

CB Goodman

Fundamentals of Acting

10/28/21

Name: Ashlyn Zunker

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Character Analysis for *Gruesome Playground Injuries*

Character (name): Kayleen

Bibliographic Information:

Author (*style, other plays, themes they write about, awards*): Rajiv Joseph is an American playwright. Rajiv is a Founding Member of the New York-based theatre company. He has won many awards for his writing, a few being the Obie Award for Best New American Play in 2016, the Whiting Awards in 2009, Obie Award for Best New American Theatre Work in 2018, and the Lucille Lortel Award for Outstanding Play in 2016. He has fourteen published plays and two movies. He writes mostly dramatic comedies that sometimes handle darker themes. His plays are; *Huck & Holden* (2006), *All This Intimacy* (2006), *The Leopard and the Fox* (2007), *Animals Out of Paper* (2008), *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* (2009), *Gruesome Playground Injuries* (2009), *The North Pool* (2011), *The Monster at the Door* (2011), *The Lake Effect* (2013), *Guards at the Taj* (2015), *Mr. Wolf* (2015), *Describe the Night* (2017), *Archduke* (2017) and *In the Sick Bay of the Santa Maria* (2019). His *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was a finalist for the 2010 Pulitzer Prize. The recipient of the Vineyard Theatre's Paula Vogel Award, Rajiv's plays include *Animals Out of Paper*, *All This Intimacy*, *The North Pool* (winner of the 2011 Glickman Award for best play to make its world premiere in the Bay Area), *The Leopard and the Fox*, *Alter Ego*, and *Huck & Holden*.

History of Play (*notable productions, awards, reviews, when it was written and performed what was going on in the world*): It was written in 2009 and first performed in 2011. This is actually the play that won him the Whiting Award in 2009 when it was performed at the Alley Theatre. He was nominated by Alley's Senior Dramaturg and Developer of New Play Development Mark Bly and was given a grant of \$50,000 for it. The first people to play the two characters were Selma Blair and Brad Fleischer. In 2011 the New York production was directed by Tony nominee Scott Ellis, with scene designs from Neil Patel, costumes by Jeff Mahshie; lighting by Donald Holder; sound by Ryan Rumery; music by Gwendolyn Sanford and Brandon Jay; production stage manager, Barclay Stiff; stage manager, Davin De Santis. It premiered featuring Jennifer Carpenter of TV's "Dexter" and Pablo Schreiber, a Tony Award nominee for *Awake and Sing!* It got many good reviews saying that it is an amazing story that dealt with many hard topics and a beautiful unexpected love story. New York Times said that "It follows the decades-spanning relationship of two made-for-each-other masochists who, between them, manage to slice, bloody, bruise and/or mutilate most parts of the human anatomy."

Time Period Of The Play (*research/important facts*): Although the play technically takes place over 30 years it is not specific as to what time in the world the play takes place nor what specific location. I think this is because the play is so universal that it can technically be done at any time in any place. This is what keeps the play so relevant in our time. So instead I chose to focus on the events that took place while the play was being written thinking they might have some secret effect on what was going on in the play. Although Self Harm Awareness day was established on March 1st, 2003 It was still a topic that was hardly talked about in 2009 when this play was written. It was still seen as a taboo thing that was considered insane. There are some movies that have come out about self harm around that time. One of them was in 2000 called Secret Cutting which deals with a young teenager dealing with cutting as a coping method. Also released in the year 2000 was Sharing the Secret which dealt with similar material. In 2003 the Movie Thirteen dove into the world of sex, drugs and selfharm for a young teenage girl. Although movies like this were still hard to come by, Rajiv wanted to tackle this topic as he wrote a play about it with real characters for an audience to love and understand. It was still more of a culture shock at the time. There were however some things happening around the year the play was written. Some major events that were happening in 2009 included; Barack Obama becoming the 44th president and becoming the first African American president in History. Troops were deployed into Afghanistan. New space ships were sent into the Milkyway to find habitable planets for humans. The unemployment rate dropped below 9%. Several Tornadoes go through the north and northeastern Missouri towns of Green City, Novinger, and Kirksville, killing three. Tornadoes are also reported in Oklahoma, Kansas, and Illinois. The death of Michael Jackson. President Obama wins the Nobel peace prize.

Synopsis of Play: Over the course of 30 years and several different locations this play follows the lives of Kayleen and Doug. Kayleen was a girl who always seemed to be sick with some kind of stomach issue and eventually later in life turned to self harm as a coping mechanism. Doug was a boy who was always putting himself in situations where he would get hurt, weather it was riding his bike off the road, picking a fight with the biggest guy at school or shooting fireworks into his eye. The two of them were always known for collecting and comparing their scars. Two childhood friends who always seemed to get themselves hurt. They seem to have a special connection to each other and always find their way back together through the years. Throughout this play we get to see their unlikely love story unfold and we look into moments throughout their life where they found themselves injured together.

Given circumstances of character (*pg 8-9 PHA*): Kayleen, we see her at ages 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, and 38. She has a mother who ran out on her when she was young. An emotionally absent father who has always treated her like shit. She is a bit of a loner and has a hard time making connections to other people. She has stomach issues that cause her to constantly be sick. This even eventually breaks her down mentally when she gets so fed up she tries to remove her own stomach.

Relationship to other characters:

(character name - relationship)

Doug- *annoying classmate, childhood friend, best friend, boyfriend, ex- boyfriend.*

Character's Through-Action (*this if for the entire play; also known as the **spine**; for help refer to pages 33-38 in A Practical Handbook for the Actor*):

Literal: Kayleen is battling her own inner demons to survive.

Ultimate Goal/Through-Action: I want to overcome my issues and find peace.

Principal obstacle: My physical/ mental health and the flighty love of my life.