Don't Read The Comments Teacher's Guide

DISCUSSION ETIQUETTE

Creating a safe space for group discussion is always important, especially when it involves potentially sensitive issues such as the ones in this play. If your class or school have agreed-upon rules for discussion groups, please review them with your class prior to beginning. If not, please consider these standard ground rules:

- Respect what others say without passing judgment. It is all right to disagree with another's opinions, but respect must be maintained at all times.

- All things said within the group should remain confidential. An environment where hypothetical situations are not treated as confessions should be created and respected.

- Only those students who feel comfortable speaking should be asked to do so. Silence should be respected without judgment.

- Students should have the freedom to explore their opinions and to change them at will. The process is to allow the students to find, rather than be instilled with, a set of values.

ABOUT THE PLAY

Breakdown of Characters

CORY – a gamer keeping a low profile at a new school
ALEX – class clown and internet prankster
CJ – just tries to blend in and be friends with everyone
ROWAN – beauty/fashion influencer and secret poet
SAGE – smart, studious, and obsessed with getting into college
MATH TEACHER – played by the actor playing CJ
AMANDA – Cory's little sister, played by the actor playing Sage

Setting

A Seattle-area high school, and occasionally the students' homes.

About the play

Don't Read The Comments follows five high school students: Cory, who has just transferred into the school, meets up with friends Alex, Rowan, and CJ, who are obsessed with turning their social media posts into extra views and attention. Their friend Sage is more obsessed with getting into college although still very interested in their friends' social media hijinks. We also meet a math teacher who tries to get the students' interest in their social media stats into an interest in numbers more generally, and Cory's little sister Amanda, who surprises Cory by hinting that she has received online death threats. We learn that Cory is fleeing a viral social media moment that brought him unwanted notoriety. When Alex and Rowan decide to work together to produce videos for each others' followers, things get toxic quickly, leaving the students the difficult task of working things out.

Learn more about playwright Joy McCullough [here](#)

PREPARING FOR THE PLAY

- In order to prepare your students for the performance, please remind them about theatre etiquette. This includes:

- Please don't talk during the performance. It is distracting to the performers and other audience members.

- Please try to keep non-verbal noise to a minimum. Unwrapping hard candy, popping gum, and electronic noises steal focus from what is happening on stage.

- It's okay to laugh if something strikes you as funny. It's also okay to cry if something makes you sad. These are examples of appropriate responses. However, whistling at the actors, shouting comments and catcalling are considered inappropriate responses.

- Live theatre is different from film and television because it is based on a relationship between the actors and the audience. Therefore, each performance of the same play is very unique because it is heavily influenced by the responses and interest of the audience. The best thing an audience member can do is to listen and get involved in the story.

Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

1. How often do you use social media?

2. What do you think are the pros and cons of social media?

3. Have you ever been harassed or bullied on social media? What did you do?

4. Why do you think people bully each other over social media?

5. What do you think is appropriate to say or post on social media?

6. What is internet anonymity? Have you ever posted something that you wouldn't say to someone in person?

7. How do you think you would be different if you lived in a world where social media didn't exist?

8. Have you ever read or seen anything by author/playwright Joy McCullough? What was your response?

Post-Play Discussion Questions

1. Is there any part of this story that you can relate to personally?

2. Can you understand and respect everyone's position and beliefs in this play? Why or why not? Does the play give multiple sides to this story or just one?

3. What do you think happens next in the lives of these characters?

4. Do you think harassment and bullying are just part of being a teenager? What about being an adult?

5. You have the power to choose how you treat people. What are some ways in which individuals are misusing that power in our world today?

6. Cory had to move across the country because someone posted something embarrassing about them. Has anyone ever posted something about you that you didn't want online?

7. Why do you think Cory and Rowan write poetry?

8. Rowan tells the teacher "It's just the internet. It's not real life." Do you agree? Why or why not?

9. Many of the statistics cited in the play are pulled from real studies. Does that help make any part of the play more real or engaging to you? Why or why not?

10. This play doesn't have a universal happy ending, in the sense that Alex doesn't realize the problems with his behavior and doesn't leave the audience feeling like he will change. What do you think the other characters should have done in response?

11. Do you think schools should adopt social media policies to try to combat the problem of cyberbullying? What would a useful social media policy look like?

Post-Play Activities

1. Act out a scene in which Rowan and Cory (and possibly Sage and CJ also) confront Alex about his behavior. Is it possible to get to a satisfactory conclusion to the issues here or are the characters too dug in to achieve that?

2. Act out a scene in which the math teacher goes to some other adults at the school (perhaps the principal and a school counselor) and tries to get their help addressing the problem of cyberbullying. What kinds of solutions are they able to achieve?

Further Questions?

If you have questions about the play, the talkback, or how to address these issues with your class, please reach out to Jeremy Ehrlich, Education and Outreach Manager at Taproot Theatre, at (206) 529-3674 or jeremye@taproottheatre.org.

Additional Resources

The following resources have more statistics on teen use of social media, and were used by Joy McCullough in writing this play:

https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/teens-and-social-media-fact-sheet/

https://cyberbullying.org/facts

Additional Resources

These tools and references are provided to support educators in addressing bullying, cyberbullying, and online safety in and out of the classroom.

- **Report Cyberbullying — StopBullying.gov**

Explains how and where to report cyberbullying — including guidance for reporting to schools, online platforms, and law enforcement.

- **Washington Anti-Bullying Laws & Policies**

Outlines state laws to help educators understand Washington's legal framework for addressing bullying in schools.

- **Get Help Now – StopBullying.gov**

A practical guide for students and adults, organized by age and type of bullying issue, to help find the right kind of support quickly.

- **WA State Office of the Education Ombuds**

Provides information for parents and educators on identifying and addressing bullying, harassment, and intimidation in Washington schools.

- **ACLU of Washington – Schools' Legal Duties**

Explains public schools' legal responsibilities to prevent and respond to bullying and harassment.

- **The Committee For Children**

Authors of the Second Step bullying prevention curriculum used in our productions.