

NYU Steinhardt

Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS PROFESSIONS

PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL THEATRE
Presents

Salvation Road

by D.W. Gregory

CAST

Cody Allyn
Marshall Burgart
Jack Dod
Jess Honovich
Valerie Issembert
Alexis Lounsbury
Natalie Mack
Haven Mitchell-Rose
Leslee Alileen Myers
Marco Santarelli
Kathleen Turner
Spiro Tzakis
Dan Walsh
Rebekah D. Wilson
Charlie Wright

DIRECTOR **David Montgomery**
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR **Jess Honovich**
SCENIC & LIGHTING DESIGN **Daryl Embry**
COSTUME DESIGN **Michelle Humphrey**
SOUND DESIGN **Jack Dod**
DRAMATURGY **Sarah Chichester**
ORIGINAL MUSIC **Natalie Mack**
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR **Randy Susevich**
PRODUCTION STAGE MANAGER **Talia Krispel**
PRODUCTION MANAGER **Alix Claps**

Teacher's Resource Guide

Black Box Theatre
82 Washington Square East

ADMISSION: \$15 General, \$5 Students and Seniors

October 26 & 27 and November 1-3, 2012 at 8pm
October 28 and November 4, 2012 at 3pm

Salvation Road was developed by the New Plays for Young Audiences series at the Provincetown Playhouse, sponsored by the Program in Educational Theatre at New York University, summer 2012.



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Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS PROFESSIONS

Program in Educational Theatre

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New York, New York 10003 - 212 998 5868 – ed.theatre@nyu.edu
www.steinhardt.nyu.edu/music/edtheatre

Dear Teacher:

Welcome to Educational Theatre at NYU. Our award-winning program is dedicated to developing the next generation of theatre artists and educators for careers in schools, cultural institutions, and various community settings. We have a long and established track record of producing the most innovative theatre educators in New York State and beyond.

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To speak to us personally, or to arrange a visit, please contact our office at ed.theatre@nyu.edu or 212 998 5868.

David Montgomery, PhD
Director
Program in Educational Theatre

Director's Notes

In June, 2012, The Program in Educational Theatre's annual New Plays for Young Audiences (NPYA) program stayed true to founders Lowell and Nancy Swortzell's vision to focus on the development of exciting new scripts for young audiences and families. For its 15th season, as three new plays were developed over three weeks, the series once again was held in the Provincetown Playhouse, where the tradition of developing new scripts and new talents dates back to the early days of the Playhouse. One of the plays that NPYA worked on was *Salvation Road*, by D.W. Gregory, which culminated in a staged reading of the play.

Everyone involved in the NPYA *Salvation Road* rehearsals, including the director, dramaturg, and cast, offered their commentary and feedback to the playwright. D.W. Gregory responded each and every day during the course of one week by re-writing or re-shaping moments of her play. As an observer to this wonderfully creative process, I noted how the story of a 17-year-old teen, Cliff, who embarks on a road trip to search for his older sister who disappears with members of a fundamentalist church, provoked meaningful dialogue and great depth of thought amongst everyone involved in the project, including audience members who came to see the staged reading of the play later in the week. I couldn't wait to take *Salvation Road* to its next level, a full production of the play in the Black Box Theatre.

In Cliff's attempt to understand how a smart and talented girl could fall for the hollow promises of a cult, the play raises questions about religion, belonging, and family bonds, while engaging the audience in a deepening mystery. D.W. Gregory plays with time and imagining in her play. She avoids always presenting scenes chronologically, and various scenes are imagined and played out by different characters. This allows for multiple and shifting attitudes to be explored as the mystery is investigated. As a critical thinker with a great need to find his sister and make sense of her devotion, Cliff raises most of the unanswered questions of the play. Significant questions like the ones he grapples with have the power to engage us and shift our mindsets.

It is not often that one finds a play for young audiences that deals with such weighty subject matter, yet alone one that is so entertaining. Through her use of humor, smart dialogue, strong characters and a plot that is not too, pardon the pun, preachy, D.W. Gregory's play is accessible and relevant to pre-teen, teenage and older audiences.

The journey of *Salvation Road* has revealed that regardless of its stage of development, the questions at the heart of the play keep it urgent and exciting. In fact, questions in the earlier process generated more questions that evolved in complexity with the later development of the play. As questions drive growth and fuel creativity and critical thinking, my hope is that you'll leave the theatre entertained and satisfied, but also more curious to engage with the multitude of fascinating questions posed by *Salvation Road*.

David Montgomery, Director

Dear Teacher:

We have been working for many weeks to prepare this resource guide for you and we hope that you find it useful when helping your students learn from our production of *Salvation Road* either before or after seeing the show.

At its heart, *Salvation Road* is a play about the internal bonds of family and the struggle to maintain those bonds, a theme which many of your students can probably identify with, either from their own experiences or those which they have encountered in school, with friends, or in literature, film, and television. Ideally, their interaction with *Salvation Road* will expand their understanding of how theatre can convey this theme and may encourage them to experiment with a physical approach to storytelling. The activities presented here will help you to facilitate this experimentation should you feel it appropriate for your students.

Each individual activity concludes with a series of reflective discussion questions which will help the students to process their experiences as well as allow them to demonstrate achievement towards the New York State Learning Standards for the Arts.

Please pay particular attention to the Theatre Etiquette piece on page 7 and review this information with your students before attending the performance.

We are curious to have feedback on the utility of this document and we will contact you after the performance to evaluate your use of the guide.

Thank you for bringing your students to our production and we hope that you will consider coming again in the future.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Jones
Program Administrator
NYU Steinhardt
Program in Educational Theatre

Leslee Meyers
Master's Student
NYU Steinhardt
Program in Educational Theatre

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New York State Learning Standards for the Arts

Excerpted from:
Learning Standards for the Arts
New York State Education Department, April 1996

Available online: www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/arts.html

STANDARD 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute creation and performance in the arts (dance, music, theatre, and visual arts) and participate in various roles in the arts.

STANDARD 2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Students will be knowledgeable about and make use of the materials and resources available for participation in the arts in various roles.

STANDARD 3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will respond critically to a variety of works in the arts, connecting the individual work to other works and to other aspects of human endeavor and thought.

STANDARD 4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

Students will develop an understanding of the personal and cultural forces that shape artistic communication and how the arts in turn shape the diverse cultures of past and present society.

Theatre Key Ideas

1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts

Students will create and perform theatre pieces as well as improvisational drama. They will understand and use the basic elements of theatre in their characterizations, improvisations, and play writing. Students will engage in individual and group theatrical and theatre-related tasks, and will describe the various roles and means of creating, performing, and producing theatre.

2: Knowing and Using Arts Materials and Resources

Students will know the basic tools, media, and techniques involved in theatrical production. Students will locate and use school, community, and professional resources for theatre experiences. Students will understand the job opportunities available in all aspects of theatre.

3: Responding to and Analyzing Works of Art

Students will reflect on, interpret, and evaluate plays and theatrical performances, both live and recorded, using the language of dramatic criticism. Students will analyze the meaning and role of theatre in society. Students will identify ways in which drama/theatre connects to film.

4: Understanding the Cultural Dimensions and Contributions of the Arts

Students will gain knowledge about past and present cultures as expressed through theatre. They will interpret how theatre reflects the beliefs, issues, and events of societies past and present.

Summary

"*Salvation Road*" is a dynamic new play for young audiences.

When his hip older sister disappears with members of a fundamentalist cult**, 17-year-old Cliff Kozak struggles to hold it all together, pretending that he isn't hurt by her decision to cut him out of her life. But a year later, a chance sighting of Denise at a New Jersey strip mall leads Cliff and his best buddy on a road trip into the heart of a deepening mystery. Why would a smart and talented girl like Denise fall for the hollow promises of a sleazy preacher? Could it be that blind faith is just another term for a desperate need to belong?

**Cult: A religion regarded as unorthodox or spurious... a minority religious group holding beliefs regarded as unorthodox or spurious...

A system for the cure of disease based on the dogma, tenets, or principles set forth by its promulgator to the exclusion of scientific experience or demonstration...

A great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing...

a. the object of such devotion...

b. a body of persons characterized by such devotion, for example, "America's growing cult of home fixer-uppers."

Webster's Third New International Dictionary (unabridged, 1966)

Theatre Etiquette

It is essential that students understand that the experience of going to the theatre requires a certain kind of interaction between audience members and the cast of a show. In order to present a successful show, we ask that all audience members:

- 1) Be respectful to the performers by not talking to others during the show.
- 2) Stay seated during the performance.
- 3) Turn off all cell phones.
- 4) Refrain from eating and drinking in the theatre.
- 5) Remember that photography and video are not allowed in the theatre.
- 6) Feel free to laugh, cry, and applaud when appropriate.
- 7) Enjoy the show!

Character Descriptions *Written by the Actors Who Portray Them*

- Cliff Kozak** Cliff is the middle child in the Kozak family, and, like most middle children, feels like he gets lost in the mix. Cliff slides by, projecting himself as content to be lost in the mix of his family and life, although years of pretending like he doesn't want to be a leader has left its mark. Particularly, in the anger that courses through his veins. Most of the time, the anger bubbles up as sarcasm, but now and then, he can boil over into rage. Cliff's anger can pose a challenge to his grappling with his new position as a leader in the home. The shadow of Denise's former presence looms large over the family but shrouds Cliff completely in darkness.
- Jill** Jill is Cliff's feisty sister who is almost 15-years-old. She is most visibly upset about her older sister Denise's absence. Through flashbacks, it is clear that Jill looked up to Denise. She actively encourages Cliff and Brian to search for Denise's fellowship in order to understand why Denise left and if Jill herself was at fault.
- Denise** Denise is a young, passionate singer/songwriter/musician who is about to embark on her college career. She is a fervent supporter of any good cause that aims to help others and better the lives of the less fortunate. Denise is extremely invested in her friends – namely, her band. With this, she flourishes in collaborative environments, where people come to together to make music and support each other in their creative endeavors.
- Brian Duffy** Brian is an adventurous 18-years-old who does whatever he can to help his friend Cliff, but of course hopes to make some memories along the way. His belief in family and friendship is what primarily guides his actions in his and Cliff's adventures. Brian also hopes his actions will eventually get him to a crazy party with a sorority or two.
- Elijah** Elijah is a charismatic member of the Disciples who shepherds those searching for a place to belong. Coming off as a welcoming and engaging face on campus, he fosters an exclusive community of followers whose aim is to serve God without distraction. Elijah believes that it is his duty to guide the troubled souls of his fellowship to salvation.
- Sister Jean** Sister Jean is a campus nun who aids Cliff and Duffy on their journey to find answers when Cliff's sister, Denise, disappears into a religious cult. Sassy and straight-forward, Sister Jean is no ordinary nun, but in her own non-traditional way, she gives Cliff pieces of sound wisdom, inspiring him to re-evaluate his approach to his sister and his own philosophies in life.
- Rebecca** Rebecca is Denise's closest friend in the True Deciples, though she is more loyal to the group than to her friend. Rebecca firmly believes that even if one of the True Deciple's decisions or actions could potentially have a negative outcome, the group always knows what's right. And she will do whatever it takes to do what they believe is best.
- Simi** Simi is a shy, 20-year-old girl who was kicked out of the Disciples when she left to see her sick mother. She misses her life with the True Disciples and wishes it could “go back to the way it was before.”

About the Playwright



D.W. Gregory writes in a variety of styles and genres, from historical drama to screwball comedy, but a recurring theme is the exploration of political issues through a personal lens. The New York Times called her “a playwright with a talent to enlighten and provoke” for her most produced play, *Radium Girls* (Playwrights Theatre of New Jersey), about dial painters poisoned on the job in the 1920s. A resident playwright at New Jersey Rep, she received a Pulitzer nomination for the Rep’s production of *The Good Daughter*, the story of a Missouri farm family struggling to adapt to rapid social change. Other plays include *The Good Girl Is Gone* (Playwrights Theatre), a black comedy about maternal

indifference; *October 1962* (NJ Rep), a Cold War era psychological thriller; and *Molunby’s Million* (Iron Age Theatre Co.), a comedy about the boxer Jack Dempsey, which was nominated for the 2011 Barrymore Award for Outstanding New Play by the Theatre Alliance of Philadelphia.

Her work has been developed through the support of the National New Play Network, the Maryland Arts Council, and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and has been presented at the New Harmony Project, ShenanArts, The Playwrights’ Center, Theatre of the First Amendment, NYU’s HotInk Festival, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Lark, Florida Stage, Geva Theatre, the Women’s Project, and the Young Vic, among others. D.W. also writes frequently for youth theatre. Her play *Salvation Road*, about a boy whose sister disappears into a fundamentalist church, was developed through New York University’s Steinhardt New Plays for Young Audiences program and is slated for several productions in 2012-13. A member of the Dramatists Guild, a former national core member of The Playwrights’ Center in Minneapolis, and a recent inductee into the League of Professional Theatre Women, Ms. Gregory is also founding member of the Playwrights Gymnasium, a process oriented workshop based in metro Washington, D.C.

www.dwgregory.com

Interview with the Playwright

Who or what inspired you to become a writer?

One of my early motivations to become a journalist, actually, was seeing the impact that a well researched article could have on people’s lives. It was the reporter who met my sister on the road in Amherst and later sent us his expose of the Unification Church – the article that persuaded her to give up on the church and come home. That more than anything made me think of journalism as a career. But I had

always been writing something – a lot of dreadful poetry and mediocre short stories for years before I actually got a job on a newspaper.

What do you consider to be your greatest achievements as a playwright?

I’ve written several plays that have been produced largely in youth theatre. Once I went to see a production – I walked into the rehearsal hall before

the opening performance and the students gave me a standing ovation. It is an amazing feeling to realize you've written something that has generated so much enthusiasm; very often the students are so excited to be working on the play and when they meet the writer it is like meeting a rock star. So the sense of having created something that lives on and inspires other artists in ways you can never know is a really energizing discovery.

What was your inspiration for writing *Salvation Road*?

Initially, the play began as an assignment from a friend who was vitally interested in the topic. So I wrote a short play for three actors, figuring it might be a good piece for touring. That version never went anywhere; I just did not like it much. But in 2008 I went back to the play and found a new way in; I decided to write about the people who are left behind – Cliff, Duffy, Jill,-- left behind and confused by what has happened. And that became my focus and gave me the drive to pursue a complete overhaul of the script.

While writing this play did you find that you related to a specific character, and if so how?

I relate more to Cliff and Jill – siblings trying to make sense of the disappearance of an older sister. They are young and find it hard to articulate their feelings, but underneath the bluster is a deep sense of loss and hurt.

What were the challenges (research, literary, psychological, and logistical) in bringing *Salvation Road* to life?

The biggest challenge was in finding the hook – finding a way into the story that did not seem didactic or too much like an after school special. As a friend of mine noted, everyone knows cults are bad. What can you tell me about cults that I don't know?

Are experiences in *Salvation Road* based on someone you know, or events in your own life?

I did considerable research into the cult experience but the inspiration for the play comes from a personal experience. My older sister spent six weeks among the 'moonies' one summer – and I was very like Jill, left at home, with no information, trying to make sense of what was going on.

Do you have anything specific that you want to say to an audience watching *Salvation Road*?

People who get involved in these kinds of organizations do so out of some deep, unexpressed need. Something is missing in their lives; they think they are getting it from the church. So if you can be loving and set aside any impulse to judge, you'll be in a much better position to reach them. It's terrifyingly difficult to do. I hope audiences will think about the fact that controlling organizations are not a myth but a reality of life in the United States.

Cults: Questions and Answers

***This is an excerpt. The full text can be viewed at <http://www.csj.org/studyindex/studycult/cultqa.htm>*

Q. What is a Cult?

The term cult is applied to a wide range of groups. There are historical cults, such as the cult of Isis, non-western cults studied by anthropologists, such as the Melanesian cargo cults, and a host of contemporary cults that have caught the public's attention during the past fifteen years.

A cult can be defined as a group or movement exhibiting a great or excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea, or thing, and employing unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leaders, to the actual or possible detriment of members, their families, or the community. Unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control include but are not limited to: isolation from former friends and family, use of special methods to heighten suggestibility and subservience, powerful group pressures, information management, suspension of individuality or critical judgment, promotion of total dependency on the group and fear of leaving it, etc.

Contemporary cults are likely to exhibit three elements to varying degrees:

- *members' excessively zealous, unquestioning commitment to the identity and leadership of the group,*
- *exploitative manipulation of members; and*
- *harm or the danger of harm to members, their families and/or society.*

Q. What Types of Cults Exist?

Many systems for classifying cults have been advanced. A straightforward breakdown has been suggested by Dr. Margaret Singer, who observes the following types of cults:

- *eastern religious*
- *Christian aberrational*
- *mass therapy or transformational training*
- *satanic*
- *occult/witchcraft/voodoo*
- *spiritualist*
- *Zen and Sino/Japanese philosophical-mystical*
- *flying saucer and outer space*
- *psychotherapy*
- *political*
- *new age*
- *commercial*
- *communal/self-help*
- *racist*

Q. How Many Cults Exist and How Many Members Have They?

Cult educational organizations have compiled lists of more than 2,000 groups about which they have received inquiries. The frequency with which previously unheard-of groups may be new religious, political, psychotherapeutic, or other kinds of movements. Experience suggests, however, that a significant number, perhaps more than 1,000, are cults. Although the majority are small, some cults have tens of thousands of members.

Q. Who Joins Cults and Why?

Contrary to a popular misconception that cult members are “crazy,” research and clinical evidence strongly suggest that most cult members are relatively normal individuals, although about one-third appear to have had mild psychiatric disorders before joining.

Cult members include the young, the old, the wealthy, the poor, the educated, and the uneducated. There is no easily identifiable “type” of person who joins cults. Nevertheless, clinical experience and informal surveys indicate that a very large majority of cult joiners were experiencing significant stress (frequently related to normal crises of adolescence and young adulthood, such as romantic breakup, school failure, vocational confusion) prior to their cult conversion. Because their normal ways of coping were not working well for them, these stressed individuals were more open than usual to recruiters selling “roads to happiness.”

Other factors that may render some persons susceptible to cultic influence include:

- *dependency (the desire to belong; lack of self-confidence);*
- *unassertiveness (inability to say no or express criticism or doubt);*
- *gullibility (impaired capacity to question critically what one is told, observes, thinks, etc.);*
- *low tolerance for ambiguity (need for absolute answers, impatience to obtain answers);*
- *cultural disillusionment (alienation, dissatisfaction with status quo);*
- *naive idealism;*
- *desire for spiritual meaning;*
- *susceptibility to trance-like states (in some cases, perhaps, because of prior hallucinogenic drug experiences);*
and
- *ignorance of the ways in which groups can manipulate individuals.*

Q. How Can Cults Harm People?

Because they often recognize the harmful changes that are not apparent to seduced converts, families are usually the first to be hurt. In their attempts to help cult-involved relatives, families experience intense frustration, helplessness, guilt, and, because so few people understand their plight, loneliness.

Members may be harmed in that they lose their psychological autonomy and frequently their assets. Furthermore, the group's partial-to-total disconnection from society deprives members of the opportunity to learn from the varied experiences that a normal life provides. Members may lose irretrievable years in a state of “maturational arrest.” In some cases, they undergo psychiatric breakdowns and/or suffer from physical disease and injury. Children in cults appear to be at high risk for abuse and neglect.

Those who leave cults frequently experience anxiety, depression, rage, guilt, distrust, fear, thought disturbances, and “floating,” the shifting from cult to non-cult ways of viewing the world or the sense of being stalled in a foggy, “in-between” state of consciousness. This emotional turmoil impairs decision-making and interferes with the management of life tasks.

Q. Why Do People Leave Cults?

People leave cults for a variety of reasons. After becoming aware of hypocrisy and/or corruption within the cult, converts who have maintained an element of independence and some connection with their old values may simply walk out disillusioned. Other members may leave because they have become weary of a routine of proselytizing and fund-raising. Sometimes even the most dedicated members may feel so inadequate in the face of the cult's demands that they walk away, not because they have stopped believing, but because they feel like abject failures. Still others may renounce the cult after reconnecting to old values, goals, interests, or relationships, resulting from visits with parents, talks with ex-members, or counseling.

Q. Is Leaving a Cult Easy?

Persons who consider leaving a cult are usually pressured to stay. Some ex-members say that they spent months, even years, trying to garner the strength to walk out. Some felt so intimidated that they departed secretly.

Q. How Can Parents and Others Help Cultists Voluntarily Reevaluate Their Cult Involvement?

Because cults discourage open and honest analysis of their beliefs and practices, parents and other concerned relatives or friends must exercise imagination and tact to help cultists voluntarily reevaluate a cult involvement.

Helpers should:

- *Stay calm and keep the lines of communication open. One cannot have any constructive influence without communication.*
- *Respectfully listen to cultists' points of view. Inquire into their beliefs, feelings, and thoughts about life in the cult and outside the cult. Find out if they have doubts or unanswered questions about the group – but don't pounce on them as soon as these are uncovered.*
- *Be patient.*
- *Be more inclined to calmly ask questions, rather than proffer opinions.*
- *Find out if they miss aspects of their old lives (friends, recreational activities, school, relatives, music, etc.) Open their minds to their own memories.*
- *Find out what they believe and why.*
- *Question their beliefs or try to get them to question them, but do so in a calm, respectful manner so as not to push them into a defensive corner. Timing is critical.*
- *Calmly express your point of view, but don't insist that they agree. Respect their right to disagree. Sometimes it is more effective simply to plant "thought seeds."*
- *Demonstrate one's love and concern, but do not make this contingent upon agreement or obedience, for doing this will rightly be perceived as a bribe. Instead, show love and concern even when disagreement is substantial.*
- *When possible, neutralize anger by analyzing its source, for anger begets anger. But do not artificially stifle anger, for the cultist will most likely sense the insincerity inherent in stifling emotion. Instead, show the sorrow, pain, and anxiety which are usually the root causes of anger.*
- *Let cultists know that their actions hurt or worry you, but simultaneously respect their right to do as they see fit, however manipulated they may seem to you.*

- *Communicate love and help the cultist reconnect to his old life by talking about old times and encouraging him to write, call, or visit relatives and old friends. Also, when appropriate, encourage relatives and friends to contact the cult member.*

Q. What Can Educators, Clergy, and Others Do to Protect Young People Against Cultic Recruitment?

The cultic danger to young people is decreased when:

- *outside criticism causes cults to decrease the level of manipulation in their environments;*
- *young people develop resistance to cultic sales pitches by learning about how groups in general (not just cults) can influence one's thoughts, feelings, and behavior; and*
- *young people learn to cope with stress and recognize and try to overcome personal vulnerabilities, such as dependency, low tolerance of ambiguity, and naive idealism – seeking professional help when appropriate.*
- *Consequently, educators and clergy can help protect youth by not being afraid to criticize cult abuses, but teaching youth about cultic manipulations, and by helping youth cultivate three values that will make them less vulnerable to cultic enticements:*
- *personal autonomy – the individual's capacity to determine his life with minimal pressure or manipulation from without;*
- *personal integration – the individual's continuing attempt to order his memories, values, beliefs, heritage, etc., into a unified whole; and*
- *independent critical thinking, without which autonomy cannot be maintained or integration achieved.*

Michael D. Langone, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The International Cultic Studies Association

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Characteristics Associated with Cultic Groups

Concerted efforts at influence and control lie at the core of cultic groups, programs, and relationships. Many members, former members, and supporters of cults are not fully aware of the extent to which members may have been manipulated, exploited, even abused. The following list of social-structural, social-psychological, and interpersonal behavioral patterns commonly found in cultic environments may be helpful in assessing a particular group or relationship.

Compare these patterns to the situation you were in (or in which you, a family member, or friend is currently involved). This list may help you determine if there is cause for concern. Bear in mind that this list is not meant to be a “cult scale” or a definitive checklist to determine if a specific group is a cult. This is not so much a diagnostic instrument as it is an analytical tool.

- The group displays excessively zealous and unquestioning commitment to its leader and (whether he is alive or dead) regards his belief system, ideology, and practices as the Truth, as law.
- Questioning, doubt, and dissent are discouraged or even punished.
- Mind-altering practices (such as meditation, chanting, speaking in tongues, denunciation sessions, and debilitating work routines) are used in excess and serve to suppress doubts about the group and its leader(s).
- The leadership dictates, sometimes in great detail, how members should think, act, and feel (for example, members must get permission to date, change jobs, marry – or leaders prescribe what types of clothes to wear, where to live, whether or not to have children, how to discipline children, and so forth).
- The group is elitist, claiming a special, exalted status for itself, its leader(s) and members (for example, the leader is considered the Messiah, a special being, an avatar – or the group and/or the leader is on a special mission to save humanity).
- The group has a polarized us-versus-them mentality, which may cause conflict with the wider society.
- The leader is not accountable to any authorities (unlike, for example, teachers, military commanders or ministers, priests, monks, and rabbis of mainstream religious denominations).
- The group teaches or implies that its supposedly exalted ends justify whatever means it deems necessary. This may result in members' participating in behaviors or activities they would have considered reprehensible or unethical before joining the group (for example, lying to family or friends, or collecting money for bogus charities).

- The leadership induces feelings of shame and/or guilt in order to influence and/or control members. Often, this is done through peer pressure and subtle forms of persuasion.
- Subservience to the leader or group requires members to cut ties with family and friends, and radically alter the personal goals and activities they had before joining the group.
- The group is preoccupied with bringing in new members.
- The group is preoccupied with making money.
- Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time to the group and group-related activities.
- Members are encouraged or required to live and/or socialize only with other group members.
- The most loyal members (the “true believers”) feel there can be no life outside the context of the group. They believe there is no other way to be, and often fear reprisals to themselves or others if they leave (or even consider leaving) the group.

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Answering Tough Questions

Due to the plot of *Salvation Road*, you may find your students asking questions that you may feel ill prepared to answer. Refer to the preceding informational pages as they will provide many answers.

While this is not a play about religion, you should feel confident answering questions that arise that are related to this controversial topic. Some questions and potential responses that we feel may help you include:

1. Are they saying that my religion is a cult?

While some behaviors of the True Disciples may mirror those of traditionally accepted faith based organizations and religions, we understand that this is part of cultic groups' manipulation. If they appeared to be predatory or otherwise outside of socially acceptable practices, they would not be able to recruit and maintain new members. These cultic groups may come across as mainstream, and there may even be moments in "Salvation Road" where this appears to be the case, but their motives for manipulation and control are always just below the surface and makes them markedly different from traditionally accepted faith based organizations and religions.

2. How is my religion different from a cult?

Traditionally accepted faith based organizations and religions do not overtly engage in manipulative techniques of persuasion and control. While they can be habit forming, individuals are free to leave the congregation at any time. Additionally, they do not exalt their leaders without accountability to a higher authority or the congregation itself.

3. Are they saying that all religion is bad?

"Salvation Road" addresses the interaction of individuals with a fictitious cultic organization, The True Disciples. It does not address or otherwise demean traditionally accepted faith based organizations and religions.

4. Elijah reminds me of my religious leader. Should I be worried?

An overzealous and charismatic religious leader is perfectly normal, given that faith can often present itself with certainty and fervor. If you have doubts, consider what underlies that charisma and fervor. Is the leader trying to inspire and encourage belief and faith for your benefit or his/her own? Is the leader engaging in exploitive, manipulative, or otherwise harmful behaviors? Encouraging others to do better should not be worrisome, but inspiring deification and worship of an individual who is not accountable to a higher authority or the congregation itself should be suspect.

Pre-Show Activity: Cult Jigsaw

While this play is not a lesson in cultic organizations, we would be remiss if we didn't take the opportunity to identify what cults are, discuss what makes them harmful to individuals and society, and explore the warning signs that our students can look for so they can be informed and protected from these predatory organizations.

For this activity, the teacher should reproduce "Cults: Questions and Answers" (pages 11-14) for the students. Divide the class into four teams and assign each team 2-3 different questions that they will become familiar with by reading the responses provided, discussing them among their team members, and coming up with a way to present that information to the rest of the class in their own words. Each group will then take turns teaching the rest of the class about their assigned questions.

Rather than reading from the document, presenting the information in their own words will allow students the opportunity to demonstrate comprehension of the text as well as reflect meaningful conversations about the subject matter that they had within their teams.

After each group has shared, use the discussion questions at right to facilitate a discussion about the activity. The questions have been designed to reflect on the activity, connect the experience to the students' lives, and to begin making predictions about the play.

Discussion Questions

1. Why might this information be important?
2. Who might be most vulnerable to these types of organizations?
3. What can we do as individuals to protect ourselves, our families, and our friends from these types of organizations?
4. What can we predict about the plot of the play *Salvation Road* if this information is being provided for us?

Pre-Show Activity: Life in a Cult

Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel during this activity?
2. How did the group leader make you feel?
3. Did this activity seem like a natural event or were you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
4. Based on the definition of a cult that was as part of the activity, did you feel that our role work reflected this definition? Why or why not?

An important connection between the members of a cult is that they view each other as a family. It will be helpful for students to think about this idea of family while completing the next activity. How do families relate to one another in day-to-day activities?

In this activity, the students will first take time to think about their own families and friends, and a time of great enjoyment with them. Some questions to explore may include:

- Who is there?
- Who speaks?
- What activities are you doing?
- Why is this an enjoyable memory?

After the students have had a few minutes to brainstorm, ask for volunteers to share some of their responses. When a variety of ideas have been shared, explain to the class that they will now pretend that they are all members of a cult.

Read the definition of "cult" on page 11 to the class in order to help clarify the world we are creating.

Guidelines:

- One student is established as the leader, preferably one who can play the guitar and lead music (though this is not required, it will help build a world that mirrors the fictional world of the play).
- The students will sit in a circle.
- The students will refer to each other as Brother ___ and Sister ___ (fill the blanks with first names). This refers to the family connection made above.
- Every student has to say something at some point.
- This activity will take about twenty minutes and during the course of the activity the group leader will lead the circle in song. An example of song is "This Little Light of Mine," though any repetitive, simple song will do.
- In-between songs, the leader will ask group members general questions in order to facilitate basic dialogue. (How are you? How are you feeling today? What's new? etc.)

After this role activity, the teacher should use the discussion questions at left in order to facilitate a reflective conversation about the activity. The questions have been designed to reflect on the activity in terms of content and performative aspects.

Pre-Show Activity: Exploring Elijah

In constructing a play, a playwright will reveal characteristics of a character through dialogue and action. Sometimes this information is revealed through what the character says or does. At other times, it is revealed through what other characters say about that character.

In addition to the information the playwright provides, the audience gets key information about a character from the actor's portrayal of the character. In the excerpt of the play that follows, the playwright reveals Elijah through his own words and actions, but the actor's portrayal will make this more clear. This activity will help your students bring some of the characters to life.

First Reading

Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6 students and distribute copies of the text excerpt that follows (if there are 5, one student will double the roles of Rachel and Sarah). Each group will read the script.

Second Reading

Distribute copies of the character descriptions from page 8 (Rachel and Sarah do not appear here, but the descriptions of Rebecca and Simi can give some information as to what these women might be like as they are all members of the Disciples). Based on information they can infer from their first reading of the script as well as the character description sheets, each group will read the script again, this time taking into account the information they are gathering about their character and trying to layer that into their reading.

Third Reading

Now, ask each student to identify two or three aspects of their character that they believe to be most clear from the descriptions and the first two readings of the text. They will imagine their interpretation of these characteristics on a continuum from 1 to 10 (1 being imperceptible and 10 being considerably exaggerated). During the third reading, they will try to emphasize the characteristics and the teacher will orchestrate their prevalence by calling out numbers at random (1 through 10).

Use the discussion questions at right to reflect on the activity and to connect the activity to the performance.

After viewing the play, ask the students to reflect on their exploratory work. Did the performances reflect their explorations? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions

1. What did you like about this activity?
2. What did you discover through the different readings?
3. Based on what you know about the play, what level of intensity do you anticipate the actors will use to convey these characteristics in the performance? Why?

Excerpt from *Salvation Road*

Brothers. Sisters.

ELIJAH

He holds out one hand and they all go to him, jointly taking his hand.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

In the name of the Lord, let us pray---as we stand before God and own up to the sins that separate us from Him. Give us the grace to see our weakness and reconcile.

They mutter Amen and part, going to separate places.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

I call this conference to pray for our dear sister, Miriam--who has worked so hard and come so far. We're all very happy to have you with us, Miriam.

DENISE

Thank you, brother.

ELIJAH

But we're worried about you also. You know why, sister?

DENISE

I already made my confession.

ELIJAH

Yes. But as you know, none of us can be truly free until we confess fully--before each other--and before God--the sins that bind us to this world.

DENISE

I've confessed all my sins.

ELIJAH

(to Simi)

What sin am I speaking of, Sister?

SARAH

The sin of pride.

ELIJAH

The sin of pride.

DENISE

I rid myself of pride. I dress plainly. And I pray--every day--

ELIJAH

These are outward signs. They mean nothing if you have not changed inside.

SARAH

I have seen it.

ELIJAH

And you sister?

I--

REBECCA

Of all of us, you are the closest to Miriam. Surely you've seen it.

RACHEL

I have seen it.

(suddenly)

Rachel crosses away from Denise.

ELIJAH

Sister.

Beat

REBECCA

Sometimes. (off Elijah) Actually--quite often.

Another beat.

ELIJAH

The Bible tells us that we must be humbled before we can be admitted to the kingdom of God.

DENISE

No. But I have worked hard to rid // myself of--

ELIJAH

(on //)

Not enough, sister. Not enough. And this worries us because we know how worldly things get in the way. You know what I'm talking about.

DENISE

No. Truly I don't.

ELIJAH

I think you do. What is that worldly thing?

SIMI

The music?

ELIJAH

The music, Miriam.

DENISE

But now I sing only the songs that praise the Lord.

ELIJAH

We did think so. Until we found this.

He has her notebook with musical notations in it.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Why do you still have this?

I've always had it.

DENISE

When you committed to us. You vowed to put worldly things aside.

ELIJAH

But it's my music--the first song I ever wrote--.

DENISE

This was the wrong thing to say.
Rebecca crosses away from her.

And the songs I've written lately--You praised those songs.

DENISE (CONT'D)

And here you go resisting us. Isn't she resisting us?

ELIJAH

She is resisting.

SARAH

Such resistance.

SIMI

I see this resistance and pray for Miriam.

RACHEL

So do I.

REBECCA

Sister Rebecca does not resist us. Sister Esther does not resist us. And yet, when we point out to you--the cause of your sin--you resist us.

ELIJAH

I'm not resisting --I just...

DENISE

Do you know what sacrifice is? Sister?

ELIJAH

Of course.

DENISE

What is true sacrifice, Sister?

ELIJAH

To give up the thing you love most--in order to serve the Lord.

SIMI

Why does He ask this of us?

ELIJAH

Because He loves us.
REBECCA, SIMI, RACHEL,
OTHERS

Because of His love for us---because of our love for each other. That is why we are here. To serve Him. By giving up. Our own selfish pleasures.

ELIJAH

I don't play those songs any more. It's the ones at the back.

DENISE.

Sister. (turning from her) I am beginning to doubt your dedication to us. Who else doubts Miriam?

ELIJAH

I doubt her.

SARAH

She looks to Rachel.

I doubt Miriam.

RACHEL

I do as well. I doubt her.

SIMI

I doubt her, also.
(under their gaze)

REBECCA

Pre-Show Activity: Controversial Behaviors

Discussion Questions

1. What were the challenges of creating this scene?
2. How do you think a playwright overcomes these challenges when writing a play?
3. When we are confronted with these situations in real life, how do we respond? Why?
4. Based on this activity, what do you anticipate will happen in *Salvation Road*? Will the characters' responses be authentic or magical? Why?

Scene Criteria

1. Everyone must have an equal role
2. The roles and relationships must be clear
3. The behavior must be clearly identified (through words or actions)
4. The supporting characters must each have a clear opinion about the behavior
5. The scene must conclude with the main character making a decision to change the behavior or continue doing it

As members of different social groups (family, friends, etc.), people we are close to may at times engage in behaviors that we do not agree with. We are all individuals with free will so this is generally not a problem, but when these behaviors negatively impact ourselves, our relationships, or the wider community, they can become problematic.

Pair Share

In pairs, ask students to brainstorm a short list of behaviors that they have seen friends, family members, or other people they know that may negatively impact themselves, their relationships, or the wider community. Examples may include drug and alcohol abuse, cutting school, stealing, lying, etc. They should discuss the merits of their choices based on whether or not there is real harm being done.

Evaluation and Selection

The pairs should be combined into groups of four where they can share their lists. They will then evaluate their combined list and select one behavior that they will create a short scene about.

Planning and Preparation

The students will devise a short scene in which one character is engaging in the behavior and the other characters are members of his or her social group (friends, family members, etc.). They will determine how each of these characters deals with the behavior, as some will support it or fail to respond, while others may choose to intervene. At the end of the scene, the main character should be encouraged to make a decision to either change the behavior or continue doing it. (Refer to the criteria chart at left for group instructions).

Presentation

Each group presents their scene. The teacher should encourage students to use the audience response questions below when responding to each scene.

Audience Response Questions

- What was the behavior?
- How did the other characters respond to the behavior?
- How did the individual respond to the other characters?
- Did you believe the decision? Was it authentic or a magical (unrealistic) resolution?
- If it was magical, what might the characters do that would be more authentic?

Reflection

After each group has presented and all scenes have been debriefed, use the discussion questions at left to reflect on the activity as a whole and anticipate what the class will see when they attend the performance.

Post-Show Activity: Response Letters

When watching this or any play, there is certain to be some disagreement among audience members about the events of the play and the reasons certain characters behaved the way they did. The purpose of this activity is to try to illuminate the spectrum of understanding that exists within the class.

At the end of *Salvation Road*, Cliff believes he has found Denise and is about to make contact. Some may assume this means they will reunite, but that is not necessarily the case. Students should have an opportunity to explore what these characters might say to one another if they do meet. Over the course of the play, we got a sense of what led up to Denise's decision to leave her family. If she could speak to Cliff, what might she say to him? Another option would be to consider Cliff's feelings. If he does meet Denise, what might he say to her?

Once the students have written their letters, ask them to get into small groups and read their letters to each other. Once they have all shared, use the first set of discussion questions at right to debrief the activity.

Post-Show Activity: Alternate Ending

As with any good dramatic text, *Salvation Road* does not have a predictable outcome; some may describe it as ambiguous or unfinished. Given Cliff's prediction as to what the reunion with Denise might look like, the students should reflect on their understanding of the play and contemplate alternative outcomes.

Option A: Narrative Writing

Each student is asked to think about a possible alternative ending or extension to the play, and is given some time to write a narrative of their new ending.

Option B: Improvisational Acting

The class is broken into groups and each group is responsible for improvising (that is, making up a scene without a script) that resolves the play in a new and interesting way.

The students should share their work. For the narrative activity, small group sharing is best. For the improvisational options, they can show their scenes to the class. Use the second set of discussion questions at right to reflect on the activity.

Discussion Questions

1. What do these characters want to express to one another?
2. What do these letters reveal about the characters?
3. What can the class as a whole learn from this experience?

Discussion Questions

1. Do the alternative endings seem reasonable? Why or why not?
2. Are there other possible endings that we have not heard? What might they be?
3. Why do you think the playwright left the play open ended? What might the playwright want the audience to do after seeing the play?

Post-Show Activity: Research Project

A list of references appears at the end of this guide; some of which were consulted in the writing and research of this guide, some of which may provide additional information on cultic organizations and ways in which students can protect themselves, their friends, and their family members from being recruited into these organizations. The more information that students have about these practices and ways to avoid them, the safer they will be.

Posters

Have the students investigate how to identify the recruitment practices of cult-like organizations. Using their research, the students should use poster board or chart paper, magazines, newspapers, advertisements, internet sources, markers, tape, glue, etc to create an informational poster. The posters should include detailed information and images about their selected topic. When complete, they should be shared with the rest of the class. The students should be encouraged to explain how their work related to *Salvation Road* and how their research experience deepened their understanding of the play.

Post-Show Activity: Discussion Questions

Various elements of the plot of *Salvation Road* remain ambiguous for viewers. As such, the students may have a number of questions about the production (beyond those they addressed to the cast after seeing the show) and it may be worthwhile to allow them a space to talk about these lingering questions.

Some questions you might consider exploring are:

- How do you think Denise will respond if and when Cliff is able to locate her?
- How do you think Denise feels about her relationships with the other members of the True Disciples?
- Do you think Denise regrets joining the True Disciples? Why or why not?
- Do you think Cliff blames himself for Denise's decision to leave the family? Why or why not?
- If you took the place of one of the characters in the play, would you behave the same way that he or she did or might you act differently? Why?
- What other plays, stories, movies, or television shows did this play remind you of? Why?
- What do you think we can learn from a play like *Salvation Road*?

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