

The Story of **REASONABLE DOUBT**, The Teacher Guide

The Story of the Reasonable Doubt Teacher Guide Starting in 2018, secondary educators, Sherry Van Hesteren and Dillon Person, collaborated on justice-oriented, interdisciplinary inquiries focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. When Reasonable Doubt premiered at Persephone Theatre in Saskatoon from January 29-February 12, 2020, Dillon and Sherry had the opportunity to attend a live performance with their students. Neither they nor their students had ever experienced anything quite like it.

Shortly afterwards, in early March, 2020, educators Tracy Laverty and Sherry Van Hesteren invited the creators of Reasonable Doubt to be the keynote speakers for the Third Annual Truth and Reconciliation Speaker Series in their school division. The team accepted. However, within weeks, Covid had swiftly shut everything down.

In the summer of 2020, Sherry learned that the script of the play was available through Canadian Play Outlet. She ordered it, read it, and reached out to Dillon to see if he would check it out. As Sherry and Dillon spent time with the script, they became keenly interested in sharing it with their students. They wondered if fellow educators would be interested too and imagined the differences it might make if large numbers of high school seniors in the province had the opportunity to study the play.

They knew that educators and school divisions in the province, increasingly invested in and committed to anti-racist pedagogy and to responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, would be interested in teaching the play. Their questions wouldn't be "What?" and "Why?", but "How?" How do we teach this play in a way that honors the knowledges it contains and provides conditions of engagement, cultural safety, and robust learning for students?

To address this question/barrier, they met with Joel Bernbaum in September, 2020 to discuss the possibility of collaboratively developing a teacher guide for the play. This endeavor would respond to the TRC's Call to Action #63:

We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
- ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
- iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above

Joel embraced the idea and consulted with his co-playwrights, actor and composer, Lancelot Knight, and dramaturge, Yvette Nolan, who were also very interested. We then met with David Arnot, Chief Commissioner of the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission and David Fisher, Executive Director of the Concentus Citizenship Education Foundation, who both offered enthusiastic support for the project. And thus the collaborations began.

In an interview, Yvette stated, “I think that education should be more holistic than it is, because, in the end, it’s all connected.” Sensing that the play could provide a powerful context for meeting curricular outcomes in ELA, Drama, and History, we wondered if we could create a teacher guide that teachers of all of these subjects would find useful, both for single-subject and interdisciplinary learning.

The playwrights affirmed the inclusion of this play in a history class. Nolan explains:

In Indigenous worldview and Indigenous practice, we’ve always kept our histories in our stories, in our songs, in our dances. We’ve always kept our laws, our learnings, our teachings, and our taboos inside of our stories. For me, there is less delineation between ‘history’ and theatre . . . I believe in theatre as a place to make sense of the world. I learn as much about the history of a place from the culture and the stories that are kept in the art.

With this ‘weave’ of subjects in mind, Sherry and Dillon began to work on teacher support materials for ELA30 and Drama 20/30 respectively, which they then piloted with their own students with the support of their principal, Mr. Rick Iverson. Students’ responses to the play and the approaches to teaching and learning were very positive. Diverse artifacts of student thinking revealed students’ authentic engagement, academic achievement, and personal growth as citizens.

To bring the faces, voices, and wisdom of the play’s creative team to students and teachers, we approached Damien Kent and Megan Kent, of Little Ox Film Company, to see if they would help us to film and produce interviews with the playwrights. They agreed.



Three incredible hours of interviewing at Saskatoon’s Refinery Theatre followed, resulting in a set of videos intended to enhance teaching & learning throughout the play by sharing the playwrights’ First Nations, Metis, and settler perspectives.

In the months that followed, Dillon and Sherry collaborated with trusted colleague Tracy Laverty to develop the materials in the guide. Laverty shared her perspective as a Metis woman and educator and applied her strengths in two-eyed seeing, trauma-informed practice, and social sciences curricula.

The consultant team then shared a working draft of the guide with the Joel, Lancelot, and Yvette to invite and respond to their feedback. We will continue to consult and collaborate.

All the while, the Concentus creative team, led by Ben Lamothe, took samples of works-in-progress and worked their magic to render them artfully and elegantly on the Concentus site for your use.



It is now summer, 2021. We are hoping to share the guide on the Concentus site in the fall. We are looking forward to engaging in the play with more of our own students and colleagues in the year ahead and to supporting and learning from others who opt to pilot it – including you!

We offer this guide with humility and excitement, in the hope that it will animate learning that is healing and transformative for individuals and communities.

With gratitude, Dillon, Sherry, & Tracy

