

EMOTIONAL BAGGAGE

A ONE ACT PLAY WITHOUT WORDS BY
Lindsay Price



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Seven strangers meet in a train station. Instead of luggage, they all carry their “emotional baggage.”

Background

The initial workshop and exploration took place at the University of Western Michigan. The second workshop took place in Toronto.

Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator, and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

Synopsis

Everyone has their own emotional baggage. What is yours? Characters walk into a train station with their emotional baggage and can't leave it behind. Emotional baggage holds them back, as they explore whether they will ever be able to let it go. What happens when they meet someone who can leave it behind? Will they learn to let go or carry their emotional baggage with them forever? This play addresses how we handle our emotional baggage and work towards leaving it behind.

Characters

CAN'T GET OVER FIRST LOVE: Female

CHIP ON SHOULDER ABOUT WEIGHT/THE MAN: Male

DEAD END JOB: Male

GETTING OVER HEART ATTACK: Male

INSECURE ABOUT LOOKS: Female

LIVING IN THE PAST: Female

OVERBEARING MOM: Male

WELL ROUNDED PERSON/THE MOTHER: Female

Themes

Body image, relationships, individuality, obedience, self-image, anxiety, illness/health, kindness

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does emotional baggage mean to you?
- ★ Do you think you're good at reading body language? Why or why not?
- ★ Do you think plays need words to tell a story? Why or why not?
- ★ How do you deal with your emotional baggage?
- ★ How would you describe your emotional baggage?
- ★ How do you communicate without words?

Pre-Read Activities

Gesture Exploration

- ★ Tell students that before reading the play they are going to explore character names and gestures.
- ★ Have students walk around the space with their neutral walk. When you call out a character name they should transform into how they think that character walks.

- ★ Tell students to create a repetitive gesture for that character as they explore the space. Do they make eye contact with others? Do they walk slowly or fast? Without using words, how does the character show how they feel with their body?
- ★ Repeat this activity with as many characters as you would like to explore.
- ★ When the activity is done, tell students to write down what they felt when they were each character and what gesture they created. This will be used to reflect on once students read the play.

Music Exploration

- ★ Tell students you are going to play different sounds and music. They should all close their eyes and listen to the sounds you play.
- ★ As students listen, tell them to use their five senses to imagine a scene. Where does the music take them?
- ★ After you play each sound/song discuss:
 - » What did you imagine while listening to the sound?
 - » What kind of movement would apply to this sound?
 - » What story is taking place during this sound?
 - » How did the tempo changes in the sound affect the story you were imagining?
 - » What stood out about the sound and the story you imagined?

Draw Your Baggage

- ★ Tell students to imagine what their baggage looks like. The bag doesn't have to be literal. Remind students that it can be abstract.
- ★ The goal is for students to visualize their baggage. What type of baggage would students use? How does the baggage affect them on the outside and the inside? What colors, textures, shapes, and lines would you use?

Charades

- ★ Put students into two teams and tell them they are going to play charades to explore how they read body language. This activity will help them learn to communicate without using words.
- ★ When students go up to present, tell them to be specific with their movements. What are they trying to show? How does their body help tell this story?
- ★ Keep playing until a team reaches a certain number of points determined before starting.

Emotional Baggage Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will create a three-picture tableau that focuses on the subject of emotional baggage.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ The first picture will feature everyone trying to handle their baggage on their own, the second picture will feature everyone coming together to help each other with their baggage, and the third picture will feature everyone letting go of their baggage.
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class.
- ★ Discuss with students: How did it feel to let go of the emotional baggage? What made your emotional baggage challenging? Was it easy or hard to let go? Why? How did it feel to come together as a group versus being alone with the baggage?

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

Read One: What is happening?

1. Where does the play take place?
2. What job does Dead End Job work?
3. What does Insecure hide behind?
4. What did Living in the Past do in her past life?
5. Why is the spotlight important to Living in the Past?
6. When does First Love become happy?
7. What comes out of the trunk Overbearing Mother has?
8. Pick a character from the play. Describe their gesture.
9. Why does everyone freeze midway through the play?
10. How do the characters react to the guitar case?

11. What makes Well Rounded different from the other characters?
12. Who is the first person to approach Well Rounded?
13. What happens when Well Rounded and another character swap baggage?
14. How does Well Rounded get the others to leave their baggage?
15. What is the key message of the play?

Read Two: How is it happening?

1. How does the description the playwright provides in the beginning set the tone for the play?
2. How does the tone shift each time a new character enters the scene? Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
3. How does the playwright use repetition to develop characters in the play? Cite an example from the text to support your answer.
4. What effect does the author create by not using words in the play?
5. Based on her movements and description, how would you costume Living in the Past?
6. How would you describe the tempo of this play? In your opinion, are the gestures slow or fast? Name an example of a tempo shift from the text.
7. Pick one of the characters from the play. What do you think their gesture symbolizes?
8. Describe the characters' relationships with one another. How do the relationships develop as the play goes on?
9. What is the significance of Well Rounded in the play? How does she contrast with the other characters?
10. In your opinion, how does the sound design set the tone for the play?

Read Three: Why is it happening?

1. In your opinion, would you add words to the play? Why or why not?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about baggage? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about letting go? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with emotional baggage with what happens in the play.
5. How does the author want you to respond to the play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question 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 handle your emotional baggage?
- ★ What symbol would you use to describe your emotional baggage?

Post-Read Activities

Fill in the Blanks

- ★ Put students in groups and assign them a scene to analyze. Tell each group they are going to put together a scene where they say the subtext of the scene out loud.
- ★ Students will fill the silences in and speak the thoughts of the characters in the scene.
 - » What does the character want to say in the silence?

- » How does the character's thoughts affect how they behave in the rest of the scene?
- » What is the character thinking in the silence?
- ★ Have each group perform and once everyone has performed discuss:
 - » What differences did you notice between scenes?
 - » How did it affect you as an audience member when you heard the subtext?
 - » Was it hard to come up with the characters' thoughts or easy? Why?

Silent Tableau

- ★ Tell students they are going to work together as a class to create a tableau inspired by gestures in the play. The catch is: they cannot talk when creating the tableau. They can only speak with their bodies.
- ★ Tell students they should come up one at a time to create the tableau. If two students get up at the same time, the whole class has to start over. Remind them that this exercise is about reading body language and silence.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Discuss with students:
 - » Was it hard to read body language?
 - » Did anything about the process surprise you? Did you surprise yourself?
 - » Was it hard to stay silent?

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? Would you use a box? What box would it be? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

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 colors and textures would they choose?

Character Soundscape

- ★ Sound plays an integral role in this script since there are no words.
- ★ There are suggestions of sounds and music to use for this play but the playwright allows for you to choose your own as you see fit. Divide students into groups and assign them each a character. Tell students to create a soundscape for their character. What sound is attached to their baggage? What sound plays when they enter? What sound describes their personality? What sound describes how you envision their voice if the character talked?

Original Movement Piece

- ★ Divide students into groups and tell them to create a 1–2-minute scene about emotional baggage. The scene should be focused on gestures and movements. Remind the students that there should be no words in this scene, only sounds.
- ★ Have students perform their scenes one group at a time.

Playwright Process

Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process writing Emotional Baggage. 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 love “what if” questions when I’m writing a new play and this one was “what if I wrote a play with no dialogue?” I was also working with some mask actors at the time and wanted to develop something that could be done all in mask without words.

What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

It’s incredibly challenging to figure out a template on the page for differentiating between writing action (in place of dialogue) and stage directions. How do you communicate action on the page? A stranger picking up the play had to easily recognize the difference. Add to that, the characters aren’t realistic humans — they are all archetypal: Overbearing Mom, Dead End Job, Insecure About Looks — I wanted to be sure that translated clearly on the page through action.

What was it like to see the play performed?

Amazing. I’ve seen so many different versions — some with mask, some without, but all clearly showing the story of the play. Which is all I could ever ask for!

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

There is a moment when the mob of emotionally damaged characters tries to overwhelm the well-rounded character and “make her” as damaged as they are. They come close to succeeding, but don’t. That moment when it seems Well Rounded has succumbed, but then she straightens her shoulders and smiles. She forgives the mob. She knows they’re afraid. She knows who she is. She even tries one more time to encourage them to leave their baggage behind. I love it every time I see it — all without words!

Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

I adore first drafts. The act of getting everything on the page without judgment is freeing and fun. I fully embrace messy first drafts with lots of plot holes and things that need to be solved. And then you actually have to solve those problems in the rewrites, which is always more of a challenge for me.

What's your writing process like?

I love to write initial ideas down in notebooks. I always start with pen and paper. I keep writing notes and ideas and characters until I feel that pen and paper is actually getting in the way of my progress. That's when I know I'm ready to move to the computer and start compiling a first draft. I often start my writing process thinking about the play and letting it roam in my head for a while. So after thinking and taking notes I'm ready to dive into something more tangible.

What engages you about playwriting?

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than be distant from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!