



NATIONAL ARTS CENTRE
CENTRE NATIONAL DES ARTS
Canada is our stage. Le Canada en scène.

I Am For You

by Mieko Ouchi



Study Guide

adapted from the version created for Concrete Theatre, Edmonton

written by Karen Goerzen

with contributions from Mary-Ellen Perley

Table of Contents

Section 1: About the Play

Dear Teachers	3
Notes from the Playwright	4
Characters & Play Overview	5
Thematic Quotes and General Themes	6
Background Information	7

Section 2: Teaching Resources and Exercises

Discussion Questions	8
Classroom Exercises and Activities	9
Teaching Resource Materials	14

Section 3: Theatre Resources

The Company	15
Preparing your Students for a Live Theatre Performance	16
Glossary	18

Section 1: About the Play

Dear Teachers:

Sometimes we have to drag our students kicking and screaming towards Shakespeare. A bit like bath time... 'you can't get 'em in and then (if we do it right) you can't get 'em out'. This was my experience. I had no use for Shakespeare until I found myself backstage pulling the tree up and down in '*As You Like It*'. The play miraculously improved as I watched. Mieko Ouchi has taken lines from *Romeo and Juliet* and brought them to life. By allowing understanding of the lines to come slowly to these utterly relatable girls, the audience is drawn into both texts right along with them. At the top of the show, Lainie is sick and tired of Mariam's snide looks... of always being made to feel like an outsider. And Mariam is just as tired of Lainie's tough girl act. Both decide here and now, in the drama room, IT GETS SETTLED. And they get caught. Rather than the expected expulsion, the drama teacher decides to use the discipline involved in stage fighting to try to get through to them. Both Mieko Ouchi and Shakespeare use violence to argue for ending it. Violence begets violence.

The purpose of this guide is to provide materials to make viewing more meaningful and create multiple opportunities to facilitate learning. The subject matter may evoke strong feelings amongst your students, so it is important to create a safe and respectful space for discussion. Remind your students that there is no place for hateful comments or personal attacks. Also, feel free to adapt the ideas and activities to suit the needs and levels of your students. Enjoy!

- Karen Goerzen

Notes from the Playwright - Mieko Ouchi

I Am For You grew out of a production of *Romeo and Juliet* in which I performed a few years ago at the University of Alberta for an MFA Directing student. Revisiting Lady Capulet (whom I played professionally in the mid 1990s) was a wonderful experience... although a few things did strike me as an older and perhaps more observant woman. Each night as we warmed up and prepared for the show, when the fight call was on and all the combat sequences run, it was interesting to note that all the men in the play were on stage fighting and all the women were standing in the shadows watching... the great gender divide. That same year, I had the pleasure of teaching acting at Artstrek, the 50+ year old residential drama camp for Alberta Youth. The play we worked on, completely coincidentally, was again *Romeo and Juliet*. Seeing young people's incredible engagement with the characters, the themes and the lessons of that play resonated for me, and I began to wonder about a play that might bring some of these ideas and observations together. Watching the stage combat masterclass which two of my colleagues were teaching to a group of rapt teens was the clincher. I had my story. I had my age group. I had my title.

This play would not be here without the support of many artists and organizations. First, thanks to Concrete Theatre for supporting this script from the very beginning, to Alberta Theatre Projects and the Enbridge Award for an Established Canadian Playwright, which financed my first draft, to Brian Quirt and the Banff Playwrights Colony who gave me space to write and actors to read (Sheldon Elter, Kris Joseph, Richard Lee, Monice Peter and Pamela Sinha), to Len Falkenstein and the Notable Acts Theatre Festival in Fredericton who gave me a workshop and public reading (Stephanie Doucette, Kelsey Hines and Caleb Marshall), and finally to friend and fight consultant J.P. Fournier, who has cheered me on and helped me with the stage combat content. As *my* former fight teacher, I know very well his ability to ignite a flame in his students about stage combat. Something I hope to pass on. Many thanks to his acting students at both Mount Royal University and the University of Alberta for their generous help and support as I developed the script.

I hope you enjoy the play!

- Mieko Ouchi

Characters

Lainie - 17, a fighter

Suspicious of those who 'have it easy,' Lainie opens this play in the middle of a brawl with Mariam.

Mariam - 17, a fencer

Mariam has had it with Lainie's aggression. She is not going to be pushed around by anyone and has decided to stand up for herself.

Both girls have assumed knowledge of the other's motivation. Both 'know' that the other is judging them harshly.

Caddell Morris - 27, a student teacher, Voice of Benvolio, Voice of Lord Capulet

It's Caddell's first day of student teaching. As a former professional actor, he has made the decision to become a teacher. He wants to make a difference and is hoping that his experience in stage fighting will give him a platform to do just that. The play begins with his first chance to work with 'real kids'. He walks into Lainie and Mariam's brawl.

Play Overview

MERCUTIO

Tybalt, you rat-catcher, will you walk?

TYBALT

What wouldst thou have with me?

MERCUTIO

Good king of cats, nothing but one of your nine lives... Will you pluck your sword out of his pitcher by the ears? Make haste, lest mine be about your ears ere it be out.

TYBALT

I am for you.

from *Romeo and Juliet*, Act III, Scene 1

Fighting words... and so begins *I Am For You*.

At first glance, Lainie and Mariam look like any two girls in any high school across Canada. But when they get into a violent physical fight in their drama room, Mr. Morris, an ex-professional actor and newly minted student teacher, takes them on as a special project, helping them understand more about the roots of violence and the cost of violent acts through the art of stage combat.

As he gets to know the girls and sees their blossoming interest and commitment to learning how to "fight", he goes to bat for them with the drama teacher, and ultimately convinces her to cast the girls as Mercutio and Tybalt in their school production of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Swords, words and egos come to blows as all three battle through their demons and issues. Can they find a way to work together? And will they find another meaning to Tybalt's fighting words... I am for you.

Thematic Quotes

“In time we hate that which we often fear.”

— William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*

“Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another: “What! You too? I thought I was the only one.”

— C.S. Lewis

“Let no man pull you so low as to hate him.”

— Martin Luther King Jr., *A Knock at Midnight: Inspiration from the Great Sermons of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.*

“Try to understand men. If you understand each other you will be kind to each other. Knowing a man will never lead to hate and almost always leads to love.”

— John Steinbeck

“Hate, it has caused a lot of problems in the world, but has not solved one yet.”

— Maya Angelou

“Hatred would have been easier. With hatred, I would have known what to do. Hatred is clear, metallic, one-handed, unwavering; unlike love.”

— Margaret Atwood, *Cat's Eye*

General Themes

Hatred poisons.

Hate is often founded on ignorance.

Violence is too easy - use your words.

Background Information

Woven throughout *I Am For You* is William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, a play that is produced over and over because its themes are just as relevant today as in Shakespeare's time. While it is known as one of literature's greatest love stories, if one looks closely at *Romeo and Juliet* it appears to be more about hatred's poison, and the ripples of pain violence causes, than it is about love. The love is destroyed, but just like after a raging fire, new growth is possible.

Both plays begin in violence, but while Shakespeare ends with a warning about the consequences of violence, Mieko Ouchi's *I Am For You* gives us a way out. It is about mending that hatred by working together.

In *I Am For You*, stage fighting figures prominently in the play, and is used to explore violence in several different ways and from several different perspectives. In some ways *I Am For You* is also akin to a documentary on different types of stage fighting ...with safety information liberally sprinkled in.

With this in mind, we are offering student workshops to further understanding of stage fighting and stage combat:

- **Stage Combat Workshops for Students:** Love to see your students experience the power of learning about combat hands on? Contact us to find out more about our Stage Combat workshops for your students. These workshops are appropriate for students in grades 7 and up. The class explores the basics of hand to hand unarmed combat, in a safe and fun environment.

Length:	1 hour
Requirements:	Large open space like a drama room or a gym
Number of students:	maximum of 30 students
Cost:	\$150.00 + HST plus transportation levy depending on distance travelled

**For more information or to book a workshop,
please contact Judi Pearl at (613) 947-7000 x537
or judi.pearl@nac-cna.ca**

Section 2: Teaching Resources & Exercises

Discussion Questions

Before the Play

Who does violence hurt?

Can you think of an instance where someone's opinions might be changed through violence?

After the Play

Why are Lainie and Mariam fighting at the top of the play?

Why is Lainie afraid to go to the office?

In what ways are Lainie and Mariam similar?

In what ways are they different?

What is the playwright suggesting to the actors when she describes the characters as “fighter” and “fencer” in the character listing at the beginning of the script?

Both girls are on edge when the play begins. Why?

Mariam says, “Something breaks inside,” and Lainie says, “And something snaps.” What do they mean? Have you ever felt like this?

Why do Mariam and Lainie agree to come to work with Caddell?

Why does Caddell say that teaching is a *privilege*?

Do the girls become friends? Why or why not?

Given the differences between the girls, what might have happened had Caddell not intervened?

Why does Caddell play the voice of Benvolio and Lord Capulet? Think beyond the obvious. What are the similarities and differences between Caddell and each of these characters?

By the end of the play, both girls have learned something. What is it?

Win-win is a type of conflict resolution. What does this mean?

Empathy is incompatible with violence. What is meant by this statement?

Is conflict bad?

Have any of your ideas been challenged by this play?

What do you think happens next?

Classroom Exercises and Activities

Here are a series of activities and ideas to spark discussion and learning. Some activities are active, some visual, others reflective and text-based. These can be used to further expand the learning before and after students attend *I Am For You*.

OPEN ENDINGS

- Get students into groups of 3 or 4.
- Give students 5 minutes to agree on a scenario (in their world) which might typically end in violence.
- As a group create or write an alternative ending.
- Discuss.

Extension: Groups could write/create/act out endings for another group's scenario.

MOVING WORDS

*Rebellious subjects, enemies to peace,
Profaners of this neighbour-stained steel,--
Will they not hear? What, ho! you men, you beasts,
That quench the fire of your pernicious rage
With purple fountains issuing from your veins,
On pain of torture, from those bloody hands
Throw your mistemper'd weapons to the ground,
And hear the sentence of your moved prince.*

This text is explored in the play by Caddell, Lainie and Mariam.

- Break class into 8 small groups.
- Each group creates a tableau for a line from the text. (The first group takes the first line and so on.)
- The tableaux are then presented in order while another student or teacher slowly reads the lines.

Extension: Perform again, this time adding music.

IMAGE SCULPTURES

- Class is divided into groups again.
- Every group is given the same line from *Romeo and Juliet* (see the list of lines below) and 20 seconds to create a sculpture - a response to one of the following lines – on their feet. For this exercise, speed is important. Instructions might be: ‘You do not have enough time so just try something.’

A challenge, on my life.

Romeo will answer it.

Any man that can write may answer a letter.

***Alas poor Romeo! he is already dead; stabbed with a
white wench's black eye...***

... is he a man to encounter Tybalt?

- Each group freezes their sculpture. Ask students to remain frozen and move their eyes only to peek at the creations of the other groups.
- Take 20 seconds to discuss, and try it again. This can be called body storming. It is a fun and easy way to generate ideas for writing, discussion, or for further development.

Extension: as a group, write/discuss a modern equivalent.

EMOTIONAL COLLAGE

- Ask students to choose one of the following to focus on:
 - two images - one from the beginning of the play, the other from the end
 - one of the characters
 - a theme... e.g. conflict resolution
- Have students create an emotional collage using one of these two techniques:
 - Using cuttings from magazines combined with paint/ pencil on paper
 - Placing and putting together items in a box as symbols

SLOW MOTION FIGHT

- Put students in pairs.
- Each pair creates three tableaux (still images) that represent the beginning, middle and end of a fight.
- Then in amazing slow motion have the students connect the tableaux. To be safe **the fight must be in slow motion** (30% of regular speed), never touch and be silent! It is impossible to get carried away and be quiet! Not only is it safe... but it is also wonderful to watch.

Extension: Ask the students to use slow motion vocals.

Extension 2: Add music (movie themes or soundtrack music works well).

BODY BIOS

- Get students into groups of 4 or 5.
- Have each group create life-size body shapes by having one student lie on a sheet of paper and another student draw the outline of the body.
- Cut out body shape or not. (If you keep the 'frame' of the paper then this becomes extra space to use for quotes from the play or from other sources to reflect themes associated with the character.)
- Use the shape to create the character from the play. There is more than one way to do this.
 - Each character gets a complete body shape and the character's personality is created on the 'body'.
 - One group can do the character at the beginning of the play and another group can do the character at the end of the play.
 - OR The body bio can have a line drawn down the middle and one side will be the character at the beginning of the play and the other side can be the character at the end of the play. This allows us to see the progression of the character.
- Students should be encouraged to think about how they 'represent' the information about the character: colour of words, shape of words, placement of words, size of words/phrases. They can use lines from the play, stage directions that relate to the character, or thematic quotes.
- Each group presents their character to the class and explains why they chose the words, colours, shapes, placements, quotes, etc.

DIARY ENTRIES

- On their own, ask students to write diary entries of 1-2 paragraphs for each character for the following times:
 - Day before the play begins
 - Night after the initial fight
 - Night after the Saturday 'detention'
 - Night after being told they are in the play
 - Night before opening night
 - 3 weeks after the play
- These diary entries could be shared if students desire.

BACK STORY

- Break students into small groups.
- Ask students to write and present a brief scene (one minute max) for each of the characters before they arrive at the drama room at the beginning of the play. This could be at morning breakfast, preparing for a first day of student teaching or talking with friends outside school. We want to know what happened to these people before the moment when the play begins.
- Discuss how a person's life before the moment the play begins can affect what the character brings into the room.

FUTURE STORY

- Break students into small groups.
- Ask students to write and present a brief scene (one minute max) 10 – 20 years into the future. Where are these characters? What are they doing? Have them meet up somewhere... perhaps at a school reunion? Or in a public place... a theatre lobby? On a bus? At an airport?
- Discuss. How have they changed? How do they look back on the events and what happened to them during the play? Did their experience working with each other and learning about stage combat affect them later as adults? What did they learn from each other?

REWRITING HISTORY

- In groups or individually, have students rewrite Act III Scene 1 of *Romeo and Juliet* in point form, without Tybalt and Mercutio fighting, or Romeo killing Tybalt. Have Benvolio act as mediator with the help of Romeo.

MASKS

- Break students into small groups.
- Ask each group to create masks for Lainie, Mariam and Caddell and for Tybalt, Mercutio and Benvolio or Lord Capulet. Consider colour, texture, words, shape. Is the mask human, abstract or animal?
- View and discuss choices made.

BRIEF ESSAY

- Working individually, ask students to take one of the suggested thematic quotes from p. 6 of this guide and relate it to another piece of literature (short story, novel, play, movie or TV show). Compare *I Am For You*, your literature and the thematic quote. Draw parallels and consider differences and the effectiveness of the two pieces of literature in illuminating the thematic quote.

Teaching Resource Materials

WEB EXTENSIONS

Conflict Resolution

http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_81.htm

<http://www.all-things-conflict-resolution-and-adr.com/>

<http://openmedia.ca/member-organization/conflict-resolution-network-canada>

Conflict Poems

<http://www.poetrysoup.com/poems/conflict>

Stage Combat

Fight Directors Canada <http://www.fdc.ca>

Books

Starcrossed by Mark Schreiber

Romiette and Julio by Sharon M. Draper

Music

Sweet Honey in the Rock- *Colours, Woman Should Be, The Battle of the 'Sit Ins'*

Bruce Cockburn - *Lovers In a Dangerous Time*

Dire Straits – *Romeo and Juliet*

Movies/Plays/Operas/Ballets

West Side Story

Romeo and Juliet

- There are several filmed versions of Shakespeare's play (e.g. Fellini, Luhrmann) available on DVD
- There are two operas by Bellini and Gounod
- There are two ballets by Prokofiev and Tchaikovsky

Section 3: Theatre Resources

The Company

Playwright: Mieko Ouchi
Director: Bruce Dow
Fight Choreography: John Koensgen

The Cast: Janelle Cooper
Lucinda Davis
Tristan D. Lalla

Stage Manager: Erin Finn

About the Playwright

Actor, writer, director and filmmaker, **Mieko Ouchi** received her professional training through the University of Alberta BFA Acting Program. Theatre work includes roles in plays at the Citadel Theatre, Workshop West Theatre, Northern Light Theatre, Concrete Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, Lunchbox Theatre, Persephone Theatre, Prairie Theatre Exchange, The Globe Theatre, Tarragon Theatre and the National Arts Centre. Mieko's first full-length play as a playwright *The Red Priest (Eight Ways To Say Goodbye)* was a finalist for both the Governor General's Award for Drama and won the Canadian Authors Association Carol Bolt Prize for Drama in 2005. Her second play *The Blue Light* has enjoyed productions across the country and has been translated into French, Japanese and Russian. A Co-Founder and current Artistic Co-Director of Concrete Theatre, Mieko has directed award-winning productions of *Smokescreen, Under Cover, Routes, Apples and Oranges, Nami Namersson, The Viking Who Liked To Name Things, The Incredible Adventures of Mary Jane Mosquito, Are We There Yet?, The Plum Tree* and *Naomi's Road* for Concrete Theatre. In 2003, Mieko received the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal for her contribution to the arts community in the City of Edmonton.

About the Authors of this Study Guide

Karen Goerzen has taught senior high school Drama and Technical Theatre with the Calgary Board of Education for thirty years. Teaching at Theatre Alberta's Artstrek and writing curriculum rounded out those years. Taking early retirement has opened up a world of opportunity. In the last few years, Karen has designed lighting, directed, adjudicated and taught for Red Deer College, Theatre Alberta, CBE and CARFAC, and led workshops in directing, acting, Shakespeare, movement for director, lighting design, hanging lights and stage fighting.

Mary-Ellen Perley, B.ED, B.A, M.ED has over thirty years of teaching experience at the Junior High and Senior High School levels and is the recipient of the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. In her teaching career, Mary-Ellen has taught Drama, Language Arts and Ancient Civilizations at the 7, 8 and 9 grade levels. At the high school level she has taught English 10, 20 and 30 and English IB as well as Creative Writing. Mary-Ellen is now retired from the classroom and has gone back to her first love. She is active in the theatre community as an actress, director, stage and video writer and stage manager.

Preparing Your Students for a Live Theatre Experience



Before the Performance

Some students have never attended a live theatrical performance before, and may need some guidance as to what standards of behaviour apply and how best to enjoy the experience. Others may simply need a quick refresher.

The important point to emphasize is that when they are watching the play they are in a partnership. They contribute as much to the overall enjoyment and power of the performance as the performers do. The performers appreciate audience response. Laughter, sighs, thoughtful silence, listening, and applause all let us know we're reaching you. The unspoken back-and-forth communication of thought and feeling is what theatre is all about.

In-class preparation is very important!

Ask any actor and they will tell you: if the students are thinking about the issues when they walk into the performance space, they are the most intelligent, responsive, engaged audience a performer can wish for. By talking about the play beforehand and asking them some key questions to watch for, you can help prepare your students to take away the most benefit from what the play has to offer.

In the Performance Space



Some things to remind the students:

Please respect the performance space and equipment. That means not walking behind the set where the actors may be preparing. Do not touch or move cables, projectors and speaker equipment which may be delicate or finely adjusted for the performance.

Sound carries. Speaking aloud to friends during the performance is not only disturbing for the other audience members, it distracts the performers. They can see and hear you from the stage. They really rely on your focus, attention and respect to do what they do best.

There is no photography or recording permitted during the performance.

This is because of our agreements with our unions.

No use of cell phones, pagers, music players and headphones (iPods, MP3 players) allowed during the performance. Please remember to ask students to turn off watch alarms as well. You can imagine why!

Texting during a performance is absolutely not allowed. This one is so important that we've given it its own paragraph. Texting is extremely distracting for both the students and the performers. We ask that teachers supervising the performance also refrain from texting. Thanks so much for your help on this one!



Post Performance Wrap-up:

Like a good meal, theatre should be digested. Create a time and a comfortable environment to review the production with your class. Follow up on the issues raised in the pre-show discussion. Take advantage of the activities and discussion points suggested in the study guide and feel free to use them as a jumping off point to create your own customized follow-up.

We'd Love to Hear From You:

We love to get feedback from both the students and yourselves. We encourage you to send us the results of your post show discussions or activities and invite you and your students to share their thoughts about the play and the experience of bringing your students to the NAC.

Please send any feedback, questions or comments about the performance or about this guide to Judi Pearl, Artistic Projects Coordinator, English Theatre:

judi.pearl@nac-cna.ca

613-947-7000 x537

**National Arts Centre
53 Elgin Street
PO Box 1534, Station B
Ottawa, ON K1P 5W1**

Glossary

- Advance:** Footwork carrying the body forward. The opposite of Retreat.
- Arrête:** “Stop” in French. A term used to stop a fight.
- Beat:** A sharp tap with the middle part of one's blade against the middle of the opponent's blade.
- Blunted:** A weapon that has been purposely made safe by dulling the edge or tip, or that has a button on the tip, for stage combat or for practice.
- Break a Leg:** A traditional theatre saying meaning “good luck”.
- Cue:** A checkpoint in a fight to assure mutual awareness and readiness to perform the techniques.
- Cut:** A stroke, blow or attack made with the edge of a blade.
- Draw:** A term that means unsheathing your sword.
- Distance:** The proper measure between two or more combatants to safely execute any particular technique in stage combat.
- Dry Fencing:** Fencing without electronic targets or charged foils. ‘Dry’ weapons have plastic or rubber buttons on the tips.
- En Garde:** A term in fencing adopted from the French warning "On [your] guard". The basic physical "ready" position of a combatant.
- Envelopment:** A checking action made on the opponent's hand, arm or leg, executed by blocking the attack and then by describing a circle with both arms in contact, bringing the opponent's arm back to the placement where the check began.
- Eye Contact:** A "cue" or "check point" in a fight that has the combatants frequently look in their partner's eyes to assure mutual awareness and readiness to perform the techniques.
- Fencing:** Fencing is the sport of fighting with swords. The most common version of fencing today, also called Olympic fencing or competitive fencing, is divided into three weapon categories: foil, sabre and épée. Classical fencing uses the same three weapons, but approaches fencing as a martial art.
- Foil:** A fencing weapon with a rectangular cross-section blade and a small bell guard. More generally, any sword that has been buttoned or had its point turned back to render it less dangerous for practice.
- French Handle:** Sometimes called a French Grip. A traditional hilt with a slightly curved grip and a large pommel.
- Grip:** The handle of a weapon.

- Hair Pull:** A grasp with one or both hands in which the victim's hair appears to be clasped in the fist and aggressive force is applied.
- Knap:** A technique for creating the sound of impact to help heighten the illusion that contact has been made.
- Mask:** The safety helmet worn by fencers that protects the face.
- Measure:** Correct distance between combatants when performing stage swordplay. A distance of six to ten inches from one's opponent at full extension after executing any offensive footwork.
- Parry:** A defensive action (made by a sword, dagger, shield or hand) which blocks or deflects an attack.
- Partnering:** The process in which two or more combatants actively work together to safely and effectively make nonviolent actions appear dangerous and real.
- Pistol Grip:** A modern, orthopedic grip, often shaped vaguely like a small pistol.
- Places:** Also known as Places Call. A call given by the Stage Manager, asking actors to get into position backstage, ready for the start of the play.
- Punch:** Offensive striking techniques with the hand(s) that are executed with the hand closed into a fist.
- Retreat:** Footwork carrying the body backwards. The opposite of Advance.
- Sabre:** A fencing weapon with a flat blade and knuckle guard, used with cutting or thrusting actions. A military sword popular in the 18th to 20th centuries.
- Salute:** A gesture of respect and civility performed with the weapon. Performed at the start and end of a bout, and also at the start and end of a lesson.
- Sightline:** A sightline is the unobstructed line-of-sight between a spectator and the stage. What the audience can see.
- Slap:** A blow delivered with an open hand, usually (but not exclusively) made to the face.
- Target:** The area designated for valid hits.
- Thrust:** An attack made with the point of the weapon.
- Unarmed:** Stage combat that does not use weapons. Also known as hand-to-hand.

National Youth and Education Trust

The National Youth and Education Trust is the primary resource for youth and education funding at the National Arts Centre.

Through the Trust, individual and corporate donors from all across the country help the NAC nurture and develop the creativity of young people in all regions across Canada and support the educators and artists who challenge and encourage them.

Lead Partner



Student Matinees at the National Arts Centre are made possible in part by an Anonymous Donor and



STRONGER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER™
