



Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Allens Arthur Robinson present

HONOUR

by Joanna Murray-Smith



Image by Brett Boardman

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Teacher's Resource Kit compiled by

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KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises

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ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about

CREATIVE TEAM

Director – Lee Lewis

Set Designer – Michael Scott-Mitchell

Costume Designer – Alice Babidge

Lighting Designer – Damien Cooper

Composer and Sound Designer – Paul Charlier

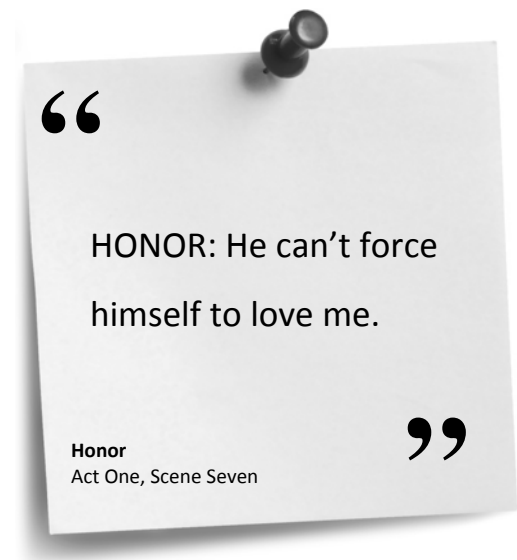
CAST

Paula Arundell

Wendy Hughes

Yael Stone

William Zappa



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SYNOPSIS

Honor and George have been married for 32 years. George is a successful journalist, Honor is his supportive wife. Sophie is their 24-year-old daughter. Claudia is an ambitious young writer, interviewing George about his work and his life. Her questions flatter George's ego and arouse in him the passion for another life – one that involves falling in love with Claudia and leaving Honor. While Sophie and Claudia view George's choices very differently, they are united in their condemnation of Honor's career sacrifices for love. Once a promising writer herself, Honor has spent 32 years content to define herself by her marriage. As she witnesses Honor reconstructing the very essence of her life, Claudia realises she doesn't love George, she relishes being loved by George. Hearing Claudia's self-interested confidence, Sophie acknowledges that she, too, must create a life independent of her parents. George recognises Claudia symbolises a chance at a second youth. And Honor begins to write again, "with a brutal awareness of what it cost her to give up her own life for the sake of others" Interview with Simi Horwitz,

'Face to Face: Joanna Murray-Smith Probes "Honour" in Marriage', Backstage, May 1998.

“

CLAUDIA: And what if the truth is that we do not know love because we do not know how to deny ourselves anything?

”

Honour
Scene Seventeen

THEMES

Loyalty, honour, justice, family, relationships, marriage, sacrifice, love, independence, betrayal, ambition.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Joanna Murray-Smith is an Australian playwright, screenwriter and novelist, based in Melbourne. Her plays include *Love Child*, *Rapture*, *Redemption*, *Ninety*, *Rockabye*, *Bombshells* (written for performer Caroline O'Connor) and *Scenes from a Marriage*, a stage adaptation of Ingmar Bergman's 1973 film commissioned by UK director Trevor Nunn. Most of Murray-Smith's plays have been produced internationally, and she is widely regarded as one of Australia's leading playwrights. Her most recent play, *The Female of the Species*, created international controversy over its lead feminist character, which Germaine Greer angrily supposed to be based on herself before reading or seeing the play.

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HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

“ JOANNA MURRAY SMITH:
There were scenes in *Honour*
that I literally wrote with one
hand on the keyboard
while I was breastfeeding
with the other. ”

Interview with Jane Sullivan,
'Scenes from a survivor', *The Age*, August, 2008

Joanna Murray-Smith wrote the first version of *Honour* in 1995 when she was studying at Columbia University in New York. The play's first public reading featured Meryl Streep and Sam Waterston and Kyra Sedgwick.

Honour shows traces of Murray-Smith's life. Her experience as a working mother, even at the time of writing *Honour*, inspired the play, and feeds into the character of Honor and her choices: "In the wake of having a child... I began thinking about what it must be like for a woman to nurture

that child, watch it grow, watch her husband grow, professionally, personally, only to discover at the age of 58 that she's been abandoned" Interview with Simi Horwitz, 'Face to Face: Joanna Murray-Smith Probes "Honour" in Marriage', *Backstage*, May 1998.

Murray-Smith met her own husband, Ray Gill, when they collaborated to write a play for a group at university. Her father was Stephen Murray-Smith, an academic and editor of the left-wing literary journal *Overland*, and her parents' relationship was based on intellect and a shared passion for language: "I was very lucky to be raised by people who considered writing to be the most valuable of pursuits and who believed passionately in the ability of language to transform lives, to get to the heart of existence," Interview with Penguin Books, March 2010.

Neither Murray-Smith nor her parents are divorced. She says, "I'm very interested in the idea of love and long-term relationships and the collusion that happens between people in staying together. Allowing each other a certain amount of self-delusion, making a pact to be silent about certain things, seeing in each other things that no one else sees" Interview with Jane Sullivan, 'Scenes from a survivor', *The Age*, August, 2008.

Murray-Smith is aware that the basic story of *Honour* is not unusual: "I was interested in telling a story that has been told a million times before, but telling it in a different way...We rarely hear from a middle-aged woman who has willingly sacrificed her life for marriage and is abandoned at the very point where she should be reaping the rewards of that devotion"

Interview with Claire Armistead, 'Love hurts', *The Guardian*, February 2003.

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AIM: To introduce comparative texts that explore similar themes and issues.

Marriage and Divorce



War of the Roses

www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ebv3i_9Ltc



Kramer Vs Kramer

www.youtube.com/watch?v=35GfPszsq_Y

Marriage breakdown and the effects on children



The Squid & The Whale by Noah Baumbach, based on his parents' marriage break-up.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=IIMv-UqZ4Ds

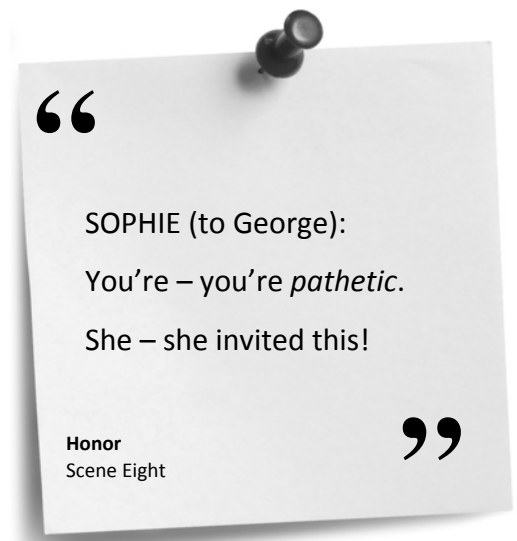
Hamlet by William Shakespeare

Broken trust within families

Lolita book by Vladimir Nabokov

film adaptation by Stanley Kubrick, 1962

American Beauty directed by Sam Mendes, 1999.





AIM: To explore the concepts of honour and loyalty.

Consider the various meanings of the word honour.

Create a thought shower/brainstorm explaining what honour means to you.

Include the characteristics of an honourable person.

Give some examples of how you can demonstrate loyalty.

Add as many kinds of disloyalty as you can think of, and the potential causes of disloyalty.

Look up the dictionary definition of the word and add it to your ideas.

List different situations in which people behave with honour. For example: finding a wallet on a train and deciding whether to hand it in to the authorities.

Think of ways you can inspire loyalty.

“

CLAUDIA: I'm just saying some women use loyalty as a way of justifying their own absence of self.

Honor
Scene Three

”



Write a creative poem, song, short story, dialogue or scene between two/three characters where one person has been disloyal.



Improvise a scene between two characters.

Establish a situation where one character must act with honour, while the other character behaves in a dishonourable way.

Think about how you can convey the nature of these characters without speaking - focus on body language, movement and interaction.

Adapt your scene into the form of a seated conversation between the two characters.

Discuss:

1. Is loyalty just a resistance to change?
2. What do you think Murray-Smith's intention was in naming the play after the character of Honor?



DEBATE: Moral Responsibility Vs Desire

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AIM: To explore the idea of love.



Make a collage on the theme of love OR love gone wrong.



Write or devise a creative response incorporating the line of text,

“Misery is part of what we might all expect of love.”



OR

Fill in the blank, replacing *misery* with another word of your choice, “...is what we/I expect of love.”

Discuss:

1. What is love?
2. How do you show love?
3. What do you expect of those you love? Consider your friends, family, pets.
4. Do you agree that misery is part of what we might all expect of love?

“

HONOR: That’s what love is, actually. A very complex mixture of pain and pleasure –

”

Honor
Scene Three

“

JOANNA MURRAY-SMITH:

I started off thinking that the play is Honor's story but I don't any more... the tragedy is as much his as it is hers.

”

Doing honour to the National stage
Darrin Farrant, London, 2003,
www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/10/27/10246062100031.html

Find excerpts in the text that demonstrate or reveal Honor’s tragedy.

Do the same for George.

Discuss the quote from Joanna Murray-Smith.

1. With which character do your sympathies lie? Why?
2. If you could change one ‘fact’ in the text that would shift your sympathies, what would it be?

For example, would your reaction change if Claudia was the same age as George and Honor?



AIM: To explore how Joanna Murray-Smith conveys character and relationship through conversation.

Read the following excerpts:

Act One, Scene Three

HONOR: He hasn't been easy –

CLAUDIA: Is any man?

HONOR: But then I'm not an easy person, either.

CLAUDIA: You're a writer too.

HONOR: I suppose I still am.

CLAUDIA: You can't retire from being a writer.

HONOR: Perhaps. A toughness. A watchfulness. As Graham Greene said: 'In every writer, a chip of ice'!

CLAUDIA: But you've stayed together?

HONOR: You just have to stick it out through the hard times.

Act One, Scene Four

HONOR: She's a clever thing –

GEORGE: Very focused, for that age, very – I wish Sophie had a bit of her – She's tenacious.

HONOR: And she's beautiful.

GEORGE: Is she?

HONOR: She has something of my early ambition. And she's very bright. Yet she has this-toughness – as if she's afraid of being damaged.

GEORGE: Maybe she has been damaged.

HONOR: As if somehow, she wasn't quite –

GEORGE: Always composing histories – the writer's compulsion.

HONOR: Loved. Maybe she was loved in every identifiable way, ballet lessons, party shoes, good schools, but not-

GEORGE: Can we not - ?



INDIVIDUALLY

Identify the different ways each of the characters is revealed through these snippets of conversation, such as observation, self-analysis, comments, opinions and so on.



Choose three characters and a scenario from your favourite television program.

Create a short two-scene script, featuring conversations between the characters.

Think about how you can construct the conversations to convey to your audience a sense of who these characters are through the things they say about themselves, observations of others, comments and responses.



PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Find excerpts from the text that demonstrate the relationship between Sophie and George and Sophie and Honor.



Compare with Claudia's description of her relationship with her own parents.

Discuss:

1. What does Claudia mean by this statement?
2. Do you agree with her?
3. What do you need from your parents? Why?
4. What are your responsibilities to your parents?
5. What are their responsibilities to you?
6. How might things change in the future?



PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

Discuss:

1. Do you agree or disagree with George's statement?
2. What do you think it reveals about his opinion of Honor?



“

CLAUDIA: You don't own your parents... they don't belong to your needs.

”

Honour
Scene Twelve

“

GEORGE: Journalists are far superior, morally, to writers.

”

Honour
Scene Four

FEMINISM



Read Murray-Smith's candid interview to *The Age* newspaper about her personal life and opinion of critics who view her work as 'anti-feminist'.



Debate: *Honour* is anti-feminist.

Give examples from the text to support your argument.



SELF-DECEPTION

Write a paragraph describing who you would like to be. You can use a celebrity, family member or friend as inspiration.



Discuss:

1. Do you ever wish you were someone else?
2. What is about this person that you admire?
3. What do you see as the differences between yourself and who you'd like to be?
4. Are there realistic steps you could take to become more like the person you want to be?
5. What are the differences between Sophie and Claudia?
6. What are the similarities?
7. Why do you think Sophie wants to be more like Claudia?
8. Do you think she ever will be?

“ SOPHIE: You're so – you're so clear. You seem so clear about things. Whereas I'm – I'm so – I can never quite say what I'm – Even to myself, I'm so inarticulate. ”

Honour, Scene Twelve



AIM: To increase an understanding of the play's commentary on marriage and relationships.

DIVORCE



Research marriage and divorce rates over the past 100 years in Australia.



Compare and contrast the figures.

Note any surprises.

Report back to the group on your findings.

Brainstorm the external or societal forces that may have had an impact on marriages at various times throughout your research.

“

CLAUDIA: Actually, an exploitative relationship is in many ways the most dependable relationship.

”

Honour
Act One, Scene One



CELEBRITY MARRIAGE

Find images of celebrity couple relationships in the media, in various stages of 'togetherness'.

For example: Princess Diana and Prince Charles

Lara Bingle and Michael Clarke

Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt

Kevin Rudd and Therese Rein



Discuss:

1. How are the couple portrayed in the images?
2. Do you think the portrayal is accurate or justified?
3. How does your opinion of an individual change when you see them as part of a couple?
4. How do relationships change over time?
5. What are some of the reasons for these changes?
6. How have significant relationships in your own life (with friends, family members) changed over time? Why?



CHANGE

Choose a significant person in your life to do a biographical image study.

Find 3-5 images of the person that show different periods of their life.



Compare the images.

Consider:

1. What do the images reveal about how the person has changed? Consider their physical appearance, personality and mood at the time.
2. Why have they changed?
3. What are their hopes and dreams?



BROKEN TRUST

Explore the themes of infidelity and broken trust in *Honour* by writing a scene or story entitled 'Broken Trust'.



INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

There are many examples of journalists and writers who fall in love with their interview subjects. Some famous couples who met in this way were Paul McCartney and his late wife

Linda McCartney, Clint Eastwood and Dina Ruiz, former Prime Minister Bob Hawke and Blanche d'Alpuget. Can you think of any others?



Research a relationship that started through an interview.

Many writers use the interview as a dramatic device to introduce and explore character relationships. The films *Notting Hill* and *Crazy Heart* are recent examples of an interview that leads to romance between the characters, just as in *Honour*.

Write or devise an interview scene where two characters meet.

Explore different kinds of relationships and different outcomes based on the themes explored in *Honour* - loyalty, justice and broken trust.



Write or devise a scene that demonstrates or refutes this statement:

An interview comes down to secrets.

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