

The Portland Community College  
Illumination Project  
**Study Guide**  
Spring 2020



Student Developed Theater Addressing  
the Issue of Sexism



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# What we usually do

**Typically the Illumination Project performs live interactive plays based on a style of theater called Theater of the Oppressed. We perform on all four PCC campuses and off campus as well. The plays are written by the students in the program and are based on their lived experiences.**



The plays are short - 10 to 15 minutes long. In the play we present a problem around inequity or discrimination (this spring term 2020 the topic is sexism). During our performances the play is performed once without interruption. We do not solve the problem in the play.

The first run through of the play is called the "anti-model" because the protagonist loses, the antagonist wins, and the potential allies are ineffective.

We perform the play again. This time the audience can say "stop" when they see the problem happening. An audience member then comes on stage and takes the place of a character they feel could make a positive difference in the situation. This is called an "intervention".

The audience member tries something out, the actors still on stage improvise in character and then the audience member sits down. Sometimes the intervention works, sometimes it does not. We dialogue with the audience and actors about how the intervention went. Then a new audience member tries a different intervention with the same character or a new character and so on and so on...







# Why we do what we do



The Illumination Project uses theater as way of promoting dialogue and action around issues of systemic discrimination. There are lots of ways of working toward social justice. Theater is one of them.



We believe that all of us can play a part in making PCC and our whole community a place where everyone feels welcomed and included. It can be hard to figure out what to do when problems around injustice or discrimination occur. Sometimes, the problems are so deeply ingrained in our society, that it feels overwhelming. Sometimes, it can happen so quickly, that we are stunned or so upset we end up not doing anything at all. Or, it comes from our friends and family, and we are worried about losing relationships. There are thousands of reasons why it can be difficult to intervene in oppression.

These plays are a unique opportunity to watch/read about situations that are real (they happened in lives of our Student Educators) but that are not actually happening right now. It helps to put some good thinking, acting and writing into how you might intervene, if this happened in the future.

We do not have the answers and we are not trying to tell others what to do. We are showing the problem and seeing what our audience comes up with. The greatest learning we have all year is from all the different strategies the audience members use to solve the problems in our plays.



## WHAT WOULD YOU DO?





# What we are doing now



All of the plays and related learning and promotional material are created by the Student Educators! Since we can't perform in person, we are offering all of our content for instructors and students online. This collection includes:

1. Zoom recordings of staged readings for each script
2. The student-written scripts for each of the three plays
3. This study guide which incorporates prompt questions as well as information about our work
4. Our education booklet which includes information and resources around sexism and intersectionality. The education book does not cover every relevant topic related to sexism but highlights some of the key issues that students felt passionate about



# Questions for the Plays

## General Questions Part 1

1. What are some examples of sexism in the play?
2. How is gender role socialization and the gender binary represented?
3. How does sexism intersect with other forms of oppression (classism, racism, ableism etc.) in the play?
4. What is the impact on the characters when there is intersectionality between two or more oppressions?
5. What are some of the social institutions (education, media, criminal justice, economic etc.) represented in the play?
6. How do these institutions promote or uphold systems of sexism and gender oppression in the play? What is the impact on individual characters? Think about how all the characters are impacted not only the protagonist.
7. How are men and women characters impacted differently by sexism?
8. Describe some of the examples of privilege from the play?

# Questions for the Plays



## General Questions Part 2

9. Do you see any variation of severity in struggle between women with different backgrounds and identities?
10. Do some characters have an easier time being believed than others?
11. Which of these scenarios have you not experienced or noticed? How could your own privilege contribute to that?
12. How does toxic masculinity show up in the play?
13. How does victim blaming show up?
14. Theater of the Oppressed plays are called “anti-models.” This means the first run through of the play always ends with the main character(s) “losing.” What did the main character(s) lose? Please be detailed.
15. Knowing that men and people who are gender non-binary can also be harassed or assaulted why do you think the play focused on the dynamic of how these issues impact women?



# Questions for the Plays

## Intervention Questions

*In Theater of the Oppressed (TO) when audience members enter the scene to change its outcome it is called an "intervention." TO has certain ground rules for interventions including:*

- Audience members cannot take the place of the person causing the problem (the antagonist).*
- Audience members can take the place of the person experiencing the problem (protagonist) if they share a similar identity in terms of gender, race, ability etc. This is primarily relevant depending on at what oppression is impacting the character (i.e. if the character is a person with a disability impacted by ableism then the audience member ought to be a person with a disability as well etc.)*
- Audience members of any identity can take the place of the "potential ally/bystander/friend" character.*

1. Why do you think is it "against the rules" for an audience member to take the place of the person causing the problem (the antagonist)?
2. Why do you think there is a rule that asks that you only take the place of the protagonist if you share an identity with that character?
3. Which of the characters could have changed their actions to create a different outcome? Pick one or more characters (keeping in mind the ground-rules above) and give a detailed explanation of the strategies and tools the character could have used to create a more positive situation.
4. In general - how could support be provided to these characters and how would it have changed the outcomes? What are some resources the characters could have used?
5. What do you think gets in the way of someone intervening in an oppressive situation?
6. Describe one or more of the oppressive situations in the play. What are some strategies/tactics you personally would use to intervene in this situation?
7. If you saw a friend being assaulted or harassed what would you do or say? Would this approach differ if you did not know the person?
8. What types of privilege do you have that could be useful when intervening in these scenarios?
9. What can you do personally to work to end this oppression?
10. What actions can PCC take to make the college more welcoming and inclusive especially in relation to the issues represented in the play?



# Questions for the Plays

## Questions for Specific Plays

### "ABOUT THAT NIGHT"

1. Why do you think Josh is unable to understand Catie's changed attitude towards him and her unwillingness to spend time with him after he raped her?
2. Why do you think Halley and Ryan are initially unwilling to believe that Catie did not give Josh permission to sleep with her?
3. In About That Night, can you see what problem Halley has beside being harassed in the bar? What can you do support Halley as a friend?
4. Who in the play has the potential to be an ally? How do they succeed or fail in being an ally?
5. What systems of oppression are present in the play? How do they impact individual characters?

### "LUCKY ONE"

1. What are some of the red flags seen early in the play? How might you able to help someone acknowledge them?
2. What are the ways that racism and sexism intersect in this play?
3. How does internalized sexism show up in the play?
4. What are some instances of victim blaming?
5. What systems of oppression are present in the play? How do they impact individual characters?

### "HER VALUE"

1. What obstacles does Sky face from her family and other individuals to navigating her life independently?
2. Why do you think Wren feels she has no choice but to be her professor's personal assistant?
3. As a bystander on the bus, what could you do to help the situation between Sky and Chad?
4. What are the ways that ableism and sexism intersect in this play?
5. What systems of oppression are present in the play? How do they impact individual characters?

# Questions for the Education Booklet



1. Was any of this information surprising? Why or why not?
2. What are you curious about? What do you want to learn more about after reading the education booklet?
3. Will this information motivate you to change your behavior in any way?
4. How does the binary gender system uphold sexism, heterosexism, and cis-sexism?
5. What are the expectations of each gender (in the binary gender system) and how have they influenced your life?
6. Stereotypes are part of part daily life. What can we do to realize the gender stereotypes that we have and re-evaluate the judgements we make from those stereotypes?
7. In what ways does failure to live up to stereotypical male behavior lead men to bully or harass women, other men or gender non-conforming people?
8. What types of listening skills do you think allies should develop?
9. What is intersectionality? Why is it important?
10. Sexism impacts every women. However, certain communities are more impacted. How does sexism effect women of color differently from white women in the U.S?



# Questions for the Education Booklet



11. In what ways are historical racism and colonialism manifesting in the lives of women of color in the United States today, and in what ways are they organizing to resist the violence against them?

12. Why do you think that society makes it so difficult to be a “good mother?” In what ways does our current society make it more difficult to parent children? Can you think of different obstacles our society places in the way of these groups: teen moms, African-American mothers, immigrant mothers, and LGBT parents?

13. How does sexism also effect other genders beside women?

14. What are some particular struggles that you associate with sexism?

15. What is one initiative/ idea that *you* feel could make gender equality more prevalent in our society?

16. What has the women's movement contributed to society and how we perceive women today?

17. How can people educate others on this and understand the effects of sexism in society?

18. Who are three people in your life who could benefit from this information? How can you share it with them?

# Play Descriptions

## Her Value

Classmates Wren, Sky and Michael are trying to have a normal college life with game nights and study groups. Wren studies day and night, getting perfect grades for her dream science program, only to receive skepticism from her professor. At the same time, Sky is trying to stay on top of schoolwork and help her family members, who think that her disability is a burden.

## Lucky One

Sisters Lea and Rida are in an exciting new time in their lives. They have become roommates, and have started college together. Lea has found new love, and Rida begins to notice the signs of domestic violence. All the while, Rida is struggling to overcome harassment on campus. Will these sisters come together, or fall apart?

## About that Night

Halley invites friends and study group members, Ryan, Catie and Josh to have a celebration at the club where she works after midterms. The night ends up prompting a series of events that not only impact their friendship circle, but Halley and Catie's health, safety, parenting, job security and ability to stay in school. Both Catie and Halley struggle with the ensuing life changes and isolation.



# What is "Theater of the Oppressed"?

Theater of the Oppressed is a form of theatre that gives communities opportunities to confront systemic oppression head-on. Developed by Augusto Boal, unlike a typical play, Theater of the Oppressed relies on audience participation, rather than the actors, as its driving force. The audience must be willing to join the actors on stage, attempting to intervene in scenes, be ok with making mistakes, and directly interact with the characters and the play in order to try changing the outcome of the scene for the better.



Augusto Boal ([thehero](#)).



Augusto Boal giving a workshop ([thehero](#)).

Augusto Boal was a Brazilian theater director, politician, and actor. He studied Chemical Engineering and theater at Columbia University, where thereafter he was hired to work at the Arena Theater of Sao Paulo. Boal was the artistic director from 1956 until 1971, where he would start experimenting with forms of theatre to help empower the oppressed. He was first inspired by Paulo Freire, from his book *Pedagogia do Oprimido* (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), a text regarded as fundamental to the birth of critical pedagogy, which is a philosophy of teaching and education that treats the acts of education and learning in themselves as ultimately acts of social justice.

# The Illumination Project



The Illumination Project is Portland Community College's innovative nationally lauded student leadership and campus equity program that addresses issues of social justice—racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism etc.—through interactive theater.

The Illumination Project has a dual purpose. First the project provides participating students with an opportunity to learn about social justice issues and interactive theater and develop skills as educators, actors, activists, and leaders. These students then educate other students, staff and faculty audiences to confront stereotypes, teach conflict negotiation and promote racial, gender, and economic equity.



The Illumination Project looks at how folks are affected by oppression in the United States. We produce two sets of plays per year, one Winter term and one Spring term, about two different types of oppression. The Illumination Project student educators write three plays for each set, exploring different aspects of oppression. We also create all of the promotional and educational materials for the plays. We hope the audience enjoys and participates in our plays, but more importantly that we all learn something.



# Student Educators

**Angelique:** To be a student educator begins with the privilege of learning from the other students in this cohort, as well as from our highly educated teacher. This is a tremendous opportunity for all of us to grow into people who effectively labor for change in our communities.

**Carmen:** The Illumination Project provides a safe space to talk and learn from each other.

**Chanel:** As a student educator and an artist, it is a chosen obligation to engage people in a way that they might elevate and promote minoritized people's social, economic, civic and intellectual status, to become outstanding citizens and leaders themselves, as I'm learning to be.

**Chau:** I don't have a habit of engaging in college activities. However, the IP changed that habit. IP is a great place for me to learn to create real connections. I'm grateful to have an opportunity to know & work with all the IP Student Educators

**Emely:** IP has helped me get out of my comfort zone and helped me adapt to any situation I find myself in. I plan to take the skills I've learned here and apply them to the outside world to do what I can to fight Racism, Sexism and Classism. We all have a voice that matters.

**Emily:** I am a full-time college student seeking to engage and learn about allyship, advocacy, social justice, civic and community engagement. The IP has been a major part of my growth, happiness and success. Thank you to the entire IP team and Jeannie LaFrance.



# Student Educators

**Jeremy:** The Illumination Project has given me the opportunity to expand my knowledge on oppression and inequalities, and given me the community and tools to be able to create inward change, and carry that change outward.

**Jacqueline:** What I value about the Illumination Project is the gift of perception. These plays allow us to visualize and convey the ripples that we create in each others lives.

**Katherine:** I am grateful to be part of an interactive theatre project that utilizes the lived experience of our actors. I am happy to be able to look at the world through a sociological lens.

**Kevin:** IP is a great opportunity to build community and perform! I'm excited to engage people in important conversations in a unique way.

**Natalee:** The Illumination Project introduces so many new ideas on issues while being able to educate others' on one's own perspective. It provides a close community that supports and cares about each other.

**Madelynn:** I joined IP to awaken my cultural and social education on the world around me, to be the best ally possible for my fellow neighbors and community.

**Shaman:** I'm a first year student majoring in Psychology. I have fought for social changes since middle school. I feel lucky to be working with such amazing people.

**Sergio:** I'm a second-year student at PCC majoring in Computer Science and minoring in Sociology. What we do and what we learn about, in IP, is to take logical steps towards improving how we and other allies conduct themselves day to day.





**Want to become a Student Educator?**

**HELP CHANGE THE WORLD**

**Apply now for 2021!**

# THE ILLUMINATION PROJECT

**Become a Student Educator  
with PCC's interactive social  
justice theater program!**

- **8 TUITION FREE SOCIOLOGY CREDITS**
- **Two term commitment (winter and spring terms 2021)**

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**[PCC.EDU/RESOURCES/ILLUMINATION/](https://pcc.edu/resources/illumination/)**

