

## ***Brothers Wreck*, by Jada Alberts**

### **Education Pack**

**THEMES:**

GRIEF & DEPRESSION

FAMILY

INEQUALITY

**GENRE:** Realism, drama

**AGE RESTRICTION:** 15+ (strong language, suicide and alcohol abuse)

**NUMBER OF CHARACTERS:** 5 (2F, 3M)

**CHARACTER LIST:**

**RUBEN**, early 20s, seemingly untouchable. Ruben is impulsive, quick-witted and sometimes aggressive. He thinks he's figured out the world and his place in it. Ruben's mum died when he was young so he was raised by one of his aunties, Adele's mum.

**ADELE**, mid 20s, Ruben's cousin and sister. Adele is dedicated, sure of herself, mostly calm and always loyal. She has a tendency to worry.

**JARROD**, mid 20s, Adele's boyfriend. He's cheeky, thoughtful, and quietly confident.

**DAVID**, late 30s, Ruben's counsellor. He is a former teacher who has worked in the Darwin area most of his life.

**PETRA**, 40s, the youngest of three sisters, she is Ruben and Adele's auntie.

**SYNOPSIS:**

*Mob can't survive like that, you can't survive like that. We gotta talk to each other, as hard as it is, 'cause I guarantee you, that phone will ring and you'll have to say goodbye again.*

Set in an Aboriginal community in modern day Australia, the play assesses the impact of structural inequality and historical racial injustice on a family trying to build a life with dignity and respect.

It begins with a death: on a hot morning under a house in Darwin, Ruben wakes to find his cousin Joe hanging from the rafters. What follows is the story of a family, buffeted by constant tragedy, holding itself together – as their people have done generation after generation. This play asks us: how do we deal with death? And how many other people does it take for each of us to live? Little by little, Ruben's family brings him back from the edge.

Ultimately the place asks whether communities which are discriminated against can truly move on without the acknowledgement of, and apology for, the severe disadvantage, dispossession and degradation they were subjected to in the past.

The play premiered in Sydney in 2014 under the direction of Leah Purcell. It is a Malthouse co-production with State Theatre Company South Australia.

**KEY MOMENTS:**

**Scene 2 (1M)**

We learn that this is Ruben's ninth counseling session with David following the suicide of his cousin, Joey. Ruben remains unresponsive and dismissive of David's invitations to talk through his trauma.

**Scene 7 (2F, 2M)**

Petra arrives at Adele's house, having driven a long distance. We learn about the circumstances around Ruben's mother's death. This revelation helps us better understand Ruben's guarded character.

### **Scene 11 (2F, 3M)**

Ruben breaks into his old house, the place where Joey had died of suicide. Among other insights, Ruben's monologue recounts the events before Joey's death, and we understand his guilt. Adele, Petra and Jarrod find Ruben and together bring him back from the brink.

### **STEP ONE: ASK**

Refer to Ruben's response to David in Scene 2 (p.5-6). In this scene, we encounter Ruben's rage over his condition, which he relates to the deep-rooted lack of opportunity as a result of the structural inequality experienced by indigenous communities in Australia.

What philosophical questions does this raise in the students' minds? In groups, ask them to come up with questions which have no easy answers. Think about universal themes raised and perhaps try to combine more than one concept in a single question to broaden it out. For example:

- Are the emotional repercussions of grief felt more acutely in communities experiencing discrimination and lack of opportunity? E.g. where an individual comes from a community discriminated against by the system, would the loss of a loved one be more difficult to deal with?

Vote to select one of the questions and discuss it, keeping the fruits of your conversations (themes, further questions, provocations, points of discomfort...etc) alive as you go through the exercises below.

## **STEP TWO: EXPLORE**

### **Exercise 1:**

Rain features heavily in the play. When Petra first arrives in Scene 7 it is raining so heavily she and Adele can barely hear each other. We also learn in Scene 7 that it was raining heavily the night Ruben's mother died in a car accident – Ruben had been in the same car but survived. What is the significance of rain in the play? What does it add to the storyline? Teachers might want to offer the suggestions that heavy rain muffles sounds, making it more difficult for characters to hear themselves and each other. It restricts our ability to see clearly. It also restricts our movement and could arguably create a claustrophobic atmosphere. What else?

Ask students to use their bodies, or objects around the classroom, to insinuate the sound of heavy rain. Agree together with the class which sounds really represent heavy rain – it may be a combination of 2 or 3 sounds together. Alternate between the students as conductors, whereby they decide which sounds to silence, or reduce, in order to find the perfect representation of heavy rain.

### **Exercise 2:**

In Scene 9, Jarrod goes to find Ruben getting drunk in front of the old house, a habit he has gotten into since Joey's death. Jarrod tries to convince Ruben that Joey's suicide was not his fault.

We have a stage direction here for light rain. Building on the previous exercise, try reading the scene with the sound of light rain in the background. Remember that the boys are outdoors, so they are getting progressively soaked. How does this affect their physicality, their movement and the way they speak?

Next, try the same scene without the sound of rain altogether. Try it again with the sound of heavy rain.

What difference can students see in the execution of the scene? Do the characters hold themselves differently against the three different backdrops of rain, no rain, light rain, heavy rain? Do they communicate with one another differently?

### **Exercise 3:**

Scene 11 sees Ruben break into the old house. In a monologue he recounts the events leading up to Joey's suicide, and we begin to understand why Ruben blames himself. Ruben is bleeding, having cut his arms while climbing through one of the windows, and he is full of pain, angst and regret.

Ruben begins the monologue with an outburst, smashing cans of beer against the wall. By the time he reaches the end of the monologue, we learn that when he saw Joey hanging from the very fishing net Ruben himself had bought, he was 'stuck' and 'couldn't move'.

We have here two opposing psycho-somatic states in one monologue – a journey from an explosive outburst to paralysis, from violent physicality to an inability to move.

Select a student to read the monologue while walking forward (e.g. they must get from point A to point B while speaking the words). Select another student or two to hold the actor back, making it difficult for them to reach their destination. The actor is therefore facing resistance while they deliver the monologue. Ensure that this is all done safely so that those holding the actor back avoid the face and focus on holding the actor back from the torso area only, preferably the waist.

What happens to the actor when their energy is worn down by fatigue? What changes in the way they deliver the lines as they journey from point A to point B? How does that mirror Ruben's emotional journey?

You may choose to layer on sounds of rain building from the previous exercise.

### **STEP THREE: FEEDBACK**

Discuss what came up for the students. What are they still wondering about? What was the most interesting thing they learned? What was their least favourite part and why?