

TARRAGON THEATRE

34th SEASON 2004-2005

“One of the most artistically adventurous and yet commercially stable companies in Canada” ***The Globe and Mail, 2004***

“Is there a better evening of theatre to be had anywhere?”
David MacFarlane, *Globe & Mail, 2003*

“An unrivalled purveyor of Canadian drama”
Vit Wagner, *Toronto Star, 1999*

About Tarragon Theatre

Tarragon is primarily a playwright's theatre. Its mandate is to develop, encourage and produce new work; to attract or train new artists and technicians to interpret new work; and to inform and develop an audience for new work. The goal of the OutReach programs is to develop quality theatre education initiatives for students, educators, community members, and theatre patrons. The mandate of OutReach is “to use all its resources, programs, and facilities to promote, wherever possible, inclusion. Particularly through our OutReach initiatives we aim to support and foster relationships with community members, educators and students as together we develop the theatre practitioners and audiences of today and tomorrow”.

In 2003, our neighborhood association unanimously voted to adopt the official name Tarragon Village Community Association, making this the first neighborhood in Toronto to take its name from that of a theatre. Tarragon Village encompasses Dartnell Avenue to Bathurst Street and Bridgman Avenue to Davenport Road. An inaugural ribbon cutting ceremony took place on May 31, 2003.

Tarragon Achievements

- Over 175 Canadian premieres by such celebrated and award-winning playwrights as David French, James Reaney, George F. Walker, Judith Thompson, John Murrell, Joan MacLeod, Maja Ardal, Morris Panych, Jason Sherman, Guillermo Verdecchia, Ann-Marie MacDonald, Daniel Brooks, Diane Flacks, Richard Greenblatt, Ted Dykstra, Ken Garnhum, Michael Healey, Morwyn Brebner, Mavis Gallant, Kristen Thomson and a host of others.
- Tarragon is the foremost producer, in English Canada, of translated plays from Québec, most notably the work of Carole Fréchette and Michel Tremblay.
- Plays developed and produced at Tarragon have, on many occasions, toured nationally and internationally; they have also been widely published, broadcast and filmed.
- Tarragon has received more than 200 Dora Award nominations, many nominations (and winners) for the Chalmers Canadian Play Award and many nominations for the Governor General's Award for Drama (winners include Judith

Thompson, Joan MacLeod, Guillermo Verdecchia, John Krizanc, Jason Sherman and Morris Panych, all for Tarragon plays). Tarragon has received the Lieutenant Governor's Award 5 times in the past 7 years.

- Since the 1995/96 season, Tarragon subscriptions have risen 136% to a record 4,095 subscribers in the 2002-2003 season. Tarragon is deficit-free.
- The Urjo Kareda Playwrights Endowment Fund, named to honour Urjo's commitment to Canadian theatre, stands at just under \$1.2 million. Income from the fund is used to assist playwrights while they are writing their plays.

Tarragon Programs

- 7 or 8 major productions in two theatres each season. In the 2002-2003 season, there were seven productions (300 performances) with a total attendance of 46,950.
- Playwrights Unit (since 1982). As many as 7 playwrights, with works-in-progress, work individually and collectively with the artistic director and the associate artistic director over the course of a year. These plays are given a public reading during Play Reading Week, held in mid-December.
- 4 playwrights-in-residence.
- Tarragon Theatre/George Brown College New Play Development Project – a Tarragon playwright will write a play to be workshopped by second year acting students at George Brown College in order to give the students a sense of the development process and their role as actors within it.
- Spring Arts Fair (since 1985): an extraordinary free celebration of the performing arts, presented in spaces throughout the interior and exterior of Tarragon Theatre.
- OutReach programs aimed at youth including Spring Training Project, Young Playwrights Unit, *Under 20 for Under 20's* playwriting contest, high school and post-secondary co-op placements; OutReach programs aimed at educators including Teacher Nights and study guides.
- Apprentice programs in arts administration and stage management.

Tarragon Special Services

- Over 500 scripts professionally read and assessed annually without charge.
- Student and senior matinees; wheelchair accessibility throughout facility.
- Costume and prop rentals for professional and community companies.
- Pay-What-You-Can performances every Sunday afternoon.
- Tickets donated to community and social service groups for fundraising events.

TARRAGON THEATRE

study guide

Private Jokes, Public Places by Oren Safdie



**Starring: Victor Ertmanis, David Jansen,
M.J. Kang, Dan Lett**

Directed by Alisa Palmer

Set and Costume Design by Judith Bowden

Lighting Design by Andrea Lundy

Stage Manager: Kathryn Westoll

September 21 to October 24, 2004

About the **Private Jokes, Public Places** study guide:

This study guide has been created so that your theatre experience at Tarragon is a fulfilling and engaging one. We hope that it will help create discussions, generate ideas and prompt many questions.

The **Private Jokes, Public Places** study guide was coordinated and compiled by:

Joanna Falck (BA Honours, M.A.) is in the final year of her PhD at the Graduate Centre for the Study of Drama. She is the Literary Manager at Tarragon Theatre.

Avery A. Swartz (BFA Honours) is a graduate of Ryerson University's Technical Theatre Production program. She spent 4 years as a producer with Festival of Classics in Oakville. She is Tarragon's Publicity and OutReach Associate.

Kristen Van Alphen (BA Honours) is an experienced professional stage manager, who in 1999 made a career change to education program administration and theatre outreach. She is currently Tarragon's OutReach Director.

Mary B. Wood (BA Honours, B.Ed.) first came to Tarragon in 2000 as a Tarragon Theatre/ OISE intern. She teaches dramatic arts full time and continues to work with Tarragon Theatre as our OutReach Consultant developing lesson plans grounded in Ministry Curriculum.

Special thanks and acknowledgements to Judith Bowden, Chris Carlton and Laurie Fyffe.

The **Private Jokes, Public Places** study guide is divided into several sections.

1. **About Tarragon Theatre**
2. **About the Play**
3. **Design Elements**
4. **Additional Resources**
5. **Lesson Plans**

Point of Interest

We encourage you to make use of this study guide as effectively as possible and as such we want to highlight the fact that some elements of the guide are most useful prior to viewing the production and some are most useful post viewing. For example, while the structure, character breakdown and themes set up a context for viewing, the design elements are best understood after viewing. There are also lesson plans included for pre and post show activities.

**Feel free to contact us should you have any questions or comments at
416.536.5018 x243.**

Private Jokes, Public Places

"You live in a vacuum, confident with your beliefs, unconcerned with what the whole world thinks."

A young female student presents her thesis for a public swimming pool to an all-male jury. As each man challenges her ideas, a power struggle begins, which leads to a radical conclusion. Canadian Oren Safdie's play comes to Tarragon after its successful off-Broadway run.

About the Playwright

OREN SAFDIE earned a Master's Degree in architecture from Columbia University but in his final semester, he took a playwrighting course and realized that he was not going to become an architect. From that playwrighting course came the germ for the play *Private Jokes, Public Places*. As Oren said, "The grain of it started when I was switching from architecture to writing." He was also part of a Columbia Theatre group called the Columbia Dramatists.

Oren's father, Moshe Safdie, is a world-renowned architect having designed Habitat '67 for Expo '67, the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, and Toronto's new Terminal One, to name a few of his projects. Oren said his father was, "extremely moved" when he saw the play in New York. "Margaret [the female student character] reminded him a little of himself...The philosophies in this play have a lot to do with what he's wanted to pursue in not bending to trends."

Oren is a playwright-in-residence at La MaMa E.T.C. in New York and the Malibu Stage Co. in Los Angeles where the play was first developed. It subsequently ran Off-Broadway last year and will open in the West End in London in spring, 2005. Other plays Oren has written include *Jews and Jesus: a musical comedy*, *Fiddler Sub-Terrain* (an updated satire of *Fiddler on the Roof*, set in Montreal), *Smother*, *Broken Places*, and *La Compagnie*, which he developed into a 1/2 hour pilot for Castle Rock and CBS. He is presently developing a mini-series on the architect Frank Lloyd Wright.

About the Play

The worlds of academia and architecture are the focus of this funny and thought-provoking play. Margaret, an architecture student, defends her thesis project to an all-male jury including her thesis advisor and two well-known architects. Margaret has designed a public swimming pool and each man, in his own pompous way, critiques her work and eventually, her identity. This simple premise provides a platform to examine not only architecture but notions of gender and power and what happens when a student refuses to be labeled.

Dramaturgical Elements

All of the components that make up a play are called the dramaturgical elements. These include the structure (how the story is 'built') the genre (comedy or tragedy), the dialogue

(what kind of language the characters use) and themes (the larger issues the play is examining). There is also a job called a dramaturg, and he or she works with a playwright, helping them to develop their new play by discussing these elements with them and helping them make all of these elements clear.

Structure

The structure refers to how the playwright has arranged the events in his/her story. A story can be told in many different ways, for example the playwright can begin at the beginning of the story and move forward until the story reaches a logical ending. Or a play can begin long after the events have happened and unfold in random order in one character's memory. Shakespeare's plays always have five acts with the rising action in the first two acts, the climax in the third act and the falling action or denouement in the final two acts. Many modern playwrights reject this structure and they arrange the events in the play in a less logical way. How a playwright chooses to arrange the events in the play can tell us how he/she wants the audience to experience the story.

Private Jokes, Public Places is a one-act play – there are no divisions of scenes or acts in the play and there is no intermission or break in the middle of the play. The action therefore is continuous – there is no break and so the tension between the four characters mounts until almost the last moment of the play.

If you were directing this play, would you choose to put an intermission in? Why or why not?

The structure of the play comes from the structure of a real thesis defense. The play begins with the professors ending their critique of a student's project before moving on to Margaret's piece. Margaret is introduced, she is allowed to explain her thesis (in this case, a model for a public swimming pool), and then she must 'defend' her thesis by answering each jury member's questions. The audience is also addressed throughout the play (called "direct address") as fellow architecture students with projects also waiting to be judged.

Why does the play begin with the end of another student's defense? What is the effect on the audience?

What is the effect on you as an audience member when a character looks out and speaks to you? How does it affect your experience of a play?

The ending of the play raises more questions than answers. The men decide they are finished critiquing Margaret's work and, in the words of the playwright, she "kicks off her shoes, collects herself, and gives her last defense".

Why did the playwright put this moment at the end of the play? Would you call this the climax of the play?

Genre

Genre is a French word meaning type, species or class of composition. Determining a play's genre helps the reader/spectator understand how to 'view' the play – what is the world view of the playwright? How is s/he asking us to look at the world? Knowing a play's genre helps us understand better the 'rules' of the play – how the play is operating in terms of its portrayal of the world.

In general, we would call this play a comedy. But comedy is a huge category with many sub-genres, for example, black comedy, satire, and parody. One way to determine more specifically what kind of comedy the play uses is to ask: what is the playwright inviting us to laugh at?

In *Private Jokes, Public Places*, one of the central sources of comedy being employed is the characters. The plot or the action of the play is not what makes us laugh but rather the characters and their psychological and moral attributes. Therefore, this play can be called a comedy of character. The playwright describes the characters this way:

Margaret, 20s. An attractive female Korean-American architecture student.

William, 30s, Margaret's studio professor. North American. Sensitive, spiritual, weak.

Colin, 50-60s. Perhaps British. Intellectual, uptight, snobbish.

Erhardt, 40s – 50s. German or French or Spanish. Macho, animated, charming.

Because the play is structured as a thesis defense, there is very little action; rather, we are invited to observe (and laugh at) how the characters interact with each other.

Another sub-genre evident in this play is comedy of ideas. In these plays, ideas or philosophies are debated for comedy. In *Private Jokes, Public Places*, the characters debate ideas and philosophies about architecture. Each character has his or her distinct view that is often in conflict with another character's ideas or philosophies and this becomes another source of comedy.

What other kinds of comedies can you think of? What other sub-genres of comedy are there?

A playwright can describe his/her characters but when casting a show, the director may choose not to follow these descriptions. Do you think a director should cast actors that fit the playwright's descriptions? Why or why not?

Symbols

A symbol is a literary device where anything (an object, an event) stands for or represents something. Its meaning is left open for interpretation – what the symbol 'means' is never totally explained in the play.

One central symbol in the play is water. Margaret's design is for a public swimming pool and throughout the play and the production, water is associated strongly with Margaret.

Margaret begins her defense by stating: “I probably feel more comfortable in water than I do on land”. But water has a dual meaning for her:

“On the one hand, the experience of swimming – being immersed in water – feeling protected by an enclosing structure – is instinctively a comforting state of being, evoking those pre-natal months we safely spent in our mothers’ wombs... On the other hand, from the moment we’re born our natural instinct is to cry out, fill our lungs with air and reach out into the world – perhaps this has something to do with our instinct to conquer – nevertheless, these two dichotomies of inner peace and outer pursuance are important emotions...these things are important themes to me...” (*She stops to take a drink of water*).

So water is both a means of protecting yourself and something to break out of in order to live. The production also emphasizes the importance of water (see Production Elements).

What other things does water often represent? Can you think of other stories that use water symbolically?

Dialogue

Since the play focuses on ideas and philosophies, dialogue is an important element of this play. The characters use terms and refer to people that are well known to architects, but may not be familiar to everyone in the audience. But this relates to one of the themes of the play – the notion of the “private joke”. The fact that these men refer to people and ideas that neither Margaret nor the audience know the meaning of means that we are not ‘in’ on their ‘private joke’. Their language and their world become their own ‘private joke’. But it’s not important that the audience knows the exact meaning of these words – what’s important is that we understand the attitude of the characters towards these ideas.

A list of terms, people and ideas in the play are included for reference in Additional Resources.

Relevant Themes

Public and Private

The play’s title comes from an article Oren’s father Moshe Safdie wrote for the magazine *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1981 called “Private Jokes in Public Places”. In it, Safdie criticized postmodern architects for indulging in the kind of irony and jokes in their designs that only other architects could appreciate. Safdie feels that buildings are public and must have qualities and features that everyone can ‘understand’. Things like sunlight, a view, a comfortable place to sit – Safdie wants buildings that are calming and comfortable, not ones that try to make a statement. Margaret herself says, “People feel more comfortable in spaces they can understand”.

As an architecture student, Oren’s final thesis project was also a public swimming pool and he, like Margaret, was criticized for being too ‘populist’ or too common. He said his project was a response to the computer-assisted designs his classmates were

designing, with the most improbable designs receiving the most praise from his professors.

Margaret's design for a swimming pool incorporates elements of the public and private. She designs it so that the swimmer can get to the swimming pool from the locker room without having to be in public, emphasizing, for her, the "privacy within a public space." Her design also allows for someone who's climbing to the diving board to be hidden until they reach the top, "To increase the sense of drama", for her there are always elements of both, "the public – the diver, within the private – the water; within the public – the building; within the private – the block..."

In what other ways are the ideas of "private" and "public" examined in the play?

Language

The way language is used becomes a central source of both the comedy and the tension in the play. The play begins with Erhardt and Colin each trying to "have the last word" and throughout the play, how words are used and how they are understood becomes central to Margaret's struggles.

Erhardt in particular uses the language of academics. He uses words, phrases and ideas that are generally only familiar to other people who specialize in his field and Margaret (and the audience) have a difficult time understanding what he means. Here's short example:

"Rather than focus on a vocabulary of pliant and reconfigurable forms and gestures, I think it's important that you research a procedural agenda, or practice, that is pliant and reconfigurable..."

When he uses this kind of language, he is aware that most people will not understand him – so why does he speak this way? Why would a playwright have a character use language people in the audience may not understand? Do you think it's important for the audience to know all of the words and ideas he is referring to? Why, or why not?

As the defense continues, they begin using more terms and phrases from architecture: Modernism, I.M. Pei, the International Style – and each person in the room reacts differently to the meaning of these words.

Identity

The use of language in the play seems to connect strongly to the notions of identity in the play – particularly how the men all want to use known words to define Margaret in order to better understand her. For Margaret, their definitions of her are not a comfortable fit and she resists any labels – of either her work or herself.

The questions about her identity begin when they try to compare her architecture style to that of I.M. Pei, a Chinese-American architect who designed a glass pyramid that stands in front of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Margaret keeps reminding them that she is not Chinese but rather Korean. Erhardt becomes frustrated:

"We try and define this project as one thing – you say, no, it's something else. We try and classify it as something else – you disagree with that. Are you a modernist, a

postmodernist, a deconstructivist, a reconstructivist...an Episcopalian? You don't seem to want to be part of anything identifiable...which makes this very frustrating."

Colin later says, "It would be wonderful if we lived in a world without labels, without categories or definitions, but then how could we pass judgment over anything...You can't be everything to everyone."

A quote from the playwright about the play, "Even though its about architects, its really about critics judging this woman. It's really a human story about authority, and the firebrand coming up and challenging authority."

Do you agree with Colin's statement? Why do you think Margaret is resisting their labels? Is her resistance heroic or arrogant?

Elements of Design

The following section is intended to increase the awareness of production elements utilized in theatre. It combines general information about areas of design (including information from Tarragon production staff, design websites, and the textbook: *Theatrical Design and Production* by J. Michael Gillette) with specific examples of how design elements have been employed in the production you are attending. A brief glossary is included in Additional Resources to assist with technical terms used in this section of the guide.

Design Overview

A script can be performed numerous times without ever being interpreted the same way. Although text stays the same from production to production, the way the piece is conceptualized changes.

The designers (set, costumes, lighting, sound, etc.) and director thoroughly discuss the play to ensure all parties share a similar vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through design. Design elements should create an environment for the play that supports the production concept: the creative interpretation of the script.

There are some artistic and practical considerations that apply to all areas of design. These include:

- mood and spirit of the production
- historical period of the production
- locale of each scene
- season of the year and time of day for each scene
- time, labour and material budgets
- health and safety
- needs of other designers

How do these elements affect the choices for each area of design?

Designers in each discipline also submit their ideas to the production department for costing. This is the first introduction of the designers to the production manager and

technical director. When the costing is complete the director, design team and production team review the feasibility of the design and make any adjustments necessary.

The production design for this show uses magic realism as its basis. That is to say it incorporates natural elements, such as the lighting and the rain, in moments that drive and underscore the storyline without overtly imposing on the action. Another strong element in the design is the concept of structure – striving to show the architecture of the classroom the characters inhabit, as well as the clothes they wear. Finally, the design is a life size expression of the swimming pool Margaret is presenting – this element grows throughout the show until the swimming pool effect overshadows the room and allows the end of the play to directly refer to Margaret's thesis presentation at the beginning.

Set Design

The set designer's job is to create a physical world, which helps the audience understand and enjoy a play by providing a visual representation of the production concept. Before rehearsals begin, the set designer meets multiple times with the director. From these meetings design drawings and a maquette (a scale model of what will be onstage) are developed. The model and drawings are used by the actors, stage managers and production staff to better understand the design goals; to imagine and replicate the space the production will be set in; and to build and decorate the set pieces.

Specific practical elements considered by the set designer are:

- the socio-economic level of the characters
- number and position of entrances and exits needed
- number and position of entrances and exits already in the space
- the seating formation of the theatre – is it malleable?
- the type of stage that comes with the theatre (i.e. proscenium, thrust, arena, catwalk etc.)
- is this a flyhouse?
- the duration of the run
- will the set tour after the first production

In addition to the scenery, the set designer is frequently responsible for designing the stage properties.

It will be interesting to take notice of the following:

- Where on the stage certain scenes take place
- How the mood and spirit of the production is relayed through the design
- How many different locales are represented on the stage
- What areas are used as exits and entrances
- What information the set gives about the characters

Set designer Judith Bowden has created a room that is rife with architectural symbolism:

- The long windows at the back of the set open onto a blue backdrop – this element mirrors the arcade in Margaret’s maquette.
- An isometric grid – a tool often used for architects or set designers to create construction drawings – is used on the floor. This grid always uses 30 degree lines and, in this case, turns the set at a 30 degree angle.
- The drawings on the screens of the set are actual drawings used by permission of the Columbia School of Architecture (the alma mater of playwright Oren Safdie).
- The ‘benches’ and ‘tables’ are blocks, akin to building blocks.
- The walls that extend into the lower audience seating exhibit architectural drawings.

The set serves many purposes:

- The neutrality of the set colour allows the structure of the room to be seen.
- The fake thrust and extension of the grey walls reinforce the notion of the audience doubling as characters in the play (an audience of Margaret’s peers at the student jury) by allowing them to inhabit the same space as the actors.
- The screens reinforce the notion of compartmentalization – the ‘boxing in’ that Margaret is resisting.
- The tall windows, blue backdrop, and rain boxes allow the room to take on the essence of a swimming pool as the play progresses.

Point of Interest

The rain effect used in this production is achieved by running water through a hose to standard garden sprayers mounted over each window. The water is collected at the bottom of the windows in a trough that is manually drained by the running crew at the end of each performance.

Sound design

Sound design has grown incredibly in the past few years. This is partly due to increased expectations created by film and television, the advancement of sound technology, and the prevalence of high quality personal sound equipment. Sound is now increasingly being used in the theatre to focus the audience’s attention and reinforce (or counteract) the dominant emotional theme of the material being presented.

Sound design consists of music, effects and reinforcement (such as microphones).

The sound designer obtains a lot of information directly from the script i.e. “a phone rings”, “it begins to rain”, or “a sad song is heard through the window”. S/he must think about the transitions between scenes and what sound elements will shift the audience from the mood of one scene to the next. Sound design also extends to the elements the audience hears when they first enter the theatre, during the intermission, and even the curtain call and post-show music.

Some practical elements the sound designer considers are:

- speaker and microphone placement

- live or recorded sound, or both
- volume of each piece
- length of scene changes
- equipment available
- existing ambient noise in the theatre

As well as establishing and reinforcing mood and atmosphere, sound elements also provide information to the audience:

- When you enter a theatre take a minute to listen to the pre-show music or soundscape – does it offer any clues about the nature of the show?
- What sound cues did you hear that helped establish time and place?
- Were any special effects used? Were they useful in moving the story forward? Why or why not?

Sound designer John Gzowski had one major cue in this production: to work within the notion of magic realism John needed to reinforce the rain effect with rain sounds. One challenge John faced was to find a way for his recorded rain cues to be more audible than the sound of the pipes being used to create the rain effect. To address this the pipes needed to be insulated and speakers placed in such a way as to maximize the sound of John's cue. Like the other production elements the goal of this cue was to slightly embellish the sound of the rain so that it was present and apparent but not overwhelming.

Although almost imperceptible, John also created an ambient soundscape, which includes passing trains. This background sound blends the natural sounds from the theatre (which include trains from across street) and creates an atmosphere relative to the environment of the set (i.e. sounds one would expect to hear in an urban university classroom).

The pre-show sound is that of dissonant classical music and the curtain call music is "Burning Down the House" by the Talking Heads. *What is the effect of these cues?*

There is a cue that begins and ends the show – what does it sound like to you – what does it evoke?

Lighting Design

Effective stage lighting not only lets the spectators see the action of the play but also ties together all the visual elements of the production and helps create an appropriate mood and atmosphere to heighten the audience's understanding and enjoyment of the play.

The lighting designer wants to give information such as time and place, mood, and where the focus of a scene is. Lighting design is often not noticeable because it has been created in such a way as to enhance the mood of the play as unobtrusively as possible. However, many directors will employ unnatural lighting or hyper-realized lighting to add another layer to the production.

Lighting includes the use of coloured gels to create different effects; intensity to determine how dark or bright a scene is; direction to establish the angle at which the light hits the stage; and movement to decide the duration and components of cues.

Lighting and sound often work together to create an effect (i.e. a fade to black that is timed to a piece of music).

Lighting also works closely with set pieces when 'practicals' are used. These are light sources that are manipulated by the actors (i.e. a desk lamp). In this case the set designer will determine the look of the lamp and the lighting designer will decide how it functions.

Some practical considerations for a lighting designer are:

- the number of locations in a set
- the number of lighting instruments available
- the type of performance (i.e. drama, dance, opera, etc.)
- whether the lighting board is manual or computerized
- alternate light sources (i.e. video or slide projection)
- set materials requiring special lighting (i.e. a scrim or cyclorama)

Some lighting elements to notice are:

- when and how lighting indicates a change in time or location
- lighting changing the focus from one character to another
- how lighting interacts with sound elements
- how lighting is employed to reinforce a mood
- how colour is used in the lighting instruments

Lighting designer Andrea Lundy worked closely with the set designer, who had included practical ceiling and clip lights to extend the verisimilitude of the classroom environment. Andrea worked with these lights and reinforced them with theatrical lighting.

To support the production concept, Andrea's cues are extremely long negating the likelihood that audience members will be overtly aware that a change is taking place. In this way, Andrea is supporting or changing the mood as subtly as possible.

How do the lighting cues support the motif of the classroom as swimming pool near the end of the play?

Costume Design

Costume design includes all clothing, underclothing, hairdressing, makeup, and accessories such as hats, scarves, fans, umbrellas, and jewellery, worn or carried by each character in a production.

A costume design suggests specific personal information about each character.

Through discussion with the director, the costume designer will decide whether or not to make the costumes 'period accurate'. The designer researches clothes of a period in

many ways including: looking through store catalogues of the era (i.e. Sears or Eaton's); going to a reference library, art gallery and/or museum; perusing picture archives; or even looking at old family photographs. Similarly, if the costumes are contemporary, designers look to current fashion magazines, tv and film, and stores for research.

The designer also works from indications within the play's script and looks for hints into the characters' personality. They then make artistic choices for the colour of the costumes, their shape, and the fabrics to be used.

Finally, the designer works with the costume team and the actors in fittings to make certain that the costumes are comfortable and as easy as possible to manipulate.

Some practical considerations in costume design include:

- the background and personality of the characters
- the limitations created by the set or staging (i.e. a raked stage makes spiked shoes impractical)
- the actors can move about on the stage as required (i.e. run up a set of stairs or engage in stage combat)
- the costumes remain effective under stage lighting
- costumes that need to be changed quickly are built accordingly
- costumes can last for an entire run and be laundered

The role of the costumes in this play is very similar to that of the set – a situation that is benefited by having the designer of the set also take care of the costumes. In this piece, the primary sense the wardrobe conveys is that of structure.

Each outfit is designed from neutral shades and an emphasis is placed on shape. To reinforce this, any patterns chosen incorporate a basic architectural or construction motif i.e. rather than swirls or florals, patterns include stripes or grids.

What does Margaret's dress convey about her personality?

Stage Management

One aspect of technical production that is too often overlooked is the area of stage management. The stage management team provides support, organization, information and leadership to all areas of a production including administration, technical production, front of house, and the company of actors.

With regards to design, the stage manager plays a key role by providing a variety of information including: scene timings; costume requirement; and properties additions. The stage manager also 'calls the show' which means they coordinate when each design element will be used and tell the technical team, on a cue-by-cue basis when to "go". As a show naturally progresses throughout a run the stage manager must be the human element that determines when cues should happen in order to relate to the action on stage. They also work with the actors to remain aware of the choices that were made when the cues were set.

Additional Resources

Tower of Babel – from the Bible, the Book of Genesis.

In the beginning, the whole human race spoke the same language, and formed one community. Here they built a city and a tower – a tower whose purpose was to reach up to heaven. When God knew of the purpose of this enterprise, He saw in the unity of the people a confidence that made him fearful that the accomplishment of this project might embolden them to still more independent movements. To prevent the project from succeeding, God confused their languages so that each spoke a different language and the work could not proceed. After that time, people moved away to different parts of Earth. The story is used to explain the existence of many different languages and races. It has also become a potent symbol of over-ambitious projects destined to end in confusion. In *Private Jokes, Public Places*, this image holds a double significance, referring both to the ambition of architects and the problems of communication.

Frank Lloyd Wright – Architect, 1867 – 1959

Called one of the most prominent architects of the first half of the 20th century, Wright's influence came from his desire to have the design of the building come out of the context of the site – the surroundings of the building were as influential to him as the building itself. He also was influential in the 'open plan' ideas in the interior design of buildings and he believed that humanity should be central to all design. Some of his famous designs include the Guggenheim Museum in New York and Fallingwater, a private home in Pennsylvania. Both can be seen at www.greatbuildings.com

Philip Johnson's AT&T Building b.1906

An American architect, museum curator and historian. One of the first Americans to study modern European architecture, Johnson wrote *The International Style: Architecture since 1922* (1932), in conjunction with an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York City. He became an important advocate of the new architecture in the United States, called the International Style, as chairman of the museum's department of architecture (1932–34; 1945–54). The AT&T Building (now the Sony Building) in New York City, built in 1978, is considered important because it is one of postmodernism's most notable buildings, a major philosophy of architecture throughout the 1990s. You can see a picture of this building at <http://www.galinsky.com/buildings/att/ATT1.jpg>

Gestalt

From the German word meaning "shape", gestalt or gestalt psychology refers to how one's identity is formed in the consciousness of others. In the play, Erhardt refers to the "power of the gestalt" in Margaret's design – that people who enter her building will be able to relate to her ideas, her subconscious, through the power of gestalt because her identity is formed through the public's consciousness. The notion of gestalt is one that relates to the idea of 'public' versus 'private' – a major theme in the play. Although Margaret's ideas for her building may have been her own or private, here Erhardt insists that none of our ideas are private, that they are all 'public' through the power of gestalt.

CAD System

Computer Assisted Drafting – a computer program that is used when any ground plans or drafting plans are made. At the Tarragon, we also use the CAD system to turn designer's plans into drafting plans, which our prop and set builders use to build our

sets. In the play, Margaret does not use this computer system but draws her own plans by hand – something which seems to both impress and annoy the jury.

MOMA

Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Architectural exhibits there in the 1920s and 30s influenced styles of architecture in North America.

Le Corbusier – Architect, 1887 – 1965

The pseudonym of Charles Edouard Jeanneret, he was an architect famous for what is now called the International Style, along with Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Theo van Doesburg. He was most influential in terms of urban planning, understanding that the car changed how cities needed to be designed, he described the city of the future as consisting of large apartment buildings isolated in a park-like setting on superblocks. For the design of the buildings themselves, Le Corbusier said “by law, all buildings should be white” and criticized all forms of ornamentation. He also described buildings as “machines for living”. In the United States, his ideas mostly influenced the builders of public housing. In the play, Margaret describes the buildings in the US influenced by Le Corbusier, “These buildings look like they were designed for mice, not people.”

Adolf Loos, Architect, 1870 – 1933

“Ornament is a crime” was Loos’ famous catch phrase, taken from his essay “Ornament and Crime”, written in 1908, in which he expressed the idea that the progress of culture is associated with the elimination of ornament from useful objects and that it was a crime to have craftsmen waste their time on ornamentation. Therefore, only the most primitive societies use decoration and the most advanced societies have no extra, or in Loos’ mind superfluous, decoration.

Walter Gropius, Architect, 1883 – 1969

An important theorist and teacher, Gropius was one of the leaders of modern functional architecture. He was also the head of the school of art and architecture in Germany which was called Bauhaus – a school of architecture founded on the idea that design did not merely reflect society, it could actually help to improve it. As an architect, Gropius created innovative designs that borrowed materials and methods of construction from modern technology. This advocacy of industrialized building carried with it a belief in teamwork and an acceptance of standardization and prefabrication. Using technology as a basis, he transformed building into a science of precise mathematical calculations.

Louis Sullivan, Architect, 1856–1924

He was of great importance in the evolution of modern architecture in the United States. He is associated with the first generation of American skyscrapers, as steel technology and the invention of the elevator allowed taller and more spacious buildings than were previously possible. He was one of the leading figures of the Chicago School of architecture. His dominating principle, demonstrated in his writings and in his executed buildings, was that outward form should faithfully express the function beneath. This doctrine, the accepted and guiding principle of modern architecture throughout the world, gained for Sullivan, however, few contemporary adherents. In the face of the powerful revival of traditional classicism in the final years of the 19th century, little interest was focused on Sullivan's plea for the establishment of an architecture that should be functional and also truly American.

Mies Van Der Rohe, Architect, 1886–1969

A pioneer of modern architecture and one of its most influential figures, he is famous for his minimalist architectural dictum “less is more.” Mies incorporated the principles of the glass skyscraper with a surface expression of steel-frame construction. In doing so he helped create a style that dominated the American urban modernist idiom, but with perfectionism rarely matched by any other architect. Mies designed the Toronto Dominion Centre, which you can see at

<http://www.esmagazine.com/ES/FILES/IMAGES/9363.jpg>

I.M. Pei, Architect, b. 1917

Chinese-American architect. In his works, structure and environment are carefully integrated with precise geometrical design and a superb sense of craft, resulting in crisp, clear, sculptural structures. He is known for his sensuous use of such materials as marble, concrete, and glass and for his soaring interior spaces. His master plan for the Louvre's expansion and renovation (1987–89) initially outraged critics, in large part because of the glass pyramid that formed the entrance to the museum's new underground section. The pyramid has since become a Parisian landmark. You can see his expansion at <http://www.lmc.ep.usp.br/People/Valdir/imagens/Louvre.jpg>

Louis Kahn, architect, 1901–74

Considered one of the leading architects of the late twentieth century Kahn's architecture is notable for its simple, platonic forms and compositions. Through the use of brick and poured-in-place concrete masonry, he developed a contemporary and monumental architecture that maintained a sympathy for the site. While rooted in the International Style, Kahn's architecture was an amalgam of his Beaux Arts education and a personal aesthetic impulse to develop his own architectural forms. From 1947 to 1957 he was Design Critic and Professor of Architecture at Yale University, after which he was Dean at the University of Pennsylvania. One of his apprentices was Moshe Safdie – Oren Safdie's father. His son, Nathaniel Kahn, recently made the Oscar-nominated documentary about his father's unusual personal life and his architecture entitled, “My Architect”.

Frank Gehry, Architect, b.1929

Born in Toronto, Gehry is widely considered one of the finest and most artful of contemporary architects. He has been acclaimed for his original, sophisticated, adventurous, and very American buildings. Extremely varied and lively, his structures contrast space and materials; often jutting, unusual shapes are juxtaposed with simple geometric forms. In his earlier work these forms are expressed in a wide range of usual and unusual architectural materials (e.g., raw plywood, corrugated aluminum, and exposed pipe) that sometimes give these buildings a deliberately unfinished quality. Gehry's later work displays a curving complexity made possible by computer programs and other innovative design tools, many of which he and his team have developed. While these metal-clad buildings have distinct similarities, they differ significantly in shape, proportion, materials, and relation to the sites they occupy. His most important and acclaimed building to date is the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain (1997), a large structure of voluptuous, swooping, organic forms covered in gleaming titanium steel that made him an international star. Gehry also uses curving metal-covered walls in his Experience Music Project rock music museum in Seattle (2000). He has also been commissioned by the Art Gallery of Ontario to build an extension onto the gallery.

S.O.M.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill – The architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM) was formed in Chicago in 1936 by Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings; in 1939 they were joined by John Merrill. S.O.M. is one of the largest architectural firms in the United States. Their primary expertise is in high-end commercial buildings, as it was SOM that led the way to the widespread use of the modern "glass box" skyscraper. In the play, Margaret proudly tells the jury that she already has a job offer from "S.O.M."

Architecture Styles:

Modernism

Modern Architecture is the term given to the range of approaches in architecture, first appearing at the beginning of the 20th century that rejected historic precedent as a source of architectural inspiration and considered function as the prime generator of form employing materials and technology in an honest way. Some characteristics of buildings under this style include universal space, walls freed from the function of load bearing, glass at the corners of buildings and the use of concrete. A criticism of Modern architecture began in the 1960s on the grounds that it was universal, sterile, elitist and lacked meaning. The rise of postmodernism is attributed to the general disenchantment with Modern architecture.

International Style

Several major figures from the era of the International Style are mentioned in the play including Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Mies Van Der Rohe. Briefly, the International Style, also known as the Modern Movement was a major architectural trend in the 1920s and 30s. It was an American offshoot of the Bauhaus movement and is considered the most minimal form of modernism. Simplicity, form and function were its keys and skyscrapers epitomized the most famous manifestations of the style. Some catchphrases from the time include "Less is more" (Mies Van Der Rohe), "Ornament is a crime" (Adolf Loos) and "By law, all buildings should be white" (Le Corbusier).

Post Modernism

After 1960, a less evolutionary and more revolutionary critical reaction to modern architecture, first articulated in the writings of Robert Venturi, began to form. Architects became more concerned with context and tradition. Ornament, once banished by modernism, returned, often in the form of overtly historical revivalism, although it has just as often been reinterpreted in high-tech materials. This has resulted in a stylistic eclecticism on the contemporary scene. Prominent architects working in the postmodern mode include Philip Johnson in his later projects, and Frank Gehry.

Each of the characters seems to favour one of these styles – which character champions which style? Does the play present a balanced argument? Can you tell which style the playwright favours? Which style do you prefer?

Columbia School of Architecture

This school is the alma mater of playwright Oren Safdie and the location from which architectural drawings used on the set were obtained. To view these drawings you can visit the website at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/archprogram/bca_osite_frm.html.

Glossary of Useful Technical Terms

Acoustics	The sound transmission characteristics of a room, space or material
Cue	A directive for action (i.e. a change in the lighting, sound, or an actor's entrance)
Cyclorama	A large piece of scenic material used to surround the stage on to which colour can be projected
Gel	Generic name for the film used in lighting instruments to change colour. It can also be used as a verb (i.e. to 'gel' the lights)
Gobo	A thin metal template inserted into a lighting instrument in order to cut a pattern into the light that is projected onstage
Flyhouse	A theatre space with the ability to "fly" set pieces and/or backdrops from a fly gallery located high above the stage using ropes and cables
Maquette	A scale model 3-D representation of the set design
Plot	A scale drawing showing the placement of various elements (i.e. lighting instruments) relative to the stage configuration and theatre
Prompt book	A copy of the script with each actor's blocking, all the technical cues, and details/lists of all technical elements involved in the production
Raked stage	A stage that is higher at the back than at the front
Scrim	A scenic panel made from translucent gauze-like material

Stage Configurations

Arena Stage	A stage configuration where the audience completely surrounds the playing space
Catwalk Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 2 sides – also known as an Alley stage
Proscenium	A stage configuration where the audience watches the action through a rectangular opening that resembles a picture frame (proscenium arch)
Thrust Stage	A stage configuration where the audience surrounds the playing space on 3 sides

Pre Show Lesson Plan 1 Exploring Subtext, Double Meaning and the Comedy of Ideas

Expectations:

TH1.01: describe the process of creating a character (e.g., script analysis, character analysis, experimentation with movement and voice);

TH2.02: describe how movement and non-verbal communication can be used to portray character, to define relationships among characters, and to communicate dramatic tension;

CRV.01: interpret a variety of roles/characters, using the techniques of character development;

CR1.04 – reinterpret characters, using suggestions or notes provided by the director and peers, and demonstrating further insight into the characters in subsequent rehearsals and performances

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm up:

The title of **Private Jokes, Public Places** by Oren Safdie emphasizes the public versus private debate within the play. This concept is heightened by what the characters both “say” and “don’t say” to each other while discussing Margaret’s architectural thesis.

Colin and Erhardt’s elaborate discussions using complex architectural jargon could be considered a “mask” or “disguise” for what they really mean to say. Thus there is both “public” and “private” discourse happening all at once.

The following are experiential activities to form a framework for the students grounded in the above concept:

- Divide students into two groups.
- Tell them that they are two feuding families – such as the Capulets and Montagues from *Romeo and Juliet*.
- Each member of either “family” has a moment where they confront another member.
- The other team members support and “cheer on” their team with claps, hoots, hollers and words of encouragement.
- When in confrontation, each team representative will “insult” the other team representative by using words that in of themselves hold no threat ie. “banana” or “leisure suit” or “lemon meringue pie”.
- Students thus practice their focus while in character and use their voice to communicate different intentions through tone and volume.
- Every student from each group has an opportunity to “insult” the other.

The activity may unfold like this:

Student A: Spaghetti with parmesan!
(team A cheers)

Student B: Granny Smith Apple!
(team B cheers)

Student A: Venetian blinds....

Main Activity:

- Divide the students into groups of two.
 - Some groups will have the same scenario, illustrating different interpretations within theatre.
 - This activity furthers their understanding of sub text and double meaning.
 - Give students the following scenarios (or others as preferred):
1. Characters: Husband and Wife. Their scene revolves around their discussion of Sunday brunch. Their subtext is that everything they say about **brunch** (ie. about the toast, orange juice etc) is actually about their desire to get a **divorce**.
 2. Characters: Two Students. They are working on a history project in the school library. Their subtext is that everything they discuss about the **project** is actually about **liking each other** in a romantic way.
 3. Characters: Grandparent and Grandchild (8 years old). The grandparent is reading a bedtime story to their grandchild. The grandchild asks **questions about the story**. Their subtext is that the Grandparent is old and knows that he/she will **die** soon.
 4. Characters: Mobster with a Barber. The mobster is getting his/her hair cut at the local barber shop. The subtext is that everything the barber and mobster exchange while discussing the **hair cut and shave**, alludes to a successful **bank robbery** that occurred the night before.

Students work with their partner for 20 minutes developing the scene.
Students perform and discuss the scenes in front of their peers.

Closure:

Questions for the class to consider after the scenarios have been performed:

- 1) Did anything surprise you about this activity? Why? Be specific.
- 2) How did the actors communicate their subtext within the scene? What tools did they use?
- 3) Did this implicit communication spur a type of “comedy” in the characters’ exchange? Why or why not?

Journal:

- 1) For each activity please describe the acting skills used and provide an example for each.

Pre Show Lesson Plan 2 Exploring our Space

Expectations:

CRV.02: create and present an original or adapted dramatic work; Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

CR1.03: reinterpret roles in rehearsal and performance, demonstrating insight into the characters;

ANV.02: evaluate dramatic performances presented in the school and the community;

AN1.04: justify their artistic choices of elements, principles, and techniques in their dramatic presentations;

CR1.02 – convey character through the effective use of voice and movement techniques;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

- Lead group physical warm up, stretching body etc. and guided imagery relaxation.

Materials:

Flip chart paper (large paper)

Markers

Tape

Main Activity:

Part A: Note: this activity may take 2 classes.

Lead a group **discussion/brainstorming** about architecture (a volunteer can write the ideas on the board in a “mind map” style).

Some questions for discussion may be:

- What is architecture?
- What is its purpose?
- What style of architecture surrounds us? In our city? In our neighbourhoods? In our school?
- Do different styles stimulate different feelings or emotions in us? Think of the Eaton Centre versus the CN Tower versus Queen’s Park or Toronto City Hall.

Write each of the discussed buildings on the board and have students brainstorm their connections or feelings with each building.

- Divide students in groups of 4
- Assign each group one of the following buildings:
 - place of worship (they decide, mosque, synagogue, church etc)
 - public school
 - shopping mall
 - library
 - swimming pool
 - hospital
 - public park

Distribute to each group a sheet of flip chart paper and some markers.
Students are to think about and discuss the following items:

- Write down everything you know about your assigned space.
- Who goes to this space?
- Why do they go to this space?
- What do they do there?
- What do they need from this space?

Ask the students, according to you (your unique perspective):

- What changes would you like to make, if you could create your own hospital, school etc. Why?
- How would you implement the changes (remember to consider the needs of the whole community who accesses this place and its facilities)

Part B:

After the students have analyzed and restructured their “ideal space”, distribute the character outlines from **Private Jokes, Public Places**.

MARGARET, 20's. An attractive female Korean- American architecture student

WILLIAM, 30s. Margaret's studio professor. North American. Sensitive, spiritual, weak.

COLIN, 50-60's. Perhaps British. Intellectual, uptight, snobbish.

ERHARDT, 40-50's. German or French or Spanish. Macho, animated, charming.

- Each student in the group assumes one of the roles from the play.
- Students can play someone not of their gender.
- Students present their explanation for and their “ideal space” in character to the class.
- The character of Margaret should take on the role of the student architect (the one who has designed this space, like in the play).
- The character of William should take on the role of Margaret's supportive professor.
- Characters Colin and Erhard take on the role of the invited prestigious architects who question and analyze the proposed “ideal place”.

Closure:

- a. Lead a discussion comparing and contrasting the emphasis or main idea of each proposed “space” project.
- b. How did it feel as “Margaret” to have your ideas questioned and scrutinized to such a degree?

Journal:

1. What did you learn about the creation of space and design? Be specific. Give examples.

Post Show Lesson Plan 1 Analysis of Pre Show Press

Expectations:

THV.02: demonstrate an understanding of various aspects of the elements, principles, and techniques of dramatic arts;

AN2.02 – explain how their experiences in dramatic arts have helped develop or enhance their beliefs, philosophies, or world views;

AN2.01 – explain how participation in the theatre fosters self-awareness and awareness of others for performers, authors, and audiences;

AN1.05 – identify universal concepts and themes from a study of theatre works, and analyse their personal, social, and cultural significance;

ANV.03 · analyse the personal, social, and cultural impact of dramatic arts;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Materials:

“Building a Career” by Glen Sumi, attached herewith.

Warm-up:

Lead the students through a physical relaxation warm up.

Main Activity:

Interpreting the article “Building a Career”

- Distribute a copy of “Building a Career” to each student.
- Students read the article individually and highlight points that they “connect” with.
- Place students in groups of 4.
- In groups students answer the following questions:

Has the journalist (Mr. Sumi) drawn similarities between the character Margaret and the actor M.J. Kang? What are they? Please explain thoroughly.

Do you find that they were reflected in the Tarragon production (think of all the elements of a theatre production)? Why or why not?

In the attached interview, M.J. Kang says of her husband (and playwright of **Private Jokes, Public Places**): *“I don’t think Oren realized what it’s like to live in a country where you’re always perceived as different or other...”*

What do you think M.J. Kang means by this statement? Do you, or does anyone you know identify with this statement? Please explain.

Please discuss M.J. Kang’s philosophy about both writing and performing for the theatre. Do you agree with the roles she attributes to the playwright, actor and/or director? Why or why not?

Each group leads a discussion by presenting one or more answers or ideas that arise from specific question.

Journal:

1. What did you learn about the creative (theatrical) process from reading this article?

**BUILDING A CAREER (NOW MAGAZINE SETEMBER 2004)
M. J. KANG DISCOVERS A SOLID FOUNDATION IN PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC
PLACES**

BY Glenn Sumi

PRIVATE JOKES, PUBLIC PLACES by Oren Safdie, directed by Alisa Palmer, with Victor Ertmanis, David Jansen, M. J. Kang and Dan Lett, at Tarragon Theatre (30 Bridgman). Previews from Tuesday (September 14), opens September 21 and runs to October 24, Tuesday-Saturday 8 pm, matinees Saturday-Sunday 2:30 pm (except September 18). \$27-\$33, stu/srs \$18-\$27 (except Saturday night), previews \$15-\$17, Sunday pwy-\$15. 416-531-1827.

Is yellow the new black? From Jet Li's heroic exploits at the box office and Margaret Cho's domination of the stand-up comedy circuit to that bizarre cultural phenomenon known as William Hung, it's suddenly hipper than a kanji tattoo to be an Asian artist.

Even in the hardly mainstream world of local theatre, it's noticeable. Can you remember the last time that within 12 months there were three major plays – China Doll and the upcoming Banana Boys and Little Dragon – by Asian playwrights?

"It's such a relief," states M. J. Kang, who for the longest time was one of the few Asian-Canadian playwrights being produced regularly here. Her plays in the last decade include Blessings, Noran Bang and Dreams Of Blonde And Blue. She's also acted in such notable shows as The Yoko Ono Project and The Malaysia Hotel.

"I felt this odd responsibility," she continues. "I never wanted to be the voice of any culture or race. I just wanted to write my plays. At some point, I felt obligated to write things, if only to employ Asian actors. Maybe one day we can write about whatever we want. We're Asian, but we're other things as well."

Kang returns to Toronto after several years, not for one of her own scripts but for the Canadian premiere of Private Jokes, Public Places, Oren Safdie's satiric look at architecture. She plays Margaret, a Korean-American architecture student who's presenting her thesis project to an all-male, all-white jury of distinguished architects who seem more excited about grandstanding and careerism than they are about creating livable buildings.

The production, the season opener at the Tarragon, is sure to set some tongues wagging, not just because the city's in the midst of an architectural boom.

Safdie's the son of renowned architect Moshe Safdie; the title is a nod to the elder Safdie's controversial 1981 tell-all article about the industry called Private Jokes In Public Places. He's also married to Kang, who's played Margaret in all three previous productions of the play, including a five-month run off-Broadway that finished last February.

The two met through local playwright David Rubinoff in the late 90s when Kang was interning at the Pan Asian Repertory Theatre Company in Manhattan. It was Kang who suggested that the character of Margaret be Asian.

"I don't think Oren realized what it's like to live in a country where you're always perceived as different or other," says Kang, munching on a post-rehearsal snack. "When we went to a reading in Montreal, a woman very sweetly came up to me after and said, 'You have freckles! You can't be Asian!'"

While acclaimed in the role (a highlight came when Oscar-winner Holly Hunter traipsed backstage off-Broadway to compliment her), Kang says it still terrifies her. All four characters are onstage the entire time. Margaret begins as meek and clumsy, unable to articulate what she feels about her thesis project, a swimming pool. But over the course of the play she gains the strength to meet the famous architects head-on.

"There's no faking, no room to hide," says Kang. "And Margaret runs the whole gamut of emotions. I get so exhausted over what she goes through. I feel everything she feels, and some of it's really painful – what she hears, what happens to her project."

For Kang, the biggest bonus about the script is that she, like Margaret, has learned to stand up for her beliefs. To hell with stereotypes about passive Asian women.

"Now, I would definitely fight for my words," she says when I bring up Blessings, her play from a decade ago that got trashed at the Tarragon.

"I think it's important as a playwright to fight for your vision. You're the one who's lived with your play for years. Regardless of a director or the actors' best intentions, they don't get a complete sense of it."

Currently, Kang's working on a play about the L.A. riots from a Korean perspective, a commission from an L.A. theatre company. But don't expect her to act in her next play.

"It does the actors a disservice," she says. "It's important for me to be the playwright. For a new play it's so important for the writer to be available and active. But when you're in the play you can't give your fellow actors notes."

And though she and Safdie shuttle between Manhattan and L.A., Kang's not even sure she wants to pursue film and TV acting.

"It's all about how much you want it," she says matter-of-factly. "I have to consider how much I want it. Sandra Oh is amazing. She wants it so much and she deserves everything she gets. I don't think I have that kind of drive."

Post Show Lesson Plan 2 Play Analysis through Role Play

Expectations:

THV.01: demonstrate an understanding of the conventions of role playing and structuring dramatic works etc.

TH1.01: demonstrate an understanding of the theory of “willing suspension of disbelief” both as performer and as audience;

ANV.02: evaluate dramatic performances presented in the school and the community;

ANV.03: explain how dramatic arts represent, influence, and contribute to culture and society;

AN1.06: identify the artistic choices made by the actors, director, designer, and technicians in a dramatic production, and assess the effectiveness of these choices;

Ontario Dramatic Arts Curriculum

Warm-up:

Review with students the important elements of creating a whole group role-play:

- a. Maintaining focus throughout the role-play.
- b. Maintaining the physicality of your character throughout the role-play.
- c. Sustaining the vocal quality of your character throughout the role-play.
- d. Ability to take on, and commit to, your characters’ attitudes and beliefs.

Main Activity:

Interpreting the play through Role Play

- Distribute two pieces of paper to each student.
- Ask students to write down two questions they have for any member of the *Private Jokes, Public Places* production (writer, director, actor, designer).
- Collect the questions.
- Divide the class into two groups. Group “A” and “B”.
- Take group “A” and distribute one of the following roles on separate pieces of paper to students: actor(s), set designer, costume designer, director, lighting designer, sound designer, playwright etc.
- Ask group “A” students to discuss quietly and prepare for their role as a member of the *Private Jokes, Public Places* production team in one part of the Drama room.
- Distribute the already collected questions for members of production (hence group “A”) to the Group “B” students.
- Group “B” are told that they are each a journalist at a press conference.
- The “journalists” must ask the “artists” the already written questions (*additional, spontaneous, questions are encouraged and everyone on the artist panel must answer as least one question*).
- After each question has been asked, reverse Group “A” and “B” roles and distribute remaining questions.

In this activity students develop role playing, reflective thinking, focusing and application of knowledge skills. Students discover through their own creative work in role (layered with their experience in Drama class and viewing the production) that they may

contribute their own knowledge to some of the questions about artistic choices that are asked.

Journal:

What surprised you about your character? Please give two examples. How did discussing the play in role affect your analysis of the Tarragon production? Be specific and give examples.