive origin, common to us all, superceding all religion, cultures and beliefs, a place where we can venerate and weave a collective spirit into being, then perhaps theatre has the unique ability to make us see who we truly are as primal human beings.

Across all cultures whether from Ancient Greece to Hindu Mysticism, one of the many unique facets that seems to transcend us all, a base animalistic if not ‘Neanderthal’ like factor, is the need to destroy, dismember and annihilate. A need we tend to suppress but a feeling that rears its ugly head. To this effect we have all indulged in a God, a God of war, a God of brutality, a God of destruction: the God of carnage.

Ares: Greek God. A.K.A. Mars to the Romans. The God of bloodlust and slaughter is brother to Athena and son to Zeus and Hera. Abhorred by the Gods and more so by his father who declared (as per The Iliad): “I hate you more than any of the gods on Olympus; your only dreams are those of destruction, war and combat”.

Anhur: Egyptian God. The son of Ra (or Sun God) was in charge of hunting and slaying the enemies of his solar-deity father.

Agrona: Celtic God. She is the God of strife and slaughter. The river Aeron in Wales is named after her and literally means “carnage”.

Kali: Hindu God. She is associated as the God of death and destruction and the ultimate figure of annihilation. Through this role, she is also seen as the redeemer of the universe, and thus the patron for time and change.

Aesma Daeva: Persian God. A ruthless and immoral God of war seeks wrath and revenge. He chases the souls of the deceased as they rise to heaven.

Hachiman: Japanese God. Shinto God of war, guardian of the Minamoto clan of samurai, is symbolised by a vortex or whirlpool with three heads. Hachiman became one of the most important Gods after the establishment of the Shogun regime from 1192 to 1867, second only to Amaterasu (the sun Goddess).

Tumatauenga: Maori God. The God of war and destruction is also the ancestor of humankind. His exploits taught mankind how to harness the resources of the natural world. The body of the first warrior to fall into battle is usually offered up to Tumatauenga.
Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What themes are represented in the play? Give examples of scenes or characters that reinforce your ideas.
- How and why might these themes and this story be relevant to a younger audience?
- After reading the Lighting Designer’s Insight by Bernie Tan, discuss how the lighting influenced and contributed to the performance. For example, consider mood and transitions of scenes or moments in the play.
- Why do you think the playwright, Yasmina Reza chose to have the sons as unseen characters?
- After seeing Queensland Theatre Company's production of God of Carnage and viewing the photos of the set box on page 19, discuss the design and why the designer would have chosen to use garbage bags in the set, yellow wall paper and a simple design, in terms of lack of realism?
- Describe the relationship between the couples and discuss how the relationships change. At what moment/s in the play do they change and why?
- What do you think the play is saying about the relationship between parents and children?
- What do you think the play is saying about adults when trying to negotiate and resolve a conflict?

Websites of Interest

http://godofcarnage.com/home.php — God of Carnage on Broadway


http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/theatre-dance/features/yasmina-reza-please-stop-laughing-at-me-795570.html — Article on Yasmina Reza

Script Excerpt One — *God of Caranage*

_The NOVAKS and the RALEIGHS, sitting down, facing one another. We need to sense right away that the place belongs to the NOVAKS and that the two couples have just met. In the CENTRE, a coffee table, covered with art books. Two big bunches of tulips in vases. The prevailing mood is serious, friendly and tolerant._

VÈRONIQUE So, this is our statement... You'll be doing your own, of course... “At 5.30pm on the 3rd of November, in Aspirant Dunant Gardens, following a verbal alteration, Benjamin Reille, 11, armed with a stick, struck our son Henry Vallon, in the face. This action resulted in, apart from a swelling of the upper lip, the breaking of two incisors, including injury to the nerve in the right incisor.”

ALAIN Armed?

VÈRONIQUE Armed? You don't like armed, what shall we say, Michel, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?

ALAIN Furnished, yes.

MICHEL Furnished with a stick.

VÈRONIQUE *(Making the correction)* Furnished. The irony is, we've always regarded Aspirant Dunant Gardens as a haven of security, unlike Montsouris Park.

MICHEL She's right. We've always said Aspirant Dunant Gardens yes, Montsouris Park no.

VÈRONIQUE Absolutely. Anyway, thank you for coming. There's nothing to be gained from getting stuck down some emotional cul-de-sac.

ANNETTE We should be thanking you. We should.

VÈRONIQUE I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, isn't there?

ALAIN Which the children don't appear to have mastered. At least, not ours!

ANNETTE Yes, not ours!... What's going to happen to the tooth with the affected nerve?...

VÈRONIQUE We don't know yet. They're being cautious about the prognosis. Apparently the nerve hasn't been totally exposed.

MICHEL Only a little bit of it's been exposed.

VÈRONIQUE Yes. Some of it’s been exposed and some of it’s still covered. That’s why they've decided not to kill the nerve just yet.
MICHEL They’re trying to give the tooth a chance.
VÈRONIQUE Obviously it would be best to avoid endodontic surgery.
ANNETTE Well, yes...
VÈRONIQUE So there’ll be an interim period while they give the nerve a chance to recover.
MICHEL In the meantime, they’ll be giving him ceramic crowns.
VÈRONIQUE Whatever happens, you can’t have an implant before you’re eighteen.
MICHEL No.
VÈRONIQUE Permanent implants can’t be fitted until you finish growing.
ANNETTE Of course. I hope... I hope it all works out.
VÈRONIQUE Yes, I hope so.
Script Excerpt Two — *God of Carnage*

VÈRONIQUE What a nightmare! Horrible!

MICHEL Tell you what, he’d better not push me any further.

VÈRONIQUE She’s dreadful as well.

MICHEL Not as bad.

VÈRONIQUE She’s a phony.

MICHEL Less irritating.

VÈRONIQUE They’re both dreadful! Why do you keep siding with them?

*She sprays the tulips.*

MICHEL I don’t keep siding with them, what are you talking about?

VÈRONIQUE You keep vacillating, trying to play both ends against the middle.

MICHEL No, I don’t!

VÈRONIQUE Yes, you do. Going on about your triumphs as a gang leader, telling them they’re free to do whatever they like with their son when the child is a public menace, when a child’s a public menace, it’s everybody’s concern, I can’t believe she puked all over my books!

*She sprays the Kokoschka.*

MICHEL *(pointing)* Put some on the People of the Tundra...

VÈRONIQUE If you think you’re about to hurl, you go to the proper place.

MICHEL ...And the Foujita.

VÈRONIQUE *(spraying everything)* This is disgusting.

MICHEL I was pushing it a little bit with the shithouse systems.

VÈRONIQUE You were brilliant.

MICHEL Good answers, don’t you think?

VÈRONIQUE Brilliant. The stock manager thing was brilliant.

MICHEL What an asshole. And what did he call her?!...

VÈRONIQUE Woof-woof.
MICHEL    That's right, Woof-woof!

VÈRONIQUE   Woof-woof!

_They both laugh. ALAIN returns, hair-dryer in hand._

ALAIN    That's right, I call her Woof-woof.

VÈRONIQUE  Oh... I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to be rude... It’s so easy to make fun of other people’s nicknames! What about us, what do we call each other, Michel? Far worse, isn’t it?

ALAIN    Did you want the hair-dryer?

VÈRONIQUE   Thank you.

MICHEL    Thank you.

_He takes the hair-dryer._

MICHEL    We call each other darjeeling, like the tea. That’s more ridiculous, if you ask me!
Classroom Activity

RESPONDING

After reading the script excerpts above answer the following:

- Describe and compare the characters of Vèronique and Annette
- Describe and compare the characters of Alain and Michel
- Divide students into small groups. Give each group a couple – Vèronique and Michel or Annette and Alain. With a large piece of paper, brainstorm with words, drawings or short phrases, what the world of Annette and Alain and Veronique and Michel would look like and feel like. Include their home, their work place, their weekend activities etc.

RESPONDING AND PRESENTING

Tirade*: A prolonged outburst of bitter, outspoken denunciation

*God of Carnage* includes quite a few speeches where the characters are sprooking about an idea or topic that bothers them greatly.

Read the following Tirade and consider why the character Alain, would be saying this to Vèronique. How does this inform his relationship with his wife and family and what does it say about him? Ask individual students to interpret the text and present it as a short piece to the class.

ALAIN You're the same breed. You're part of the same category of woman, committed, problem solving, that's not what we like about women, what we like about women is sensuality, wildness, hormones. Women who make a song and dance about their intuition, women who are custodians of the world depress us, even him, poor Michel, your husband, he's depressed...

FORMING AND PRESENTING

Discuss the pretext that occurred before the play begins. Consider the characters of Bruno and Ferdinand and the incident between these two boys in the playground. In pairs devise a short scene that demonstrates what happened between the two boys. Consider the personalities of the parents, the home life of Bruno and Ferdinand and present a piece that is the pretext for *God of Carnage*.

Take this activity a step further and in groups of three, devise a short scene where the boys tell their parents what happened in the playground. Use clues from the script excerpts as to how the parents would have reacted to their son’s news.

Suggested Assessment

RESPONDING TASK

After viewing Queensland Theatre Company’s production of *God of Carnage*, write a critical essay that reflects, analyses, evaluates and synthesises how the play represents the modern family and the roles of men and women in families today. What is Reza saying about families? How did the production use space, relationships and roles to tell a story about family? With your own interpretation of the dramatic meaning and action in the production, use appropriate language conventions and specific examples from the play to communicate your justified position.
Set Model Box

Front Elevation

Plan View