

HAVE YOU HEARD?

A MONOLOGUE-BASED
PLAY IN ONE ACT BY
Krista Boehnert



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Have You Heard? is a monologue-based play that follows what happens in a school when rumours and secrets spin out of control. What makes a secret more powerful: when it's the truth? Or when it's a lie?

Playwright Bio

Krista Boehnert grew up in Regina, Saskatchewan and began weaving stories at a young age. Fascinated by experimental staging, well-defined characters, and poignant, often messy, stories, she strives to give audiences a tale that will linger with them long after the houselights come up. She currently lives on Vancouver Island.

Synopsis

The lives of five high school students are affected when an unseen character accuses a teacher of sexual assault and the accusation turns out to be a lie. Each character confronts themselves about their own secrets, and the impact of gossip and rumours.

Characters

CLEO: 17, was dating Steve until the accident. Wants a fresh start.

ZAK: 16, sick of living in the shadow of his parents.

JAKE: 17, tired of trying to be seen as cool.

ZOE: 17, has always been a good student, until recently.

MATTIE: 15, has nightmares when she sleeps.

Themes

Secrets, lies, rumours, friendship, betrayal, gossip, sexual assault

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What makes a secret more powerful: when it's the truth? Or when it's a lie?
- ★ Without revealing it, do you have a secret you've never told anyone?
- ★ Without revealing it, do you know a secret about someone else that you've never told anyone?
- ★ Have you ever heard a rumour that turned out to be a lie?
- ★ Have you ever told a lie about someone else?
- ★ Has someone ever told a lie about you?
- ★ How often do you tell the truth to people?
- ★ How often do you lie?
- ★ What is the biggest school rumour you've ever heard?
- ★ Have you ever seen a rumour grow out of control?
- ★ How does gossip impact your life?
- ★ Is there a lot of gossip at school? How do you feel about that?
- ★ Which are more powerful: words or actions?
- ★ Are white lies harmful or harmless?
- ★ Is gossip harmless or harmful?

Pre-Read Activities

Object Secret Monologue

- ★ Students will write a half-page monologue from the perspective of an object with a secret. What is the object? Where are they? What secret would the object have? What is the emotional state of the object? Who is the object talking to? Give the object a specific listener.

It's all Lies Monologue

- ★ Students will write a half-page monologue in which the characters lies from beginning to end. Are they a good liar or a bad liar? What are they lying about? Who are they talking to?

Worst Secret Keeper Ever Monologue

- ★ Students will write a half-page monologue from the perspective of a person who is the worst secret keeper ever. What is the secret they are trying to keep? Who told them? How are they trying not to tell the secret? What makes it obvious that they have a secret? Who are they talking to? What's the outcome? Does the character succeed in keeping the secret or do they tell all?

Whispering Distorts the Truth

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute theatrical moment based on the phrase, "whispering distorts the truth." This can be done through dialogue, movement, tableau, images, video, song, or spoken word.
- ★ Groups will present their moment. Discuss afterward the similarities and differences in the way the groups decided to demonstrate the phrase.

The Spread of a Lie

- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute moment that theatrically demonstrates how a lie spreads. This can be done through dialogue, movement, tableau, images, video, song, or spoken word.
- ★ Groups will present their moment. Discuss afterward the similarities and differences in the way the groups decided to present the spread of a lie.

Secrets, Lies, and Rumours Tableaux Series

- ★ In groups, students will discuss the concepts of secrets, lies, and rumours. What is the definition of each? How would you visualize each concept?
- ★ Groups will then create one tableau for each concept (one image for secrets, one for lies, and one for rumours).
 - » 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. What are the similarities and the differences in the way secrets, lies, and rumours are visualized?

Opinion Poll

- ★ Ask students to share their opinion by standing to indicate that they agree with a specific statement. Give the statement and students will stand to indicate they agree, or remain seated to show they disagree. After holding for five seconds, those standing will sit so you can give the next statement.
- ★ Statements:
 - » White lies are harmless.
 - » Rumours are always based in truth.
 - » You can tell when someone is lying.
 - » Gossip shouldn't be taken seriously.
 - » Friends always tell the truth.
 - » Sometimes it's necessary to lie.
 - » Secrets should never be revealed.
 - » Sometimes lies become the truth.
 - » Every lie contains an element of the truth.

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 *Have You Heard?*, 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. What is the name of the accused teacher?
3. Which character has nightmares?
4. Who is Steve's girlfriend?
5. Fill in the blank: "If you're going to take someone down, wouldn't you pick somebody that you'd stand to actually _____ something from?"
6. What did Steve die from?
7. What is Jake tired of pretending about?
8. Fill in the blank: "What is the value of a _____ anyway?"
9. Who received 54% on their second calculus test?
10. What do they decide to do about it?

11. What did Josh do in May?
12. What happened to Zoe after she dated Mike?
13. Did the teacher ever return to the school?
14. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why does the playwright choose to share the subject matter through monologues?
2. In your opinion, what makes a good monologue?
3. Analyze Zoe's use of language. What kind of words does she use? What can you infer about her character based on her vocabulary and word choice?
4. How would you costume Zak? Use the text to support your answer.
5. Based on the way that Cleo speaks, how would you visualize her? What is her physicality?
6. What is the significance of the line, "Problem is, instead of realizing whispering distorts the truth, we learned that we could turn the truth into a joke"?
7. What is the significance of the line, "I think a secret is like letting go of a balloon on a windy day"?
8. What is the significance of the line, "I had no opinion but to agree with their opinion"?
9. We learn about Josh, but never meet him in the play. In your opinion, why do you think the playwright made the decision to not have Josh as a visible character?
10. In your opinion, what is the conflict of the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Have you Heard*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about secrets? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about lies? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is going to happen next for Mattie?
5. What is going to happen next for Zoe?
6. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with secrets and lies with what happens in the play.
7. 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 moment resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Would you change the ending of the play? Why or why not?
- ★ Is there such a thing as a good secret?
- ★ Is there such a thing as a harmless lie?

Post-Read Activities

Original Scene

- ★ Now that you've read the play, change the form. Write a one-page scene between two of the characters in the play. You must keep the characters as they are in the play and keep the information about the characters the same. But if you were going to change the format from monologue to dialogue what would you do? Write it out.

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their 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?

Line Tableau

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a line from the play such as, "Every lie you tell takes a toll."

- ★ Each group will discuss and decide how to visualize this line in a tableau.
 - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?

Line Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups. Instead of tableau, they will write a one-minute scene using the same line as inspiration — “Every lie you tell takes a toll.”
- ★ In groups, students will create and present a scene in which they explore their own struggles with lies.

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 Krista Boehnert talks about her process writing Have you Heard? 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?

The originating idea for the play was based on an incident in my own high school where the student body knew something said about a teacher was a lie, but no one came forward with that information. I started by thinking about that scenario, and how no one had a full picture of what happened, what was real and what was made up, etc. I wanted to explore the story from that perspective — one of incomplete pieces, where no one really knew exactly what was going on.

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

There were several challenges during the writing process. One of the main ones was to balance exploring the larger storyline that ties all the characters together, that of Josh and Mr. Pender, with the personal impact the rumour has on everyone in their own day-to-day lives outside of Josh and Mr. Pender. That's the ripple effect of rumours that I wanted to highlight in the play — there's the larger story of course, but the way each character is impacted and affected by it is so personalized, which was really important to me to highlight. We all experience and perceive things differently and my hope with *Have you Heard?* was to show that.

The second challenge was that I deliberately chose not to have Mr. Pender or Josh ever set foot on the stage. Because of that, I had to unfold their story through the other characters in a way that felt natural and real while keeping the intensity of their story arc. The danger in a monologue-based play was this could just end up being flat and devoid of emotion, with the audience feeling like someone is just providing them with an update, like you'd see in a news conference — clinical, factual, and lacking in drama.

3. Why did you decide to use the monologue form to share this story?

The easiest answer is that I love the form. Monologue-based plays allow a playwright to do things that they can't in other forms. For this story, though, I felt it really lent itself nicely to that exploration of secrets, lies, and rumours. There's a confessional feeling to a monologue-based play where the audience feels like the character has their guard down in a way they wouldn't if they weren't alone. This allowed for the candid, messy, raw moments where characters confess to things they're not proud of — like Zoe and the cheating ring. It also makes the moments of shame and grief, like in Mattie and Cleo's journeys, really visceral and real. Ultimately our explorations of lies, secrets, and rumours is a deeply personal, solo journey. While we talk about them with friends and family, it comes down to our own inner core about what we ultimately feel or do with them and that is showcased by the monologue form.

4. As a playwright, what is your favourite moment/character in the play?

Oh, hard question!!! I'm going to cheat and pick two. For the personal character stories, Mattie's monologue in Scene 26, where she's on that path to healing, it's such a hopeful moment for her and I hope the audience comes away feeling she's going to be ok. For the larger story arc, my favourite is Scene 29 where Jake talks about a photo of Josh and Mr. Pender that leaves the audience with more questions than answers about how things unraveled so dramatically. The larger story arc is just as messy as the individual character ones and I think this moment really highlights that, and the fact that it comes near the end of the play hopefully invites the audience to mull over the questions raised about secrets and rumours during the performance long after the curtain goes down.

5. What is harder: coming up with ideas or rewrites?

Rewrites. Definitely rewrites! At least that's been my experience. The ideas are there and they bloom and grow as you write. The rewrites are the time when you refine and polish both your story and your characters. You examine every word, every line to be sure it's the best it can be. You're looking at large-scale issues like whether you've dropped a key storyline without realizing it, to examining whether all your characters' voices are distinct enough that they don't all sound exactly the same (word choice and vocabulary use, etc.), to the tiny mistakes that can crop up like whether you changed the name of the school they all go to partway through the script.