

In Reasonable Doubt, the identities, perspectives, and experiences of hundreds of interviewees are expressed through the words of approximately 60 speakers in the script.

“These weren’t characters; they were our community, and we wanted all of them to feel welcome and honoured.” Yvette Nolan, Reasonable Doubt, Dramaturge

In the first performances of the play at Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon, the words of these 60 speakers were channeled through the voices and bodies of 6 actors. Four were Indigenous, one was Philippino, and another was white.

Dramaturge Yvette Nolan explains how the ensemble members were chosen:

We needed Indigenous voices; we needed men and women; we needed a young person; from young people to mature people, people of different sizes – it was important that everybody could see themselves on the stage and that we had all the voices in the room.

As you can see in this photo & in this video clip <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkwRRhJLnBM&feature=youtu.be> throughout the 2 act play, the name, age, and race of each speaker was projected onto a screen whenever an actor channeled a new voice.

Often, the visible identities of the actors and the voices they channeled were mismatched. For example, in the picture, an Indigenous woman channels the voice and plays the role of a white male judge. In Act 2, Metis actor, Colin Wolfe, spoke the words of white farmer Gerald Stanley. Casting decisions thus created a sustained and intriguing sense dissonance for actors and audience alike.



As you read the play with your students – in whole or in part(s) -- they too will channel the voices of fellow citizens who are like and unlike them, in age, gender, race, experiences, and belief systems. They will thus see, hear, feel, imagine, and remember through many I's/eyes.

A NOTE ABOUT READING THE PLAY ALOUD

The interviews were carefully transcribed to be as faithful to the spoken word as possible – in its pace, emphases, & rhythms. The script uses punctuation to cue pace, emphases, rhythm, and tone in the actors’ delivery of the lines.

Lancelot Knight compares the challenges of channeling people’s varied, natural rhythms of speech to playing a cover song. Reflecting on the sometimes exhausting task of speaking others’ truths, Lancelot explained that “you had to remain an avatar for the words being said because this is exactly what the play is for.”

‘Getting it right’ mattered a great deal in the debut performances of the play at Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon, as the interviewees were often in the audience. Joel, who personally interacted with each interviewee, watched as the actors “emotionally, vocally, and personally became the person” in rehearsal and in performance. As students read the play, model and practice paying minute attention to the “verbal deliciousness” in all of the speakers’ thoughts.

**“Find the truth
of this person.”**

- Yvette Nolan

You’ll see ‘ums’ and stutters indicated in the script. If you were a linguist, you would describe these as “speech disfluencies” but verbatim theatre playwright Oonagh Duncan calls them “verbal deliciousness” because of the way they reveal information about the speaker and their emotions. Pay special attention to these details in the script and explore them as opportunities to ask questions such as, “Why did that person stutter there?”

Given the variety in language use and speech patterns in the play, it is fruitful to explicitly attend to students’ and teachers’ biases in favor of ‘Standard’ English and assumptions about grammatical ‘correctness’ – a colonial legacy that remains alive and well. Learning about registers of language, diverse Englishes, and writing the oral (or, as Susan Gingell describes it – ‘lips’ inking’!) can enhance students’ appreciation of this verbatim theatre script and the idiolects of its speakers.

