

***Winter Solstice*, by Roland Schimmelpfennig  
Translated by David Tushingham  
Education Pack**

**THEMES:**

FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS  
EXTREMISM & PREJUDICE  
TRUTH & BETRAYAL

**GENRE:** Comedy, Political Theatre

**AGE RESTRICTION:** 16+ (racist innuendo)

**NUMBER OF CHARACTERS:** 7 (4F, 3M)

**CHARACTER LIST:**

**ALBERT**, no older than 40s, possibly 30s, Bettina's partner, a classic intellectual, with glasses, seemingly careless

**BETTINA**, no older than 40s, possibly 30s, Albert's partner, slim, good looking, creative, highly intelligent

**RUDOLPH**, mid 60s, slim, good-looking with a charming smile, Corinna's friend from the train

**CORINNA**, Bettina's mother

**KONRAD**, a friend of the family and a childhood friend of Albert's, a painter

**MARIE**, 8 years old, Bettina and Albert's daughter, we never see her

**NAOMI**, Albert's publisher and mistress, we never see her

There are also lines to be spoken in addition to the dialogue.

**SYNOPSIS:**

It is Christmas Eve in a liberal, middle-class household in modern day Germany. Bettina and her husband Albert aren't happy. Bettina's mother, Corinna, is staying for the holidays, which is awkward because she met a man on the train and now she's invited him around for drinks...

While Albert and Bettina bicker, Corinna will say anything to draw attention to herself, and Marie is constantly underfoot. Rudolph, Corinna's unexpected stranger from the train, receives an awkward welcome but soon ingratiates himself within the family with this suave, charming persona. That is, until he casually reveals racist, supremacist theories and ideas with alarming implications given Germany's dark history. Will anyone challenge Rudolph's seemingly-banal interjections, at the cost of disrupting the complacent comfort of this well-to-do family?

Family, betrayal and the inescapable presence of the past reverberate through this razor-sharp comedy.

The play was originally written in German and was translated into English in 2017 by David Tushingham.

The play is written as a single scene.

**KEY MOMENTS:**

**12.1-12.20 (2M)**

Konrad and Albert discuss the truth, secrets and what choices we make around what to reveal and keep hidden. Crucially, Konrad says, 'And you haven't got a clue what truth is. But Still. You're looking for it.'

**2.1 to 2.14 (2F, 1M)**

A classic family argument. Albert and Bettina argue about Bettina's attitude and behavior around her mother, while Bettina accuses Albert of cowardice which he vehemently denies.

**17.56 to 18.1 (1F, 2M)**

Albert speaks out against Rudolph's racist ideas, asking him to leave his house, at the risk of terminating Corrine's happiness and at the cost of inviting huge discomfort to himself and his household.

**STEP ONE: ASK**

Refer to moments 12.1-12.20 (described in the 'Key Moments' section above).

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

- Would we all be better off if the truth is always spoken? This may be the truth behind our intentions, how we are really feeling, what we really think of one another...etc.

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:**

The play takes place across a number of rooms – a bathroom, Maria's bedroom, the kitchen, the entrance, the lounge and the street. In addition, the playwright gives unassigned lines (which sometimes also include lines

intended for the characters) to be spoken. Finally, the characters of Maria and Naomi are to be heard but not seen.

In groups, assign students the task of considering how they might stage this play. Among the questions they must consider are:

- How would they design the set when activity takes place across so many rooms? In reaching a consensus over the approach, invite the groups to consider why the unassigned lines are so detailed and so frequently embedded within the dialogue.
- Would the unassigned lines be shared by the existing characters or read by an additional actor?
- How would they account for the voices of Maria and Naomie? How could we interpret the playwright's directions that they are 'unseen'? Invite them to consider why, within the context of the play, those two characters remain unseen.
- Instead of scenes, the playwright chooses very brief 'moments', which overlap the present, the past and the future with the untold and the unspoken. How would the group delineate the move from one moment to another? Is there a need to?

Share and discuss.

### **Exercise 2:**

Read moments 13.48.1-13.50. Here, Corrine tells Albert something she never tells Bettina – a hidden truth. Take a moment to refer back to the question you engaged with around truth at the start of the session.

Read through 13.42 to 13.47, assigning Bettina and Corrine to two students, and their truth-telling alter egos to another two students. Every time Bettina or Corinne say a line, their alter ego speaks what they are really thinking. The veil of untruth is revealed.

Next read 13.51 to 13.59.4 – what is the cost of telling the truth?

Try this with various other moments in the play, such as:

2.1 to 2.14: A classic family argument (described in 'Key Moments' above).

5.21 to 5.26: More arguments between Albert and Bettina.

7.2 to 7.33: Corrine and Rudolph flirt while Albert and Bettina try to make sense of it all.

### **Exercise 3:**

Read moments 17.56 through to the end of the play.

Read through again, but this time in sections:

17.56 to 18.1

18.1 to 18.20

19.1 to the end

Ask the students what they notice about the time and how events unfold. Essentially, we see the cost of leaving our truths unspoken in a divergence of events from 12.46pm. In one version (17.56 to 18.1) as described in the 'Key Moments' section above, Albert speaks out against Rudolph's racist ideas, asking him to leave his house. In the other version (18.1 to 18.20), Marie awakes and Albert remains silent, leaving Rudolph's extremist ideas unquestioned. Disturbingly, we are left with a seemingly 'peaceful' closing scene in this second version.

Ask students, what is the cost of us remaining silent in the face of hatred and prejudice? What is the cost of speaking up against extremist right-wing ideas (currently on the rise globally)? Teachers may wish to look at ideas of positive and negative peace, which are established ideas in the field of Peace Education.

In groups, students could improvise how the play might end had Marie not woken up at 12.46pm. If Albert were to make a scene and ask Rudolph to leave his house, how might the rest of the scene have played out?

### **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?