

Boys with Cars - YPT Study Guide

Written, choreographed, and performed by: Anita Majumdar

Directed by: Brian Quirt

Produced by: Nightswimming, presented in association with Young People's Theatre

Introduction

This guide was written by Stephanie Long, with contributions from Jenni Saslove. As you scroll through the guide, you will find curriculum connections, discussion questions, units of study and more. If you wish to create your own lesson plan from the study guide copy, we have created a [lesson plan template](#) for your use. We hope you will find this guide to be a useful resource. Should you have any questions or feedback, or have inquiries about the use of this guide (which is copyright protected), please feel free to contact Karen Gilodo, Associate Artistic Director, Learning at kgilodo@youngpeoplestheatre.org.

Synopsis

Boys with Cars, by Anita Majumdar, contrasts the experiences of two teenage girls at a high school in Port Moody, British Columbia. It is a one-woman show, with Majumdar playing all roles and often telling the story through dance and movement.

The first part of the play follows a student named Naznin (Naz, for short). Naz is South-Asian Canadian, growing up in a predominantly white community. Naz prides herself on her classical Indian dancing and is a member of a dance troupe. We meet Naz standing outside of the wedding for two popular kids from her high school – Buddy and Candice – at which Naz will be performing. It is the May long weekend. She recounts various experiences and memories from high school.

The first flashback takes place during summer vacation before Grade 12. Naz feels invisible amongst her peers. Until one day, Lucky Punjabi, a new and cool boy at the high school begins to banter with her. Naz stands up for herself and impresses the cool kids. Students start to notice Naz, now that she has become the girl that Lucky likes. Naz and Lucky begin seeing each other every weekend, and Naz joins the cool kids after school.

The next flashback is set just before spring break during their Grade 12 year. The students are at a school assembly where Naz decides to wear a skirt for Lucky. Lucky however is driving to Calgary to audition for *Bhangra Idol*. At the assembly, Buddy (Lucky's best friend and Candice's boyfriend) encourages Naz to sit with him in the bleachers. At the assembly, Candice and her friends perform an Indian dance for the audience. Buddy places a jacket over their legs and moves Naz's hand to touch him, without her consent. Naz does not know what to do or how to stop it.

Rumour spreads that Naz has cheated on Lucky with Buddy. Naz is harassed by her fellow students, especially Candice. Lucky breaks up with Naz, slut-shaming her and without giving her the opportunity to explain the non-consensual situation. Lucky also confesses to kissing Candice, but blames Naz for leading him to do that. Naz is kicked out of school and abandoned by her family, which is when she moves in with Gustakhi and starts a wedding dance company to make ends meet.

One year after graduating Grade 12, Naz is asked to dance at Buddy and Candice's wedding. At the wedding, Buddy apologizes for Candice's behaviour, but not his own. Naz does not accept the apology, but dances at their wedding as a form of empowerment. She dances for herself, and not for the approval of others.

The play then shifts to follow Candice who is white. Candice tells her story through the recording of a make-up tutorial video. Her present time is set in September after graduating high school (9 months before the beginning of Naz's story).

Candice explains that she and Buddy broke up in June, but got back together briefly during summer break. She holds an at-home pregnancy test. Candice emphasizes her makeup for porcelain skin while gossiping about her peers. She also talks about the power to change your life and her desire to do so. She recounts her (questionable) choices regarding the graduation dance, including the Taj Mahal theme, wearing bindis, and making various racist remarks.

We learn that Candice's home life is less than ideal, with an absent mother and unhelpful siblings.

Candice also remembers the time she bonded with Lucky but was rejected when trying to make an advance on him. She expresses her jealousy when Lucky begins to date Naz. After Lucky's trip to Calgary, Candice explains that Lucky visited her first and made a move on her. Lucky then changes his mind and leaves Candice to go back to Naz.

We then see Candice bully Naz, from Candice's perspective.

Candice auditions for the Coventry School of Bhangra in England – on the May long weekend before graduation. She explains her love of Indian dance and desire to perform the style, despite not being South Asian.

Candice then recounts her experience finding out about Buddy and Naz. She reflects on her previous relationships, leading to a panic attack and a realization that she deserves better.

At their graduation dance, Buddy proposes to Candice. Candice rejects him and confesses her cheating with Lucky and applying to dance school in England.

Now in the present time, we see Candice holding the pregnancy test and discovering that she is pregnant with Buddy's child.

Thematic Overview

Boys With Cars explores themes of power and privilege as the characters navigate unchecked male privilege, female empowerment, cultural appropriation, and what constitutes consent. These are complex and timely issues, and ones that may be very close to students' lived experiences. This study guide will open guided discussions of these topics before students attend the play, and it will help them to unpack their post-show experiences and reactions together.

Content Advisory

This play is about the complex and often confusing world of teenage friendships and romantic relationships. The multiple characters portrayed by Anita Majumdar reflect the experiences of a South Asian-Canadian girl trying desperately to fit in with her peers in a predominately white society in Port Moody, British Columbia. The characters speak in authentic teenage voices, using coarse language including swearing as well as sexually explicit terminology. In the course of the story a character recounts a sexual assault perpetrated by a popular boy.

Curriculum Connections

- Social Sciences & Humanities – Dynamics of Human Relationships; Focus on Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice
- The Arts – Drama, Dance
- Health and Physical Education – Social-Emotional Learning Skills; Focus on Human Development and Sexual Health
- Language/English

Ancestral Teachings/Gifts

- Respect
- Wisdom

Themes

- Empowerment
- Privilege
- Consent
- Cultural Appropriation

About the Playwright: Anita Majumdar

Anita Majumdar is an acting graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada and holds a Bachelor of Arts at the University of British Columbia in Theatre, English and South Asian Languages. She has studied dance and choreographed contemporary hybrids of Kathak, Odissi and Bharatanatyam for over two decades.

As an actor, Anita won the Best Actress award at the Festival of First Films in Singapore for her first feature film *Murder Unveiled* and has since performed in leading roles around the world, including Toronto's Theatre Passe Muraille, Stratford, the Pasadena Playhouse, and the Museum Theatre in Chennai, India.

As playwright, Anita was awarded Canada's Governor General's Protégé Prize in playwriting where she was mentored by the late John Murrell and was one of 50 artists invited to celebrate the Canada Council for the Arts 50th Anniversary. She has been a writer with the Tarragon Theatre's Playwright's Unit, Cahoots Theatre's Hot House Writer's Unit, playwright-in-residence with Nightswimming, and has been invited to the Banff Playwright's Lab on multiple occasions. Her most produced/toured work of over 15 years, *The Fish Eyes Trilogy*, is published with illustrations by Playwrights Canada Press. A complete audio performance of *The Fish Eyes Trilogy* can be heard on the first season of CBC Radio's PlayME podcast.

Interview with the Playwright



What inspired you to write this play?

When I was a teenage girl in high school, I witnessed a lot of confusing incidents (not necessarily happening to me directly, but I was often a bystander) and at the time I didn't have the language or insight into what was happening or why. I thought that when I finally got out of high school, things would be fairer, particularly regarding how women were treated compared to men. It was a rude awakening to learn that high school had actually been preparing me to accept that there were rules that applied to you depending on your gender and the colour of your skin. When I first started writing for theatre, I felt most compelled to unpack the high school experience from the perspective of a young woman of colour and find out if other people found it equally absurd and unjust.

In what ways do you anticipate the play resonating differently today than when you first performed it at YPT?

When I first performed *Boys with Cars* at YPT, it was about six months before the #MeToo movement was a worldwide conversation. As a result, I think young people have access to conversations around consent, equal rights, safety, and protection for all genders and races, in a way that they didn't in 2017. At the same time, I think we're living in a time where there's heavy resistance (particularly online) in response to #MeToo – where feminism is misconstrued as an attempt by women to hold majority power over men and there's a desire to return back to "traditional" roles for women in order to restore the status quo. So, I anticipate the play's talkbacks to be a bit more nuanced as we discuss why Naz and Candice deserve a better world than the one that *Boys with Cars* provide for them.

Have you made any changes to the script to reflect cultural shifts between then and now?

It's still early days of rehearsal, but something that felt important to return to was the initial instinct for creating this play. When I first started writing *Boys with Cars*, Facebook was the go-to social media platform. When I started performing it, Instagram was the go-to platform. It seemed pretty clear that trying to keep the play up-to-date to a rapidly changing internet landscape was going to be impossible, but probably more importantly, I couldn't pretend to write for an experience of high school that I hadn't had myself. Even if I did a bunch of research, my heart would never truly be in it, which was more important to me.

I've heard Dan Levy talk about how he wrote *Schitt's Creek* as a world where hatred towards LGBTQIA+ didn't exist and where women could walk around town at night without fear of assault or harm. So in a way, the play asks audiences to step into a world that may not be an exact replica of their own school experience or time period, but the hope is that what happens in the play is compelling enough to engage and invest in the characters. And unfortunately, the exploration of women's autonomy and fight for agency over one's own life hasn't stopped being relevant.

There's a lot in the play around performing, whether that is performing a dance or performing a specific identity or role within the social strata of a high school. Social media and influencer culture seems to only be increasing the degree to which people perform their everyday routines for an audience. Do you see any chance of this slowing down? Do you think it needs to?

The desire to perform and be seen is portrayed in so many different forms throughout history and across cultures. We keep inventing new ways to express our experience of the world in hopes that it might resonate with others and ultimately make us feel less alone, or at least, give ourselves a sense of belonging.

I don't think finding new modes of performance is going anywhere, but my hope is that as we start to see AI excel in acting, writing, and music, that humans don't abandon performing. I believe young people often avoid putting themselves out there to avoid being "cringe". Currently, social media perpetuates the feeling that we're constantly being watched and need to be perfect at all times, which is robbing us of the opportunity to fail and try again. To see opportunity in trying something different and sharing it with the world, even if it doesn't click with your intended audience.

I think there's so much to be learned through trying something new in performance. It is inherently about taking a risk, which is also what makes performing at its core so human. You can't take a risk if you don't have something to lose, which is a totally human experience that adds a lot of vulnerability to performance. This is ultimately why I think we both perform and watch other performers. We want to connect with others to better understand our nature and our existence in our short time on earth.

Did you draw on your own high school experience at all when crafting this play about teenagers and high school dynamics?

Yes, I was inspired by experiences that I either went through, witnessed in school, or heard about from friends secondhand. While the majority is fiction, bits and pieces (like the Keg mint, certain names, personal music tastes, etc.), influence the play. As well, I think the play is my way of responding in more empowered ways that I wished I could have had the courage/agency to do when I was in high school myself.

How do you hope this play might impact young people in 2026?

Like with any show, I don't think it's my place to tell anyone how they should feel about something I've written or performed. My only wish is for audiences to be open to the way that this story is told (because it's a non-linear structure) and that students are curious to know more about these characters beyond the ways they present themselves on the surface.

If you were preparing a young person to see this play, what, if anything, would you want them to reflect on before attending the show?

In high school, a teacher introduced me to the idea that we are entitled to go after what we want as long as you're not hurting someone else. Since then, I ask myself and encourage others to think about:

- How do you know when you've hurt someone?
- What information tells you that they've been hurt (physically or emotionally)?
- Does the hurt seem worse if it's someone you know personally like a friend or a family member compared to a stranger?
- Does it matter that you didn't mean to hurt them?
- Does it matter that you've been hurt yourself and you are now hurting someone else?
- Is it okay if someone else gets hurt if it means that you get what you wanted?
- If a group of people hurt someone, is any one person responsible?

Curriculum Expectations

By participating in the exercises in this study guide and viewing the performance, students will:

Social Sciences & Humanities – Dynamics of Human Relationships; Equity, Diversity & Social Justice

- demonstrate an understanding of various social and cultural influences on relationships
- demonstrate an understanding of various dynamics and challenges that can affect relationships
- demonstrate an understanding of skills and strategies that help people to develop and sustain healthy relationships
- demonstrate an understanding of the dynamics of power relations in various social contexts.
- demonstrate an understanding of how identity is socially constructed and internalized, and of the impact of social norms and stereotypes
- demonstrate an understanding of the impact individual action can have on equity, social justice, and environmental issues, and how the media can create awareness of these issues
- demonstrate an understanding of a range of historical and contemporary Canadian equity and social justice issues
- demonstrate an understanding of how self-concept influences an individual's interactions with others
- demonstrate an understanding of the range of relationships people experience over a lifetime and of the differences between healthy and unhealthy relationships

The Arts – Drama

- use the critical analysis process to reflect on and evaluate their own and others' drama works and activities
- demonstrate an understanding of how societies present and past use or have used drama, and of how creating and viewing drama can benefit individuals, groups, and communities.
- identify knowledge and skills they have acquired through drama activities and ways in which they can apply this learning in personal, social, and career contexts.

The Arts – Dance

- use the critical analysis process to reflect on and evaluate their own and others' dance works and activities
- demonstrate an understanding of how societies present and past use or have used dance, and of how creating and viewing dance can benefit individuals, groups, and communities

Health & Physical Education

- describe factors that influence sexual decision making and demonstrate an understanding of how to use decision-making and communication skills effectively to support choices related to responsible and healthy sexuality
- apply their knowledge of sexual health and safety, including a strong understanding of the concept of consent and sexual limits, and their decision-making skills to think in advance about their sexual health and sexuality
- demonstrate an understanding of the skills and strategies needed to build healthy social relationships and intimate relationships

English

- select and use appropriate listening comprehension strategies before, during, and after listening to understand oral texts, including increasingly complex texts
- identify the important information and ideas in oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, in a variety of ways
- extend understanding of oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, by making connections between the ideas in them and personal knowledge, experience, and insights; other texts; and the world around them
- analyse oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, focusing on the ways in which they communicate information, ideas, issues, and themes and influence the listener's/viewer's response
- identify and analyse the perspectives and/or biases evident in oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, and comment on any questions they may raise about beliefs, values, identity, and power
- evaluate the effectiveness of a variety of presentation strategies used in oral texts, including increasingly complex texts, and suggest other strategies that could be used effectively

Units of Study

The units of study within this guide prompt students to think about main themes in *Boys with Cars* through engaging with drama and other creative outlets.

Pre-Show Unit of Study

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

See Interview with the Playwright for further discussion questions.

- What makes people feel powerful?
- What does consent mean?
- In the play, one of the male characters says of the girls at his high school: “You girls are like natural-born liars. Like wearin’ makeup? And those La Senza bras that make your boobs bigger . . . LIES!” There are interventions (from cosmetic surgery to makeup products) that change the way that people look. Does this constitute “lying”? Why or why not?
- The song [Amplifier](#) by Imran Khan is the first song played in the production. Listening to a clip of it, what does it make you think of? What clues might it give you to the content or mood of the play?

Pre-Show Activity #1: Powerful Poses

Objective: Students will consider what power looks like and feels like as they assume a number of poses that communicate power imbalances.

Materials: Space to move around

Instructions:

1. Have a discussion with students about the nature of power and the forms it takes. See *glossary* for a definition of power that can be shared with the students and ask if they agree with this definition or if they would add/change anything.
2. Ask students to demonstrate how someone might stand if they had just won a big game and scored the winning goal vs. how they would stand if they had lost and felt bad about themselves.
3. Ask students to stand in two lines facing one another (this could be done by pairing the students first or dividing the students in half)
4. Name one row “A” and the other “B”
5. Ask the two rows to face opposite sides of the room (back-to-back)
6. For the following scenarios, explain the two roles and then count down from “3”. Tell students that, on “GO”, they should turn and face the other row, with their bodies frozen in a pose that shows how they would feel in the given scenario.

SCENARIOS:

Row A	Row B
King	Jester
Rabbit hiding from predators	Lion hunting its prey
Kid begging parent for permission	Parent
Principal of the school	Student sent to the principal’s office
Employee being fired	Boss firing an employee

Debrief:

Ask your students:

1. How did the two rows look different in the scenarios? Did you notice any patterns?
2. How did it feel to be in a position of more power vs. less power?
3. What kind of privileges (advantages) come with positions of power?
4. Are power dynamics constant or can they change?
5. What helps you to feel proud and powerful?

Extension:

- Instruct students to choose one of the roles from the previous activity and write a diary entry from that character’s perspective. Consider how their position of power influences their everyday life and interactions with other people.

Accommodations:

- Students with visual impairments can discuss how positions of power may speak differently to the opposite position
- Students can participate as they are physically able and comfortable. They can adjust their pose, or describe the pose verbally
- Students can type or write their diary entries, or record a video

Pre-Show Activity #2: Navigating Consent

Objective: Students will work on recognizing and responding to situations where consent is clear, unclear, comfortable, or uncomfortable.

Materials: tape to mark a line on the floor (optional), space to move around, scenario list (below)

Instructions:

1. Ask students to define the word, "consent"
2. Show students the video, "Consent: It's as Simple as Tea":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQbei5JGiT8>
3. Tape a straight line on the floor or use an existing marker on the floor, and designate one side of the room as "comfortable" and the opposite side as "uncomfortable".
4. Ask students to move to a spot along the line that shows how comfortable or uncomfortable they feel in each scenario you read.
5. Read scenarios aloud:
 - a. A friend asks to borrow your phone
 - b. A friend asks if they can hug you when you're feeling sad
 - c. A classmate tries to hug you when you didn't expect it
 - d. Someone posts a photo of you without asking
6. Provide students the opportunity to share their opinions if they would like to

Debrief:

Ask your students:

1. Describe when you felt comfortable and why? What was uncomfortable and why?
2. Could your comfort level change depending on who was involved, where it happened, or the timing?

Extension:

- Invite students to work in pairs to act out their choice of the four scenarios and to show how a healthy boundary (saying "no") could be set

Accommodations:

- Scenarios can be written on paper and students can respond in written form, to avoid public responses

Post-Show Unit of Study

Post-Show Discussion Questions

- Throughout the play, when do Naz and Candice feel comfortable in their bodies? Why?
- How might this play connect to the ancestral teachings/gifts of respect and wisdom? Can you find connections between the play and other [ancestral teachings](#) (options include: love, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth)?
- Naz is compared to a gazelle throughout the play, and the hunting of gazelles is also referenced. Why do you think these comparisons are made?
- Before attending the play, we explored the concepts of power and consent. Which characters held positions of power within the play? How do you think that these power dynamics affected Naz when trying to set boundaries?

- Cultural appropriation is a theme within this play. What culture is being appropriated and how? (Before discussing this question, you may wish to review [this article](#) about cultural appropriation vs. appreciation with your students).
- What is the difference between appreciation and appropriation?

Post-Show Activity #1: Influences and Character Evolution

Objective: Students will explore the ways in which the two main characters change over the course of the play. They will consider external vs. internal influences, as well as barriers to change.

Materials: Chart paper and markers.

Instructions:

1. Divide students into groups of four or five.
2. Assign each group one of the following characters: Naz at the beginning of the play, Naz at the end of the part 1, Candice at the beginning of the play, Candice at the end of the play (having multiple groups working on the same character can be a benefit rather than a hindrance, and will be necessary in larger classes)
3. Provide each group with a piece of chart paper and at least one marker.
4. Instruct students to draw the outline of a person on the chart paper. Groups may choose to trace the outline a peer volunteer. If they do so, they should ensure they ask the volunteer's consent before lying on the paper and being traced.
5. Tell the groups that the outline represents the outline of their assigned character.
6. Ask students to write words or sentences that represent the character's feelings and struggles on the inside of the outline.
7. Ask students to write or draw what is going on outside the character outside the outline, including things that other people might be saying about them or assuming about them.
8. Ask groups to share their character profiles with the class and use the following questions to prompt connections and comparisons:
 - What is difference for the characters at the end of the play as opposed to at the beginning?
 - What and who has caused this change?
 - What helps each character to feel more empowered?
 - How did Naz' physicality (dancing and body language) change as she became more empowered and less victimized?

Extension:

- Ask each group to discuss and share what their assigned character's life might be like 5 years after the play ends.

Debrief:

Ask your students:

1. What barriers to change exist for each character? How might these barriers be overcome?
2. How much of each character's future is within their own control?

Post-Show Activity #2: “Amplifier” Revisited

Objective: Students will explore the song Amplifier in order to deepen their understanding of cultural appreciation vs. appropriation, while exploring central themes in the play.

Materials: Song from the play (played without video) [Imran Khan - Amplifier](#), a speaker, chart paper or black/white board and writing utensil

Directions:

1. Invite students to move freely in the space as the song “Amplifier” plays or to be still and listen if this is a better fit for the group.
2. Divide students to groups of four or five (could be the same groups as Activity #1).
3. Ask groups to discuss anything they already know about the song, how it makes them feel, and what they think it might be about.
4. Inform your students that Imran Khan began writing the song while stuck in a traffic jam (according to [this article](#)). The title “Amplifier” means to make something louder or stronger. Ask students to consider ways in which the characters in the play also felt stuck or trapped in their circumstances and how they became more powerful (amplified) throughout the play.
5. Ask students to create 1-3 tableaux that communicate a transition between feeling stuck/trapped and feeling free and empowered (you may want to reference the tableau conventions listed [here](#)). Remind students to focus on their own experiences or ideas, rather than reenacting anything from the play. If time allows, students can find ways to move smoothly between each tableau.
6. Play the song in the background while students devise their tableaux (optional).
7. Ask students to share their creations with the group and invite reflection on different interpretations of the central themes.

Debrief:

Ask your students:

1. What might influence the way that a student responds to or connects with a song (e.g. personal experiences, cultural heritage etc.)?
2. What can help teenagers to feel empowered and strong in times where they feel stuck or trapped?
3. How does the creative process we used here (focusing on our own experiences and connections) avoid cultural appropriation? How is it different from us trying to create a dance in the style of the song?
4. How could this same process be used when it comes to other types of art-making, such as visual arts?

Glossary

Boundaries: An invisible line that defines what behaviours are acceptable for an individual. Boundaries can be physical (e.g. do not touch me) or emotional (e.g. do not lie to me).

Consent: Permission or agreement.

In a sexual context, the University of Toronto's Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment defines consent as: "The voluntary agreement of an individual to engage in a sexual act. Consent is positive, active and ongoing, and can be revoked at any time. Consenting to one kind of sexual act does not mean that consent is given for another sexual act or kind of activity. Consent is NOT obtained where a person is incapable of consenting – for example, due to intoxication, or where a person is induced to engage in the activity by someone abusing a position of trust, power, or authority."

Cultural Appreciation: Refers to the mindful and respectful interaction with another culture. It goes beyond merely adopting elements of a culture but strives to understand and celebrate the significance of those elements within their historical and social contexts. When individuals or organizations engage in cultural appreciation, they seek to genuinely connect with the culture, demonstrating sensitivity to its nuances and showing respect for the people to whom the culture belongs.

Cultural Appropriation: Refers to the adoption or use of elements of one culture by members of another culture. This concept is often discussed in the context of power dynamics, where a dominant culture takes from a minority or marginalized culture without permission, understanding, or respect for the original cultural context.

The Canada Council for the Arts considers that cultural appropriation applies when cultural borrowings or adaptations from a minoritized culture reflect, reinforce, or amplify inequalities, stereotypes, and historically exploitative relationships that have direct negative consequences on equity-seeking communities.

Empowerment: The process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you.

#MeToo Movement: A social movement and awareness campaign against sexual abuse, sexual harassment, and rape culture, in which survivors (led by the voices of women, especially public figures) share their experiences of sexual abuse or sexual harassment. "Me Too" is meant to empower those who have been sexually assaulted through empathy, solidarity, and strength in numbers, by visibly demonstrating how many have experienced sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace.

Power: In political science and sociology, power is the capacity to influence, lead, dominate, or otherwise have an impact on the life and actions of others in society.

Privilege: Advantages, benefits, or special rights that individuals or groups possess in society due to certain aspects of their identity, background, and/or circumstances that provide benefit to them as they navigate the world.

Resources

Kids Help Phone

Visit: <https://kidshelpphone.ca/>

Text: CONNECT to 686868

Call: 1-800-668-6868

Sources

About the Play and Playwright

<https://slotkinletter.com/2017/03/review-boys-with-cars>

<https://www.anitamajumdar.com/anita-majumdar-bio-canadian-indian-actress-performer-writer-artist-consultant>

Definitions

[Boundaries](#)

[Consent](#)

[Cultural Appropriation vs. Appreciation](#)

Cultural Appropriation [1](#) & [2](#)

[Cultural Appreciation](#)

[Empowerment](#)

[#MeToo Movement](#)

[Power](#)

[Privilege](#)