

# darklight

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT BY  
*Lindsay Price*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## Introduction

*darklight* addresses anxiety and depression in teens and how they deal with it.

## Background

*darklight* was workshopped in a variety of schools over two years in Mississauga, Guelph, Listowel, and Niagara Falls. It was first produced by Governor Simcoe Secondary School in January 2018 under the name *Brain Basement* and in February 2018 under its current name. The play was subsequently produced by Web's Spiders Theatre Company (Listowel District Secondary School) in March 28, 2018.

## Playwright Bio

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

## Synopsis

The play follows Anxiety and Depression as they attempt to impact everyone they come in contact with. Characters fight their inner thoughts, search for their truths beyond having anxiety or depression, and have surreal conversations with death. Some fail, some find hope. Even in the darkest night there are stars.

## Characters

**ANXIETY:** A sharp pointed coach figure.

**DEPRESSION:** A grandmotherly type, soft, flowing, smothering figure.

**LUZ:** The light. Moves, acts, and speaks with positive purpose.

**MOE:** Suffering from Anxiety.

**VAN:** Suffering from Depression.

**DEPRESSION THOUGHTS:** This group represents Depression. They move slowly, always as a tight mass. They are rounded, heavy, and carry a narrow light.

**ANXIETY THOUGHTS:** This group represents Anxiety. They move with a scattered, straight-legged frenzy. They carry a searching frantic light.

**MR. (or MRS.) HALCYON:** A salesman with a specific product.

**RIYA:** Best friends with Fallon. Talking about dating. Mostly.

**FALLON:** Best friends with Riya. Talking about dating. Mostly.

**THEO:** Friendly, welcoming character. His friends rely on him.

**THEO2:** Theo's inner thoughts of depression, slowly taking over.

**KARI:** Friend of Theo.

**LIV:** Friend of Theo.

**MASON:** Friend of Theo.

**JYN:** A new student who sees right through Theo.

**DEATH:** Cheerful and very much an anti-stereotype.

## **Themes**

Anxiety, Depression, Self-care, Identity

## Theatre forms

*darklight* explores two types of theatrical staging. The first follows the early 20th century form of Expressionism. Expressionism is a form found in painting (Edvard Munch's *The Scream*, Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night*), literature, music (Stravinsky, Bartok), and theatre (Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*). The form focuses on the expression of emotions and the inner experience of a character rather than the presentation of traditional theatre conventions. To that end, the sections of *darklight* in the Expressionist style have more stage direction than dialogue. They are physical and visual rather than follow a linear plot. This can be hard to follow when reading the text but becomes much more clear when seeing the final product.

The second form of theatrical staging is the vignette form. A vignette is a short contained scene on a theme. Each vignette only occurs once in the play. This form focuses on immediate and vivid character/location recognition. This form has a more traditional text look, however, when staged non-traditional techniques are used. This allows for quick transitions between scenes.

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What makes you anxious?
- ★ Do you know what makes your friends anxious?
- ★ What do you do to help your anxiety?
- ★ Have you ever asked for help to deal with anxiety?
- ★ Have you ever helped a friend deal with anxiety?
- ★ Do you talk to your friends about depression? Why or why not?
- ★ What does the inner struggle (be it with anxiety or depression) look like on the outside?
- ★ How can inner anxiety be outwardly expressed in a play?
- ★ How can depression be outwardly expressed in a play?
- ★ What causes anxiety? What causes depression?

## **Pre-Read Activities**

### **Anxiety/Depression Original Scene**

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute scene in which Anxiety or Depression appears as a character.
  - » How will this character appear to others? How will they interact?
  - » What does this character look like? How do they behave?
  - » What's the conflict in the scene?
  - » Who will win in the end?

### **Anxiety/Depression Character Profile**

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a character profile of either Anxiety or Depression. Come up with the following details for the character:
  - » Name
  - » Three physical traits
  - » Three personality traits
  - » A favourite outfit, which includes their favourite colour
  - » Favourite/least favourite food, movie, music
  - » Pet peeve
  - » Secret
  - » Motto
  - » Living environment

## Anxiety Monologue

- ★ Have students reflect on what it would be like to be free of anxiety. What would that look like? Sound like? Feel like? Have students turn these thoughts into a monologue of a character who is anxiety free.

## Depression Monologue

- ★ Have students reflect on what it would be like to be free of depression. What would that look like? Sound like? Feel like? Have students turn these thoughts into a monologue of a character who is depression free.

## Inside/Outside Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will identify and discuss how they behave in public situations and how they see themselves “from the inside” when it comes to depression or anxiety. So this is more than how they act “in private.” Is their brain a peaceful place? Is it full of anxiety? Is it foggy from depression? How do their thoughts manifest? What are the similarities between inside and outside? What are the differences?
- ★ Groups will then create a tableau that explores three states:
  - » Outside: How do they behave in public situations?
  - » Inside: How do they see themselves from the inside?
  - » Choice: For the third tableau, students will choose either inside or outside. Which is their preferred state?
- ★ Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Lastly, groups will create transitions between each tableau to form a series.
- ★ Groups will present their series to the class. Discuss the similarities and differences in that third picture. What do students choose?

## Thoughts Original Scene

- ★ Divide students into pairs. Each pair will create a one-minute conversation between the character and their thoughts of anxiety or depression.
- ★ Put the character into a situation where they are planning to do something (e.g., getting ready to go to the movies with friends). How will their inner thoughts of anxiety or depression talk to the character about this situation? Are they supportive or combative? Does the character fight or give in?
- ★ At the end of the scene, decide who wins. Does the character follow through with the situation, or do they decide not to do it based on what their inner thoughts have said?

## Research Project

- ★ In small groups students will research aspects of Anxiety and/or Depression.
- ★ After completing their research, students will create a presentation in which everyone in the group must take part. It can be:
  - » A live oral presentation with a visual component such as a slide deck
  - » An original scene theatricalizing their findings
  - » A recorded presentation (filmed scene, or oral presentation with visual component)

## Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *darklight*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

### Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. Who do the cat burglar and the arsonist represent?
3. What is Mr. Halcyon selling?
4. What keeps Anxiety Awake, awake?
5. Finish this sentence: "I know you are walking in a narrow \_\_\_\_\_."
6. Who is Theo?
7. Who does Moe say "I'm here!" to?
8. Where does Van meet Death?
9. What does Moe stand for?
10. What is the key idea of the play?



## Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose lower case letters for the title?
2. In your opinion, why has the playwright chosen the colours red and yellow for Anxiety and blue and black for Depression? Would you choose the same colour scheme? Why or why not?
3. In your opinion, why does the playwright characterize Depression like a grandmother?
4. Based on the way Anxiety speaks, how would you visualize them? What is their physicality?
5. After reading the play, how would you costume the Depression Thoughts? Would you choose a uniform look or an individual look? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. In your opinion, what is the significance of how Depression Thoughts and Anxiety Thoughts are visualized? What impact would they have on stage?
7. What does the word Halcyon mean? Why is this character called Mr. Halcyon?
8. How is light used in the play? What impact would it have on stage?
9. Analyze Death's use of language. What kind of words do they use? What can you infer about their character based on their vocabulary and word choice?
10. What is the significance of the line, "I'm just trying to protect you"?
11. What is the significance of the line, "People tell me their problems all the time. How do I deal with mine?"
12. What is the significance of the line, "Even in the darkest night there are stars"?
13. What is the main conflict in the play?

### Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *darklight*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about dealing with anxiety/depression? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. In your opinion, what is going to happen next for Moe?
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with anxiety/depression with what happens in the play.
5. How does the author want you to respond to this play?

### **Post-Read Questions**

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you deal with anxiety or depression?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you deal with your inner thoughts?
- ★ Would you end the play differently? Why or why not?
- ★ If Depression was a character, what would it look like? Behave like?
- ★ If Anxiety was a character, what would it look like? Behave like?

## **Post-Read Activities**

### **Character Costume Design**

- ★ Choose a character and design a costume based on their personality.
  - » What would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them?
  - » What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

### **Staged Scenes**

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.
  - » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
  - » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
  - » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

### **Depression/Anxiety Thoughts Ensemble Scene**

- ★ The play gives a specific description of how Depression Thoughts and Anxiety Thoughts look, sound, move, and use light.
- ★ Discuss as a group your own feelings about Depression and Anxiety using the five senses: sight, sound, taste, touch (texture), and smell.
- ★ Create a moment as a group where you define how you think Depression Thoughts and Anxiety Thoughts look, sound, move, and use light.

- ★ Discuss the similarities and differences of your decisions with those of the playwright.

## **Poster Design**

- ★ Based on what you've read, design a poster for the play. How would you visualize the play in a single image that would attract an audience? What font would you use for the title? What information other than the title would you include?

## **Playwright Process**

*Playwright Lindsay Price talks about her process of writing darklight. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.*

1. What was the originating idea for the play? Where did you start?

I wrote the Van and Death scene for another play that actually didn't go anywhere. This happens all the time, you start an idea, develop it through monologues and scenes and sometimes that idea just doesn't translate when turned into a play. But I received a lot of feedback from the scene which led to a discussion about depression and anxiety in the school community. It's such an important issue.

2. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The question of "How do I theatricalize depression and anxiety?" came up over and over again during the writing process. How do I turn these concepts into characters? How do I turn hope into a character? How do I visualize thoughts that happen internally in an external fashion? And because I wanted to explore expressionism to visualize Depression/Anxiety thoughts, how do I write these visualizations in a way that a teacher who wasn't involved with the initial productions can make it happen for themselves? So many questions! But asking questions and then answering them through character, dialogue, and story are a big part of my process.

### 3. What changes, if any, were made during rehearsals?

There were a ton of changes. There was so much on the page that changed once it was put into the hands of actors — especially with the Depression Thoughts and the Anxiety Thoughts. These moments were developed to be driven by movement, colour, sound, and light and that's hard sometimes to put into words.

Also, it was important to craft the script as a piece of theatre. And a couple of the essential elements with that is variety in tone and pacing. Every character dealing with depression can't speak in a slow monotone, even though that might feel authentic for the actors playing these characters. A lot of change came after seeing actors interpret moments and making changes because of those interpretations. This is why the workshop process is so helpful as a playwright. You see your words and actions in real time and see how actors will approach characters/moments.

### 4. What was it like seeing the play performed?

I was extremely happy with the final product, but more than that, I was so thankful with the response from students. That's the most important part of an issue play.