

ANONYMOUS

A PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Allison Green



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE: ANONYMOUS

Introduction

Anonymous addresses sharing our stories and finding out who we are. It is about discovering our identities and learning how to be our truest selves.

Playwright Bio

Allison is a storyteller, artist, and teacher. She is the granddaughter of Andy Green, an Algonquin elder of Talon Lake near Mattawa Ontario. It was with great pride that she was gifted the Algonquin name Shinawe Pewanak by elders who felt she earned “The One who Rattles the Flint.” Elders saw the passion to pass on her fire through the teaching of young people, new teachers, and members of her Indigenous community who have not found their voice.

Allison’s formal theatrical training began at York University, Toronto, in theatre production, stage management, and design, where she also returned for her Bachelor of Education. Allison’s artistry can be seen in her Indigenous artwork, beading, stage design, and painting. She continues to write, direct, and stage productions with high school students. She is currently a secondary school teacher in rural Northern Ontario where she teaches drama, social sciences, and Indigenous studies.

Synopsis

“Me” is the new kid in school trying to fit in. “You” shows Me around and Me meets She and Her. Them doesn’t know why Me left her old school. Rumors begin to circulate about Me and You. Are they dating? Why do they spend so much time together? Me, You, She, Her, and Them are trying to discover their identities in a society that is constantly asking you to share your story. *Anonymous* is a story of every teenager: the new kid trying to fit in, the best friends, the love interests, the kid in the corner with their secret, the group of individuals each trying to belong.

Characters

ME [W]: Teenage girl.

YOU [M]: Teenage boy. Me's friend.

SHE [W]: Teenage girl. Me's friend.

HER [W]: Teenage girl. Me's friend.

THEM [A]: A chorus of voices.

Themes

Adolescence, body image, friendship, love, gossip, individuality, relationships, self-image, identity

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What makes you an individual? How are you unique and different?
- ★ What does it mean to "fit in"? Have you ever tried to fit in with a group?
- ★ How would you describe your identify?
- ★ Is there anyone in your life who doesn't agree with how you see yourself?
- ★ What is something people don't know about you?
- ★ Do you find it easy to open up? Why or why not?
- ★ How do you make friends? Do you find it easy?
- ★ Have you ever judged someone without really knowing them?

Pre-Read Activities

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 center. At the end of each line, they will write one word or phrase that describes them (tall, girl, Scottish background, 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 reflect on their identity. Are they in control of their identity? Is there anything they would like to change? What would happen if they did?

Fun Facts

- ★ Have students write a fun fact that people don't know about them on a piece of paper. They are not to put their name on their paper.
- ★ Go around the classroom and collect the fun facts. Then have students come up one by one to read one aloud (not their own, one randomly given to them).
- ★ As a class, have students try and guess who the fun fact is about.
- ★ This is a fun activity for students to get to know more about each other and a way for students to experience what it means to let people into your personality.

Anonymous Tableaux

- ★ In groups, students will discuss who they are on the inside and how they present themselves on the outside. Do they try to fit in? What makes them unique? How do they make themselves anonymous?
- ★ Groups will create tableaux that show two scenarios:
 - » The first one will show them trying to fit in and be anonymous.
 - » The second one will show them being themselves and trying to stand out.
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Discuss the process of creating the tableaux. Which of the two did you prefer to create? Why?

Anonymous Character Profile

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a character profile for someone who wants to be Anonymous. Come up with the following details for this character:
 - » Name
 - » Three physical traits
 - » Three personality traits
 - » A favourite outfit, which includes their favourite colour
 - » Favourite/least favourite food, movie, music
 - » Pet peeve
 - » Secret
 - » Motto

- » Living environment

I am... monologue

- ★ Tell students that they are going to free write for five minutes with the prompt "I am..."
- ★ Once students finish their free write have them reflect on what they wrote. Tell students that they are going to write a monologue based on their free write. They can write the monologue as themselves or as a character saying the monologue.
- ★ Students will then present their monologues.
- ★ Once everyone is done presenting, discuss:
 - » What did it feel like to free write?
 - » What was difficult about this activity? What did you enjoy?
 - » Did you learn anything about yourself through this exercise? What was it?
 - » How did you overcome any challenges you faced during this free write?
 - » Why did you decide to share the story you did?

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 *Anonymous*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. Why does Me say people don't notice her?
2. How does Me feel about You?
3. How does Me describe You?
4. How does Me know She and Her?
5. What is gym class focusing on this week?
6. What does Me want to become after high school?
7. What is a Bert?
8. Why were students fascinated with Mom?
9. What rumors are people coming up with about Me and You?
10. How does Me begin to let people in?
11. What is the symbolism of a teeter totter?
12. What exciting news does Me share with You? What does she do when she shares it?
13. What does You confess to Me?
14. What does Me learn at the end of the play?
15. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. Why do you think the playwright starts the play with the sentence “Just Me”? How does that set the tone for the play?
2. In your opinion, why do you think the playwright chose not to name the characters?
3. If you were going to name the characters, what would you name them?
4. Based on Me’s use of language, how do you picture her? How would you costume her? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. In the Production Notes the playwright states that “different locations, little set and few props are required to fulfill the characters’ needs. In many ways — less is more.” In your opinion, why did the playwright make this choice?
6. If you had to create a set for the play, what would you choose?
7. What is the significance of the line, “I am me. Me. Me. And in a hundred different more we’re exactly the same”?
8. In your opinion, why does the author choose certain lines to break the fourth wall? What effect does this have on the audience? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
9. What is the significance of the line, “Letting no one in — letting nothing out”?
10. After reading the play, would you choose to costume the “Them” characters with masks? Why or why not?
11. Cite examples of how the playwright uses metaphors and symbolism throughout the play. Explain what the playwright is saying through their use of metaphors and symbolism.

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. Compare and contrast your own personal experience dealing with school with what happens in the play.

2. What is the playwright trying to say about identity? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about sharing our stories? Cite examples from the text to support your answer.
4. In your opinion what is going to happen next for Me? What is going to happen next for You?
5. How does the playwright want you to respond to the text?
6. In your opinion, why is the play called *Anonymous*?

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?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you present yourself in public?
- ★ Would you end the play differently? Why or why not?
- ★ What does anonymity look like? Behave like?

Post-Read Activities

Labels

- ★ Create headbands with labels on them for students to put on. They should be unable to see their own label, but others can see it when they put the headband on.
- ★ Have students walk around the space and tell them to treat others based on what they see on the label. For example, if someone's label is "popular" have the students treat that person as if they were popular.

- ★ As students walk around and interact with one another, tell them at the end of the activity they are going to guess what label they are based on how others treated them.
- ★ Once everyone has a guess have a discussion:
 - » Who do you think you are and why?
 - » How long did it take you to realize your label? How did you realize what it was?
 - » How did others treat you? How did you treat others?
 - » What did it feel like not knowing your label?
 - » Do you believe labels are real in your school? Why or why not?
 - » Do you treat others differently based on their perceived label? Why or why not?

Character Mask & Costume Design

- ★ At the beginning of the play the playwright says, “You may consider “Them” wearing masks for anonymity.”
- ★ Design a specific costume and mask for one of the Them characters.
 - » What would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them?
 - » What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume and mask 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?

Anonymous Art

- ★ In the play Me mentions wanting to be an artist. Students will put themselves in Me's shoes and create art.
- ★ Tell students to pick one of Me's monologues and create an art piece inspired by it. Remind students that it is okay if they are not the best artist. This is for exploration and creativity. Students can draw, use words, or take pictures from magazines to create their art.
- ★ Once students are done have them present their pieces and discuss:
 - » Why did they make the decisions they made in their piece?
 - » What inspired their piece?
 - » What stands out about their piece?
 - » What is the message they want to get across with their art?

Poster Design

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize the play 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?

Dear Abby Monologue

- ★ Toward the end of the play, characters write to Dear Abby about how they feel and what they need advice on.
- ★ Tell students to create a character that writes to Abby. Students will start their monologues with Dear Abby and write from there.

- ★ After students are done with their monologues, have them present.

Create Your Own Character

- ★ The characters in the play are named You, Me, She, Her, and Them. Tell students they are going to create their own character for the play. The character will also use pronouns. For example, students can create He, Him, or They.
- ★ Tell students to write a character profile for their character.
 - » Name
 - » Three physical traits
 - » Three personality traits
 - » A favourite outfit, which includes their favourite colour
 - » Favourite/least favourite food, movie, music
 - » Pet peeve
 - » Secret
 - » Motto
 - » Living environment
- ★ After creating a character profile, tell students to write a monologue for their character. How does that character fit into the world of Anonymous?
- ★ Once everyone is done, have them present their monologues.

Playwright Process

Playwright Allison Green talks about her process writing Anonymous.

Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

What was the inspiration for writing this play?

I was inspired to write *Anonymous* while working as a teacher and social worker. It became clear that the theme of Identity – how young people share who they are, hide the parts of themselves that they are self-conscious about and find their strengths and ways of expressing those gifts – is paramount to healthy adolescent growth and development. I used my own personal experiences and those of my own best friend to create the characters of “Me” and “You” but took liberties to make those characters feel relatable to the actors and audience.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

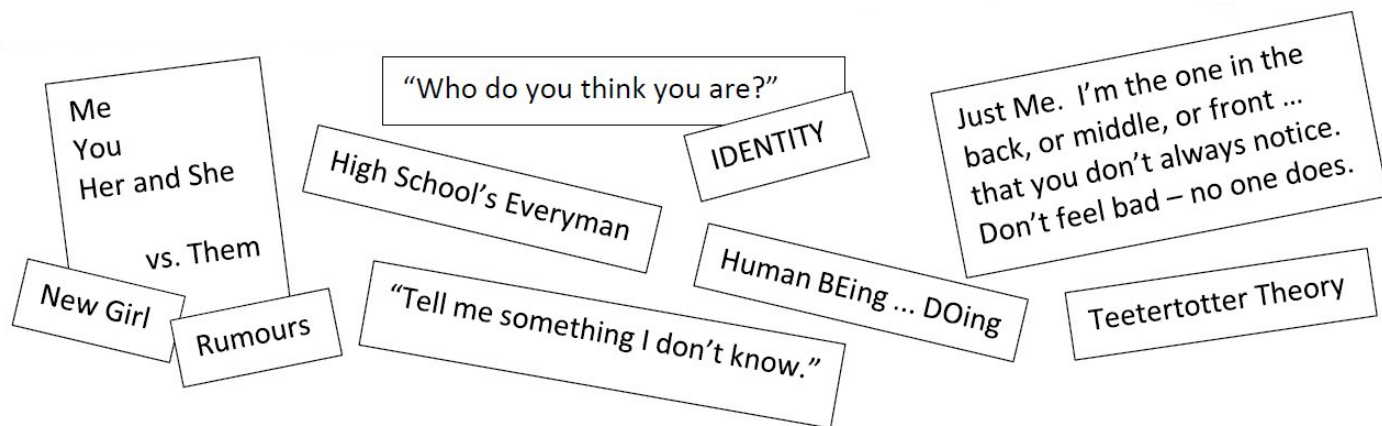
The greatest challenge of *Anonymous* was writing without character names. All of the characters are anonymous with names like Me, You, Her, She and a group ensemble of Them. I will also mention that this play was written way before the days of using “Pronouns” and discussing how we identify ourselves using pronouns. But the physical adjustments to scenes where characters use “Her” and “She” as names took a bit of mental aerobics for me!

As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play and why?

I have a few favourite moments – each, for different reasons. I enjoy some of “Me’s” youthful flashbacks like moments to the Grade 1 classroom’s Parent Day and I enjoy how people react to “Bert” – which was a simple idea that I’ve always had that I built the scene around. But, other favourite moments revolve around audience reaction to some of the common experiences that young people can relate to – Gym Class and how teens feel about themselves around others. This play feels like captured moments from my own life; and it’s reassuring and heartwarming to realize that others have gone through and continue to go through similar realities in their own lives.

What’s your writing process like?

My writing process begins with very loose ideas – for *Anonymous* my process began with post-it notes and lists – each note may have a small moment, line of importance, bigger conceptual idea or a huge overarching theme. For this play I had notes like:



From these small notes I then started writing scenes (by hand and then transcribe and type) – following an outline of plot structure and progression. Inevitably, some of these small notes get repeated visually as symbols or throughout as a motif.

What engages you about playwriting?

I am a storyteller. And I come from families of storytellers. Maybe it's my Indigenous background or the nurturing spirit of reading books and stories that I got from my family – but I have always liked to tell and share stories. I was trained in theatre professionally so my preferred medium is playwriting. I enjoy playwriting for so many reasons – certainly I like the narrative rule breaking that you can play with in the theatre like breaking the fourth wall, mixing monologue, dialogue, choral reading, and movement to tell a visually impactful and interesting story. I love creating characters – some completely fictional characters that I wish I could be and want to know but also basing characters on mashed-up versions of friends, family members and strangers that I have found interesting in my life.

I also tend to "See" stories – I like picturing how people interact with each other and I enjoy using words to create those images I see in my mind. I must admit that I have never seen any of the plays I have written produced on stage by someone else – I have produced them myself with groups of students that I teach, mentor and work with – but, I have never seen a version of *Anonymous* or any of my other works created entirely by another group. I think that's mostly because of my own rural, Northern Ontario location and how distant the production locations seem – and I truly hope to rectify that... though scary, I do feel excited at the notion of seeing how others interpret my words; I look forward to being an audience member for *Anonymous*.