

# THOUGHT TRAPS

A DRAMEDY IN ONE ACT BY  
*Lindsay Price*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## Introduction

Ariane and Kate deal with people from their past who invade their head space. Will either be able to set themselves free?

## 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

Ariane walks around with her own personal black cloud. She throws up barriers, lashes out, and refuses to tell anyone what she's thinking. Kate is the exact opposite: happy, bubbly, outgoing, and personable. But even happy people have issues. And there are more similarities between the two teens: both Ariane and Kate deal with family from their past who invade their head space and pull them into thought traps. Will either be able to set themselves free? Or will one of them snap from the weight of their thoughts?

## Characters

**ARIANE [W] (she/her):** A deeply moody teen who walks around with her own personal black cloud.

**ESSA [W] (she/her):** Ariane's older sister. Left home a year earlier. Exists in the play only in Ariane's memory.

**KATE [W] (she/her):** Presents as a perfect, happy girl. But is she?

**ANDY [M] (he/him):** Kate's older brother. Exists in the play only in Kate's memory.

**BENITA [W] (she/her):** Member of The Buzzy Bees. This improv group is always thinking. The problem is they overthink everything and can never agree.

**BILLIE (they/them):** Member of The Buzzy Bees. This improv group is always thinking. The problem is they overthink everything and can never agree.

**BRAD [M](he/him):** Member of The Buzzy Bees. This improv group is always thinking. The problem is they overthink everything and can never agree.

**BARBARA [W] (she/her):** Member of The Buzzy Bees. This improv group is always thinking. The problem is they overthink everything and can never agree.

**SHANE (they/them):** Ariane's foster parent. Non-binary. Uses the honorific Mx. (pronounced Mix). Very easy-going even though they have faced opposition to their choices.

**MR./MRS. LANG (she/her OR he/him):** The Vice Principal. A little out of touch but trying.

## Themes

Family, memory, friendship, illness/health, overcoming odds, relationships, self-image

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ Do you get along with everyone in your family?
- ★ How important is family to you?
- ★ How important are your friends to you?
- ★ How do you deal with “thought traps” — your own thoughts that can pull you down?
- ★ Do you ever overthink anything?
- ★ How often do your own thoughts stop you from doing something?
- ★ How often do you replay a memory from your past in your mind? Have these moments ever stopped you from doing something in the present?
- ★ Are you someone who lives in the present or is affected by the past?

- ★ How important is the past to you? How important is memory to you?

## **Pre-Read Activities**

### **Memory Moment: Writing**

- ★ Have students write out a memory from their past. It can be their recent past or their distant past. It should not be anything that makes them uncomfortable. Have students describe this memory using the five senses.

### **Memory Moment: Discussion**

- ★ Divide the class into groups. Have the group try to remember a moment from class earlier in the year. Remember the moment in as much detail as possible. Try to remember what people did or said. How does each group member describe the moment? Do they all remember the same details? Where does the memory differ?
- ★ Discuss as a class how memory is unreliable. Ask students: Do you relive memories from the past in the present? What purpose does it serve to remember these moments?

### **Siblings Original Scene**

- ★ Divide the class into groups. Discuss the topic of family, specifically getting along with siblings. What do students like or dislike about their siblings? What do they wish they could change about their siblings? If they're comfortable, have students share with each other a memory they have of their siblings.
- ★ After the discussion, groups will create a one-minute sibling scene. The scene should take place in the past (a distant memory) and in the present (how the relationship is today). What is the difference between the memory version of the siblings and the present version of the siblings?

## Sibling Reflection

- ★ Have students write a reflection on how they get along with their sibling, or if they don't have one, what they think it would be like to have a sibling. What are the pros and cons of the sibling relationship? What would they like to change? What's something they wish they could say to their sibling?

## **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 *Thought Traps*, 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 does Kate give to Brad as an object?
3. What name does Billie think is better than "The Buzzy Bees"?
4. What did Ariane do to land outside the Vice Principal's office?
5. In a flashback scene, what do Ariane and Essa name their club?
6. Where is Ariane's dad?

7. What is a group of parrots called?
8. What did Essa promise to do for Ariane, and broke that promise?
9. Is Kate's relationship with her brother real or in her memory?
10. What did Kate's brother used to say about Kate's talking?
11. Finish this sentence: "Friends do nothing but leave you when you need them \_\_\_\_\_."
12. In Kate's memory of her last talk with her brother, what does he want?
13. Why is Kate at the bus station?
14. Who hates eggplant?
15. What is the key idea of the play?

### **Read Two: How does it happen?**

1. What can you infer about Ariane's personality based on her language? How does her word choice define her as a character?
2. Analyze Kate's language. Based on your analysis, how would you physicalize her?
3. How would you costume Shane? Describe what they would look like.
4. In your opinion, why does the playwright include the Buzzy Bees in the play? What is their purpose?
5. After reading the play, what are the thought traps the Buzzy Bees fall into? Cite the text to support your answer.
6. How does the playwright use flashback and memory in the play?
7. After reading the play, do you think Ariane's memory of Essa is reliable? Why or why not? Cite the text to support your answer.

8. What is the significance of the line, “You don’t have problems like Gloomy does. Count your lucky stars”?
9. What is the significance of the line, “If you stay, I’ll show you my writing”?
10. What is the main conflict in the play?

### **Read Three: Why does it happen?**

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Thought Traps*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about memory? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about relationships? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. What is the playwright trying to say about mental health? Cite the text to support your answer.
5. Can you connect to Ariane’s point of view, even if you don’t share it? Why or why not?
6. How does your personal experience with family compare to that of Ariane? Can you relate to the character? Why or why not?
7. How does the playwright 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?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?
- ★ What is going to happen next to Kate and Ariane?

- ★ Would you end the play differently? Why or why not?

## **Post-Read Activities**

### **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?

### **Thought Traps Original Scene**

- ★ Divide students into groups. Have them discuss, create, and present a short scene in which characters struggle with a memory individual who acts as a “thought trap.” Which of the characters in the scene defeat their trap and which succumb to it?



## 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?

## Set Design

- ★ Students, individually or in groups, will discuss and decide how they would design the set for this play. Based on the themes in the play, what colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour set rendering or write a two-paragraph description of the set.

## **Playwright Process**

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

### What was your inspiration for writing this play?

The story of Ariane and Kate exists in another form over at theatrefolk.com, in our a capella musical *Shout*. I love their story and decided to see if I could turn it into a non-musical one act. A great challenge and a satisfying one — songs in which characters expressed their thoughts had to be turned into dialogue, and in some cases all new characters! The title *Thought Traps* came directly out of this new writing.

### What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

In a musical, characters speak their inner thoughts through song. Take the songs away and that leaves a considerable character development hole. So figuring out how characters would express themselves was a challenge. One example is that the character of Andy only exists as lyrics in a song in the musical. In the play, I turned him into a character who interacted directly with Kate. It added an interesting dimension to the play which I was really happy with. Another example is that in the musical the Buzzy Bees are an a capella group. In the play, they became an improv troupe.

### **What was it like to see the play performed?**

I'm always thrilled when I take on a writing challenge and it works in the final product! I love the characters of Kate and Ariane and I really liked seeing the Buzzy Bees in another iteration.

### **Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?**

Rewrites always! Ideas are fun because it's the brainstorming phase where everything can change. I don't feel that ideas are precious; they are just a starting point. Rewrites are specific and need to relate directly to moving the play forward. Sometimes, I can rewrite all day and hardly have anything to show for it because I'm trying to work on a moment or a character. But, while the idea stage is more fun, rewrites are more rewarding. Plays become the best they can be in the rewrites; they are never fully written or realized in a first draft.

### **What is your writing process like?**

I often work on more than one play at a time. That way if I get stuck or find myself with writer's block, I simply move on to the next play. I have a minimum of six steps in my writing process which covers the pre-write stage to various writing drafts, to a workshop, post-workshop draft, and production-ready draft. I'm not one of those writers who can sit down and write from 9–5 like a day job. My head would explode! I like short sections with different methods of writing (brainstorming with pen and paper or journal, computer, texting notes into my phone while I'm out for a walk). Just like the writer's block, moving from method to method engages my brain in different ways and keeps me writing. That's the most important thing: always be writing.

### **What engages you about playwriting?**

I love seeing characters live a story and I love watching it happen right in front of me (rather than being distanced from the experience through a movie screen). It's an intimate experience and that is very engaging!