FLYNN CENTER PRESENTS

TRIBES

By Nina Raine

STUDY GUIDE
Welcome to the 2015-2016 Student Matinee Season!

Today’s scholars and researchers say creativity is the top skill our kids will need when they enter the work force of the future, so we salute YOU for valuing the educational and inspirational power of live performance. By using this study guide you are taking an even greater step toward implementing the arts as a vital and inspiring educational tool.

We hope you find this guide useful. If you have any suggestions for content or format of this guide, please contact sms@flynncenter.org.

Enjoy the show! -Education Staff

The arts are an essential element of education, just like reading, writing, and arithmetic...music, dance, painting, and theater are all keys that unlock profound human understanding and accomplishment.

-William Bennett

It is the supreme art of the teacher to AWAKEN JOY in creative expression and knowledge.

We appreciate and value your feedback.

- Click here for to evaluate our study guides.
- Click here for Teacher Feedback Forms for the performance.
- Click here for Student Feedback Forms for the performance.
- Click here for Parent Forms to help parents engage with their children around the show.

This guide was written & compiled by the Education Department at the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts with inspiration from the Guthrie Theatre Play Guide, the Canadian Stage Guide, and the Center Theatre Guide.

Permission is granted for teachers, parents, and students who are coming to Flynn shows to copy & distribute this guide for educational purposes only.
The Performance & the Story
- The Production
- Things to Think About Before During/After you see the show
- The Company: Vermont Stage Company

Themes to Explore
- Tribes/Communities: how we connect to others
- Communication: how language impacts our tribes
- Questions to Explore the Themes

Characters & Dialogue
- The Characters
- Important Quotes from the Play

Context & History
- Nina Raine on *Tribes*
- Reflections on Language and the Deaf Community

Activities to Deepen Understanding
- Exploring Character
- Layers of Communications
- Between Two Worlds

Bring the Art Form to Life
- Art Form: Theater
- *Words Come Alive* Activities:
  - Moving Through Space & Tableaux

Your Visit
- The Flynn Center
- Etiquette for Live Performance
- Why is Etiquette Important?

**This performance contains mature language and references to sexual acts.**

Common Core Standards
The Common Core broadens the definition of a “text,” viewing performance as a form of text, so your students are experiencing and interacting with a text when they attend a Flynn show.

Seeing live performance provides rich opportunities to write reflections, narratives, arguments, and more. By writing responses and/or using the Flynn Study Guides, all performances can be linked to Common Core:

CC ELA: W 1-10

You can use this performance and study guide to address the following Common Core Standards (additional standards listed by specific activities):

CC ELA: SL1,2,5, RL3&7, RH1-10, WHST7-9, L5

An Immense Thank You!
The Flynn Center recognizes that field trip resources for schools are extremely limited, thus matinee prices for schools are significantly lower than prices for public performances. As a non-profit organization, the Flynn is deeply grateful to the foundations, corporations, and individuals whose generous financial support keeps matinees affordable for schools.

This performance is generously sponsored by Ducky Donath.


Additional support from the Bruce J. Anderson Foundation, Green Mountain Fund, Walter Cerf Community Fund, the Vermont Arts Council, the Susan Quinn Memorial Fund, and the Ronald McDonald House Charities.
The Production

Billy’s proudly unconventional family shows affection by lobbing barbed witticisms back and forth in a never ending match of wills. But Billy, who is Deaf, has never been able to fully participate in their game. When he meets a young woman who teaches him how to sign, he finally finds his own voice and stands up for his right to be heard. Staged in the intimate FlynnSpace, the audience becomes part of the action, feeling the tension, leaning into the conflict between characters. Another compelling aspect of this production is that dialogue and subtext are communicated through multiple modalities: spoken word, American Sign Language, and through captioning. These modes show how complex human communication is even in the most intimate settings.

Check out a video of the Tribes director and cast discussing the production here.

Before you see the show:
• Discuss as a class how many forms of communication everyone participates in on a regular basis. Students could even keep communication logs for a day, noting all modes they’ve used to communicate their ideas with others. Come together and make a list of all of the different modalities and discuss if certain forms are used for specific types of communication:
• One of the ways this family communicates is through provocative, brash, and profane language, often yelled or delivered aggressively. Discuss how this type of language can have power? Do you think this language masks other motives or emotions?

As you watch the show:
• Listen to the music chosen throughout the play. How does the music affect your feelings and the mood of the scenes? Do any pieces or musical moments stand out to you?

After you see the show:
• As a class or in small groups, create a list answering the following questions: what qualities define a healthy relationship? (Examples: trust, humor, honesty, respect), and what qualities define an unhealthy relationship (jealousy, control, aggression)?
• How would you describe Billy’s relationship with various members of his family? Sylvia? Healthy or unhealthy? A combination?
• What do you feel is the future for these characters? Does the play have a happy ending?

The Company: Vermont Stage

Vermont Stage is Burlington's only year-round, professional theatre company. Founded in 1994, the company has produced over 100 shows and is known for staging the most prestigious, adventurous, and entertaining plays emerging nationally; fulfilling the city's need for a vibrant, innovative, theatre with productions created by and for members of its community.

Their Mission: To create theatre that makes our community a better place by: 1) producing plays that show us what we have in common is more powerful than what separates us, 2) providing a supportive professional environment in which theatre artists are inspired to perform their best work. 3)enhancing the cultural and commercial vitality of our community and, 4) encouraging the development of Vermont audiences and their love of theatre.
Tribes, Communities: how we connect to others

“I was thinking, deafness is just one example of a kind of community, and there are loads of others. When you start looking, you see how they all share the way that deaf people talk about other deaf people– It’s the same as how some Jewish people talk about other Jewish people. About how observant you are. And it’s like intellectuals talking about other intellectuals. Any kind of group, they all share certain qualities...And then it boils down to the family– it’s like the smallest niche you can get. That’s what the play boils down to for me, the family, a tiny little kingdom with its internal rules and hierarchies and weirdnesses that are unquestioned. And how difficult it is when you meet someone that you fall in love with, how do you introduce that person into the group that already exists, the family.”


Communication: how language impacts our tribes

“How many ways there are of communicating and not communicating. You can communicate through sign language, and what happens when someone’s words are not the same as your words. Just because we have a word for it doesn’t mean that we agree on the feeling that is behind that word. How words are an attempt. And I suppose that is where the music comes in, and music has no words. “

(Nina Raine, the Columbia Spectator, December 11, 2012)

Questions to explore the theme:

• How do you feel love is characterized within this family? How do members of the family show affection?

• In many communities, hierarchies exist either bluntly or subtly. How do you see hierarchies presented in the different “tribes” presented in the play? Think about the communities you’re a part of, do hierarchical structures exist? How do they impact the connections between members? Can communities/tribes exist without hierarchies?

• Billy’s absence from the family has a big impact on them. How do you see each character changing, and what motivates this change for them?

• Language is the focus of much of Tribes. How do the characters use or engage with language within the play? Does their devotion to language help or hurt their communication? How does language play a part in your life?

• How many different ways does Nina Raine find to convey the idea of communication, whether through language, creative activity, sounds? List the modes of the communication in the play and strengths and weaknesses of each mode.
The Characters

Christopher, Billy’s father, about 60, a writer
Beth, Billy’s mother, about 60, attempting to write a novel
Daniel, Billy’s brother, 20s, a year or two older than Ruth, writing his thesis
Ruth, Billy’s sister, 20s, a year or two older than Billy, recreational opera singer
Billy, the youngest child, 20s, born deaf
Sylvia, 20s, going deaf, Billy’s girlfriend

*Dale Dymkoski plays Billy. At age three, he was diagnosed with severe bilateral hearing loss and was outfitted with hearing aids. He has lived through every incarnation of hearing aid, and believes today’s digital technology has given him the chance to play guitar and sing in pitch, something he never thought possible. Dale’s experience brings a unique and personal perspective to his portrayal of Billy.

Important Quotes from the Play - Read and Discuss

CHRISTOPHER: Do you like them? Deaf events? What’s it like? The community? ... The deaf community. ...
SYLVIA: It’s hierarchical.
RUTH: Hierarchical? How?
SYLVIA: ... Well ... I’m not deaf from birth so that makes me less good than someone who is. But I come from a very deaf family so that makes me more kosher. Billy’s at the top of the pile because he’s deaf from birth — like a cradle Catholic is better than a convert — but when he didn’t know any sign, that took him down a few notches again.
~ Scene five

SYLVIA: It isn’t that much fun being around hearing people anymore, either. No offense.
DANIEL: Why not?
SYLVIA: Oh ... the way they very politely let you know just how inconvenient it is. People yelling in your ear however much you explain so you literally have to grab their face and stick it in front of you. And ... they don’t realize how obvious it is on their faces when they don’t like you.
~ Scene five

CHRISTOPHER: Well, we didn’t bring Billy up as handicapped. We brought him up as if he were hearing. (beat) Although, to be fair, some deaf people would say that that is bringing him up as handicapped.
RUTH: Dad. Don’t stir.
DANIEL: No. They’d say being deaf isn’t a handicap, it’s being in a linguistic minority.
SYLVIA: No, being deaf is a handicap. If you’re going from hearing to deaf. Like I am. Life is worse deaf. If you’re deaf from birth, I think it might be different.
~ Scene five
Reflections on Language and the Deaf Community

**Language is at the true core of what makes us uniquely human.** It is what brings us together and separates us as nothing else. Language is the glue that allows us to establish and maintain our relationships. It is the way in which we transmit our most intimate thoughts and feelings. It is what we use to love and discipline our children. Without a common language, our thoughts, feelings and opinions are misinterpreted or lost. A place without words to reach the very people we want to touch is indeed very lonely.

Deaf educators often talk about speech and language very differently. Language enables people to express their thoughts and feelings, solve personal problems, and reach beyond their present circumstances. Language may be the most important tool for receiving information and knowledge. Speech, contrastingly, is one way of expressing language. It is the way that the majority of people express their thoughts and feelings. However, there are other ways of expressing language that most people have never thought about. Using sign language is a way that many deaf people around the world communicate and express language. Writing is another way of expressing language that is used extensively. New technologies such as the Internet have given us new ways to use language creatively and globally.


**TO THE HEARING WORLD THE DEAF COMMUNITY MUST SEEM LIKE A SECRET SOCIETY.** Indeed, deafness is a culture every bit as distinctive as any an anthropologist might study. First, there is the language, completely separate from English, with its own syntax, structure, and rigid grammatical rules. Second, although deaf people comprise a minority group that reflects the larger society, they have devised their own codes of behavior. ... The deaf world is a microcosm of the hearing society. There are deaf social clubs, national magazines, local newspapers, fraternal organizations, insurance companies, athletic competitions, colleges, beauty pageants, theater groups, even deaf street gangs. The deaf world has its own heroes, and its own humor, some of which relies on visual puns made in sign language, and much of which is quite corny. Because deafness is a disability that cuts across all races and social backgrounds, the deaf world is incredibly heterogeneous.


---

Nina Raine, playwright, on *Tribes*

*To learn more about Raine, click [here](http://www.royalcourttheatre.com/news/articles/nina-raine-why-i-wrote-tribes/)*

“I first had the idea of writing *Tribes* when I watched a documentary about a deaf couple. The woman was pregnant. They wanted their baby to be deaf. I was struck by the thought that this was actually what many people feel, deaf or otherwise. Parents take great pleasure in witnessing the qualities they have managed to pass on to their children. Not only a set of genes. A set of values, beliefs. Even a particular language. The family is a tribe: an infighting tribe but intensely loyal.

Once I started looking around, tribes were everywhere. I went to New York and was fascinated by the orthodox Jews in Williamsburg, who all wear a sort of uniform. They were like an enormous extended family. I thought about my own family. Full of its own eccentricities, rules, in-jokes and punishments. What if someone in my (hearing, garrulous) family had been born deaf?

All these things went into the play, which took a very long time to write. All I knew was that at the beginning we would be plunged into a family dinner. The first scene was easy to write. I wrote it with no idea of the characters’ names, or of how many siblings there were. But oddly, it is one of the scenes that has hardly changed during the writing of the play. It sat there for a very long time. And then, slowly, I wrote the rest. The crazy family was born fully formed. I just had to work out what happened to them.”

*(Originally published online by Royal Court Theatre in September 2010)*
Exploring Character

Have students select a character that they connect to, or are drawn to, and allow them to explore this character in the following ways:

- Create a character sketch using objects (5-7) that define or illuminate the character. For instance, Sylvia could have a book of poetry, Beth, a kimono. The objects could also be more symbolic, a conch shell for Billy, representing his hearing impairment, experiencing the world through a filter. Each object should prompt a reflection or story that relates to the character. Have students share their object and explain their significance to the characters.

- Write a journal entry from the character’s perspective. Have students choose a moment that is particularly relevant for the character during the play, and express how they feel during this moment. What’s influencing their experience?

- Have students take on the persona of this character and be interviewed about how they felt in that moment, answering in character.

Layers of Communication

Split the class into two groups, and have them form parallel lines, facing each other. People will be paired with the person right across from them. Lines should be about 10-15 feet apart if possible. Without using hands, have students in one line begin to tell their partner in the other line about their day yesterday or their favorite foods. Have them speak at conversational volume, not shouting across at each other. Students should speak naturally, not over exaggerate lip movement. Pause and ask students how much information they were able to ascertain from the exercise. Swap partners and repeat.

Give students in one line the title of a well-known fairy tale (this could be whispered or handed out on index cards). Have them tell the story to their partners without using their hands or voices, but just their by mouthing the words. If students are struggling, allow them to use their hands. When the listening, or lip-reading partner feels they know the story, have them raise their hand. When everyone has finished, discuss the experience. Did using hands help comprehension? Did anyone get frustrated? Did they feel like they got the whole story or had to piece together parts of a whole? How does this experience relate to the characters’ experiences in Tribes?

Between Two Worlds

Sylvia is a character that lives between two worlds, the hearing world and the Deaf world. She is experiencing greater and greater difficulties communicating in the hearing world, but, she is still able to hear which can be alienating in the Deaf community. Daniel says to her, “But you’re in both worlds. You’re in both worlds.”

Have students write and reflect on their own experiences. Are there any areas of their lives where they feel divided between two worlds? How do these worlds differ from each other? Does the way they communicate change depending on which world they are in? (If students are stuck, a simple example would be home vs. school. Do students act different around their friends than they would around their parents?) If students feel comfortable, have them share their reflections with the group.
The Art Form: Theater

What is theater? Webster’s dictionary says, “a dramatic performance.” Drama is any kind of performance that presents a story through character, action, and dialogue. Some say that theater portrays life—either as it is or as it might be. But one of the things that makes theater different from real life is that things can happen in theater that cannot happen in real life—in other words, things that appear to be magical. In the play Peter Pan, the children fly through the air, for example. In traditional Chinese theater, a warrior might kill a dragon. Mythical creatures of all kinds appear in the dramatic performances of cultures around the world.

It is believed that people have been acting out stories forever. Singing and dancing also celebrated the harvest and told stories of the gift of grain to the people. In all cultures around the world people performed for each other by acting out stories they knew by heart because they’d heard them or seen them acted out by others, or because the event happened to them. It wasn’t until about 2,500 years ago (500 B.C.E.) that some Greek playwrights wrote down the conversations they wanted others to say. These are believed to be the first written plays and mark the beginning of the western theater as we think of it today.

READ & EXPLORE: Click here for a more in-depth description of theater history and language and terminology.

Moving Through Space

Learning Goals: Deepen understanding of character
Performing Goals: move safely in space; explore locomotor movements

Ask students to walk or move freely around the room, aiming for the open spaces and being careful not to bump into others. Instruct them to “freeze” occasionally and also to vary their speeds or qualities: Move faster. Travel in slow motion. Travel backwards.” Then offer students prompts that relate to the emotions present in the play: Light, Heavy, Explosive, Angry, In love, Rebellious, Confused, Depressed, Happy, and any others suggested by students.

After moving through space with their whole body, ask students to choose one emotion and adapt their movement into a gesture. Go through this process for several emotions.

Discuss what it feels like to communicate without spoken words. Did you find it easier or harder to express yourself?

Tableaux

Performing goals: Communicate ideas physically; build awareness of blocking.
Learning goals: Determine key parts; identify relationships; synthesize.

Some of the themes in Tribes are Family, Language, Communication, Belonging, Isolation, Hearing and Listening. Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to create a sculpture or tableau (frozen image) that represents one of the themes above. Give them one minute to do this and then say “3-2-1 freeze!” Then have each group perform its tableau for the others.

Discuss what these ideas mean to your students and what these ideas meant to the characters in Tribes. Are they similar or very different?
The Flynn Center

The Flynn has been at the center of Vermont's cultural landscape for over 80 years—from its earliest days as a vaudeville house through five decades as a movie theater to its present life as the region's leading performance center and arts education organization. Today, the Flynn Center for the Performing Arts is recognized internationally for its significant artistic, educational, and community outreach activities; superb technical capacity; beautiful historic setting; and world-class presentations. At the Flynn, we celebrate a rich legacy of connecting our community with the arts. The Flynn is recognized for its stellar artistic programming in theater, dance, and music; and for educational programs that reach far into the community to advance teaching and learning. For more about the Flynn, click here.

Etiquette for Live Performances

The Essentials

- Listen, experience, imagine, discover, learn!
- Give your energy and attention to the performers.
- At the end of the show, clap for the performers’ time and energy.
- Eating, drinking, and chewing gum are not okay.
- Talk only before and after the performance.
- Turn off wireless devices. No photos, videos, texting, or listening to music.

Why is Etiquette Important?

A good live performance is a powerful communication between audience and performer. The more the audience gives to the performer, the more the performer can give back to the audience. The performer hears the audience laughing, senses its sympathy, and delights in the enthusiasm of its applause. Furthermore, each audience member affects those sitting near him or her, in addition to the performers onstage. Technological devices (cameras, phones, etc.) have become so prevalent in our daily lives, but using these devices is distracting to the performers onstage and other audience members trying to watch the show. Even the light from checking the time, or the buzz of a phone on vibrate can pull the people around you out of the experience. Cell phone frequencies can even interfere with the microphones in the production, and taking photos can be unsafe for performers. Additionally, an artist has the right to decide what photos and videos go out into the world. Phones keep you from being present and fully engaged with the show. Thank you for turning devices completely off!

Discuss Being a Mindful Audience Member:

How is going to see a live theatre performance different from seeing a movie, going to a concert, or watching TV? In small groups, come up with a list of positive audience behaviors, and behaviors that would be disruptive to performers and other audience members. Come together and create a master list.
We can’t wait to see you at the theater!

Teachers, a few reminders:

- Fill out the Seating and Travel Survey, so we can best accommodate your group’s needs in regards to dismissal, bussing, students with different needs, etc.
- Share your experience with us! Use the feedback links, or share your students’ artwork, writing, responses. We love to hear how experiences at the Flynn impact our audiences.
- Explore other student matinees at the Flynn this season. We’ve still got seats in some shows and we’d love to help you or other teachers at your school enliven learning with an engaging arts experience!

We have some new initiatives to deepen student connection and experience!

- **Pre or Post-Show Video Chats:** Help students build enthusiasm or process their experience with a free, 5-10 minute video chat before or after the show! We can set up Skype/Facetime/Google Hangouts with your class to answer questions about the content, art form, and experience. Contact Kat, kredniss@flynncenter.org to set up your chat!

- **Autism and Sensory-Friendly Accommodations:** The Flynn Center has been working diligently to break down barriers for audience members with disabilities, with a particular focus on those with sensory-sensitivities. Social stories, break spaces, sensory friendly materials, and more are available for all student matinees. Feel free to let us know ahead of time if any of these would be useful, or ask an usher at the show!

Make your field trip the most meaningful learning experience it can be with a preparatory Companion Workshop in your classroom!

An engaging Flynn Teaching Artist can come to your school to deepen students’ understanding of both content and form with an interactive workshop, enriching kids’ matinee experiences. Funding support is often available. To learn more, check out this link. To book a workshop, click here. Questions? Contact Sasha: schoolprograms@flynncenter.org or (802)652-4508

Re-stock your teaching toolkit and reignite your passion with upcoming professional development opportunities for educators!

Get certification renewal credits, invigorate your teaching, and learn new teaching strategies that can be tailored to most curricular material. **Sponsored by the Champlain Valley Educator Development Center**

**November 12, 4-6PM: Workshop with Improvised Shakespeare**—Chicago’s Improvised Shakespeare company leads a two-hour workshop specially designed for Middle and High School teachers. This workshop is sure to be rapid-fire fun that gives you new tools to get kids’ creative and critical thinking juices flowing! 2 credit hours

**November 18, 9-3PM: Engaging Active Learners Conference**—Now in its 7th year, we are proud to offer a full-day conference on arts integration for Vermont educators! In collaboration with the Creative Schools Initiative, we’re thrilled to welcome five of the nation’s top experts on arts integration to the Flynn to work with educators. In addition, choose from a variety of content- and grade-specific teacher break-outs and hands-on workshops, and snag resources to take back to your school. Come be part of the conversation and leave inspired! 6 credit hours

Register Now!