

THE PRETTY PRINCESS  
DOLLHOUSE FOR  
PRETTY PRINCESSES

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY  
*Emma Fonseca Halverson*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## Introduction

Gabi wants to be a writer. Elena wants a family to love and a happy life. Two friends, on the verge of their adult life, realize they have very different viewpoints on how they want to live.

## Playwright Bio

Emma Fonseca Halverson is a student based in Portland, Oregon. She is a member of the Young Professionals Company at Oregon Children's Theatre, where she works on their annual improv troupe, *Impulse!*. When she isn't doing theatre, Emma loves painting, hiking, and reading YA novels. Emma sends all of her gratitude to her family and friends (and the countless times they have proofread her work) and the incredible people she gets to work with here at Theatrefolk.

## Synopsis

Gabi and Elena begin to discuss what their ideas of success are, but the two soon realize they have different views of where they want their lives to go. Gabi feels stuck and Elena does not. The two characters try to get each other to understand what is best for their futures. Will Gabi get unstuck? Will Elena go with Gabi?

## Characters

**GABI:** 16, Latina. Waiting for her big poetry breakthrough. Enjoys reading in the dark for fun.

**ELENA:** 15, Latina. The "mom friend" of any friend group. Has strong opinions on whether flan or tres leches should be the staple party dessert. A little more than a little gay for GABI.

## Themes

Friendship, relationships, adolescence, anxiety, childhood, destiny, family, happiness, individuality, pressure

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ How do you define success?
- ★ What are your dreams for your future?
- ★ Is there anything that could change that future?
- ★ Have you ever felt “metaphorically” trapped? How did it feel? What did you do?
- ★ Do you feel you have any personal responsibility to your family? Why or why not?
- ★ Have you ever had a friend or someone you were close to leave your school or where you are from? How did it feel? Do you still get to see them?

## Pre-Read Activities

### Family Reflection

- ★ Students will write a one-paragraph reflection on their relationship with their family. Are they in a close family or are there circumstances that keep their family from communicating? Are there traditions that keep the family together? Are there traditions that cause tension in the family?

### Vision Board

- ★ Ask students to think about how they imagine their future.
  - » Do they imagine staying home? Moving away?
  - » What do they want to be when they grow up?
  - » Do they have a five-year plan?
  - » What are their hopes and dreams?

- ★ Now have students create a vision board of how they imagine their future.
  - » A vision board is a visual representation of goals in images and text. You may want to find a few examples to show students.
  - » Students can use images from the internet, magazines, or other sources for their board. It can also include quotes they find inspirational.
- ★ After they create their vision boards, have students present them to the class. After presentations you can hang them around the class to remind students of their goals for the future..
- ★ Have a discussion about the vision board project.
  - » What did it feel like to visualize about your future?
  - » What was your favorite part of the activity? What was hard about it?
  - » Did you ever feel trapped while thinking about your future? How did you work through this?
  - » Are you excited about the future? Why or why not?
  - » What can you do to make your dreams come true?

### **Success Quotes**

- ★ In pairs, give students a set amount of time to research quotes about success.
- ★ Have students pick out their favorite one to present to the class.
  - » What does it mean to them?
  - » What is the person saying the quote trying to say?
  - » Why was this the pair's favorite?
- ★ After sharing, have students write out the quote on fun colored construction paper.

- ★ After they are written, create a space in the classroom where you can hang all these quotes to remind students how success can be defined in so many different ways!

## **Dream Monologue**

- ★ Give students five minutes to freewrite about their dreams for the future. What do they want to happen?
- ★ Now have students write a monologue based on their freewrite. Students can write the monologue as themselves or they can create a character who is saying the monologue.
- ★ Ask for volunteers to present their monologue.
- ★ After presentations, debrief the activity with students.
  - » What did it feel like to write about your dreams?
  - » What was easy about it? What was challenging?
  - » Do you think your dream is achievable? Why or why not?
  - » How can you work to accomplish your dreams?

## **Stuck Scene**

- ★ Pair students up and tell them they are going to create a one- to two-minute scene about two characters. One of the characters feels stuck and wants to go off and be successful and the other character is trying to stop them.
- ★ Ask students to resolve the conflict in their scene. Who wins? How do they win?
- ★ Have students present their scenes in pairs.
- ★ After everyone has presented, have a discussion about the scenes.
  - » How did the character feel when they were stuck?
  - » How did you decide who won? How did it feel to win?

- » What do you think the future of these characters could have been if the scene had gone on?

## 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 Pretty Princess Dollhouse for Pretty Princesses*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

### Read One: What is happening?

1. What was Elena doing as Gabi wrote?
2. Why does Gabi call Elena a house wife?
3. What does Gabi want? What does Elena want?
4. What does Elena say is the word of the day? How does she feel about this?
5. Why does Gabi say Elena is trapped?
6. How does Elena feel about her family?
7. What is the main conflict in the play?
8. Where does Gabi want to go?

9. Why do the two characters think Gabi has asthma?
10. Why is it important to find a door?
11. What memory do the characters bring up in the play? How do the two feel about it?
12. How does each character feel about the walls?
13. How does the play end? What is the key idea of the play?

### **Read Two: How does it happen?**

1. What literary device is the author using throughout the play? How does it affect how you read the play?
2. What tactics do the characters in the play use to try and get what they want? Think like an actor for this question!
3. Where do you think the doors lead to?
4. What does the word “trapped” mean in the play?
5. Given most of the play takes place in little lighting, how would you stage the play to make sure both the characters stay lit and seen?
6. Why do you think the playwright has Elena and Gabi talk about their childhood?
7. Why do you think the playwright only tells the story through Gabi and Elena’s eyes? Why do you think the playwright does not include the family?
8. Analyze Elena’s small monologue on page 15 that starts with “We’re not trapped.” What is the significance of what she is saying?
9. What is the significance of the final moment in the play? In your opinion, why did the author choose to end the play this way?
10. What does a dollhouse represent?

11. Why do you think the playwright waits until the end to reveal the set? What is significant in the reveal?

### **Read Three: Why does it happen?**

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *The Pretty Princess Dollhouse for Pretty Princesses*?
2. What would you name the play?
3. Compare and contrast your own experiences of feeling stuck with that of Gabi and Elena's. If you don't have their experiences can you empathize with them?
4. What is the playwright trying to say about family? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. What is the playwright trying to say about success? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

### **Post-Read Questions**

- ★ What parts of the play resonated the most with you? Why?
- ★ Did you sympathize with any of the characters? If so, who and why?
- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in either of the characters?
- ★ Which scene stood out to you the most? Why?



## Post-Read Activities

### Set Design

- ★ The entirety of the set isn't revealed until the end. Think about what the set stands for.
- ★ Have students draw out and design what they would have the set look like. Have students think about what colors they would use and what they would include in the dollhouse.

### Compare & Contrast Characters

- ★ Put students in groups of four and have them create a venn diagram comparing Gabi and Elena.
  - » Think about both physical differences and emotional differences.
  - » Get detailed with the venn diagram and use your imagination to make this a character study of the two personalities in the play.
- ★ Once their venn diagrams are complete, have students present them. This can be an oral presentation or a visual one.
- ★ Once everyone presents, have a wrap-up discussion.
  - » Which character did the student identify with more and why?
  - » What discoveries did they make doing the character study? Did anything surprise them?

### Tactic Improv

- ★ Pair students up and tell them they are going to create two character descriptions where the characters want opposing things.
- ★ Once students write their characters tell them they are going to go onstage and use different tactics to get what they want.

- ★ As the students perform, give each one a tactic to start off with. Along with tactics, give students a place that the scene takes place in. The students should use their character descriptions to improvise the scene.
- ★ Throughout the improvisation change the tactics you give the students. You can go through about three tactics for each scene.
- ★ These tactics should lead to one of the characters getting what they want in the scene, thus leading to a resolution.
- ★ Once everyone has performed their scene, have a discussion.
  - » How did it feel to use different tactics?
  - » How did you decide who won?
  - » How did it feel when you didn't get what you wanted?

### **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 out a scene as well as read it?
  - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

### **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?

## **Future Conversation**

- ★ Have students pair up to interview one another. Students will be discussing their future selves.
- ★ Students will begin the interview by talking with each other as if they are catching up five years in the future. Here are some examples of questions to ask:
  - » How have you been these last five years? What have you been up to?
  - » What are you most proud of?
  - » How is your family doing?
  - » What are your dreams? How have you been working to accomplish them?
  - » Where are you living now?
- ★ Then have students repeat this interview for 10 years in the future and a later date in the distant future.

## **Playwright Process**

Playwright Emma Fonseca Halverson talks about her process writing *The Pretty Princess Dollhouse for Pretty Princesses*. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the Playwright's.

### **What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?**

My inspiration for writing this play was the self-discovery I was experiencing in my life at the time. This play was both a way to process the new identities I found myself in, and also an exploration of a new type of writing I hadn't worked in as much before this.

### **What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?**

The biggest challenge I encountered was converting this from a three page scene to a one act play. I had originally written this as a short play, but the topic interested me enough to keep working on it. However, at first I was pretty lost on how to expand the original ideas.

### **What is harder: coming up with ideas or rewrites?**

The first draft is always the hardest for me. Rewrites are the fun part - you get to know the character, get to hone in the lines, and dive deeper into the story.

### **What engages you about playwriting?**

Playwriting engages me because it allows me to create a little world on paper, and eventually on stage. I grew up acting, but the idea of actually creating the story has always fascinated me, and getting the opportunity to explore this has been incredible.