



**Esplanade
Presents**

**Feed Your
Imagination**

Trick or Threat!

by Drama Box (Singapore)

Presented by Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay
with support from National Arts Council

21 – 24 May 2018, Mon – Thu

Esplanade Theatre Studio

Recommended Level: Lower Secondary – Upper Secondary

Teacher's Resource Guide



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[Pre-show Preparation]

Dear teachers,

Thank you for your interest in bringing your students to attend *Trick or Threat!* as part of the *Feed Your Imagination (F.Y.I)* series.

Before you come for the show, there are just 3 things we would like you to share with your students.

1. WHERE is the production happening?

Trick or Threat! is being staged at the Theatre Studio at Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay. Most theatre venues have their own set of etiquette, and Esplanade is no different. You can view Esplanade's etiquette guide for productions in [Annex A](#).

2. WHAT is the production about?

In *Trick or Threat!*, five passengers of different ethnicities are trapped in an MRT cabin. One of them receives an SMS about a bomb, sending everyone into a state of panic.

It is a Forum Theatre* performance that explores 'racial' biases surrounding terrorist threats. It also provides a safe space for students to participate and try out different ways of solving the problems presented in the play.

*WHAT is Forum Theatre?

This is a form that was developed by Brazilian theatre master Augusto Boal under the larger umbrella of 'Theatre of the Oppressed'.

A key characteristic of Forum Theatre is that it is meant to give voice to the marginalised and on the fringes of society. Through its unique form, Forum Theatre pieces invite passive spectators to become proactive "spect-actors" by coming onstage to replace actors.

3. WHO is the production by?



Trick or Threat! is created by Drama Box, who creates theatre that inspires dialogue, reflection and change. By shining a spotlight on marginalised narratives and making space for the communal contemplation of complex issues, we seek to tell stories that provoke a deeper understanding of Singapore's culture, history and identity.

Drama Box is a recipient of the National Arts Council's Major Grant 2017 – 2020. Drama Box is also a member of the Singapore Chinese Language Theatre Alliance.

www.dramabox.org

DID YOU KNOW?



Trick or Threat! has been performed more than 20 times since 2007.

The director for the show this time is Rei Poh, a committed multi-cultural theatre practitioner who believes in the power of theatre to transform, and to create hope.

Having trained as a director and facilitator under the likes of Adrian Jackson, Babara Santos and David Diamond, Rei has created thought-provoking community and forum theatre works such as *Girl in the White Sand Box*, *Who Cares About Me?* and *Run, Run, Run*.

He has also appeared in *12 Angry Men* and *An Enemy of the People* by Nine Years Theatre to positive reviews. Rei's recent project *ATTEMPTS*, a participatory piece that experiments with videogames narrative, was showcased in Melbourne and at the M1 Singapore Fringe Festival 2018.

[Post-show Activities]

What are some thoughts after watching *Trick or Threat!*?

We have prepared a *Tuned In – Performance Guide* for students that teachers can use to kickstart further discussions with their classes. Inside the guide, there are links to some supporting resources as well (see [Annex B](#)).

Before going through the guide, we wanted to highlight to teachers the body of research that has indicated that ‘race’ is a social construct rather than clearly defined genetic categories, as this has informed the framing of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ in the student guide.

A useful article to read on the topic is [“How Science and Genetics are Reshaping the Race Debate of the 21st Century”](#), from Harvard University’s *Science in the News*, and below is a short excerpt from it:

Estimating our ancestral composition down to 0.1% seem to suggest that there are exact, categorical divisions between human populations. But reality is far less simple. Compared to the general public’s enthusiasm for ancestry testing, the reaction from scientists has been considerably more lukewarm. Research indicates that the concept of “five races” does, to an extent, describe the way human populations are distributed among the continents—but the lines between races are much more blurred than ancestry testing companies would have us believe.

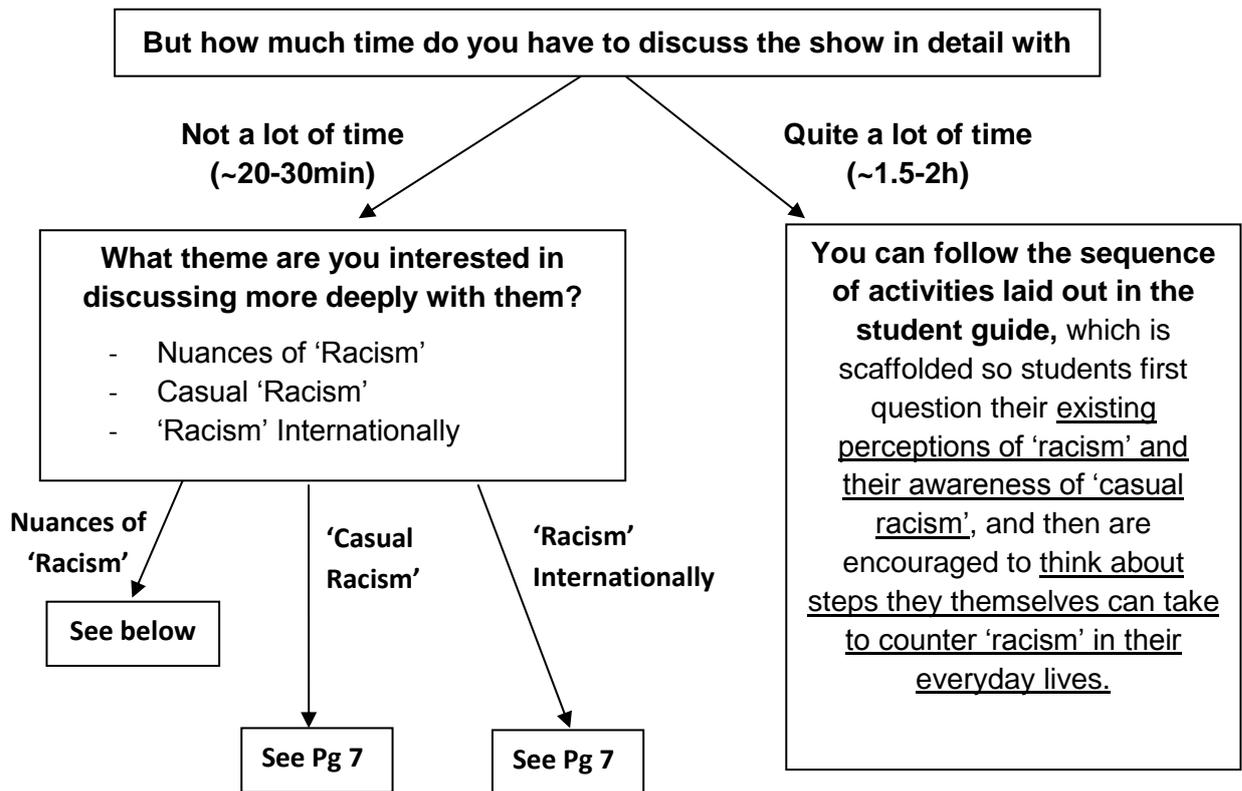
In line with this, we have taken up a few conventions used in the essay “A Memo on ‘Race’” in *This Is What Inequality Looks Like*, a recently published book by Professor Teo You Yenn. For instance, we have placed inverted commas around words like ‘race’, ‘racism’, and ‘racist’ in the students’ guide, so as to denote that ‘race’ is a social construct that still needs to be questioned and probed into further.

Another convention we have drawn on is to, as much as possible, be specific about ways in which ‘race’ is played out, rather than simply using the term ‘racism’ as a catchall phrase. As such, while we have continued to use the terms ‘racism’ and ‘racist’ as these are likely to be more familiar for students, you will notice that we have elaborated on *how* something or someone might be ‘racist’ – Professor Teo describes in her essay a number of ways in which ‘racism’ plays out, but for the purposes of the guide, we have only highlighted the salient ones for *Trick or Threat!*, such as categorisation and discrimination.

Finally, it would be also helpful to remind students that ‘race’ and religion do not go hand in hand. Not everyone who identifies as Chinese is a Buddhist or a Taoist, and not everyone who identifies as Malay is a Muslim.

We believe that it would be worthwhile to spend some time sharing about this with the students before diving into the student *Tuned In – Performance Guide*, and here are some additional short readings that you can share with them:

- [“Race and Racial Identity Are Social Constructs”](#), New York Times
- [Racial and Ethnic Stratification – Part 1, UNCG sociology notes](#)
- [“Race Is A Social Construct”](#), Centre for Health Progress



Nuances of 'Racism': Everyone's a little bit 'racist'?

This activity is a quick way to extend students' discussion from the initial sharing about 'race', and to highlight how 'race' becomes significant through specific means such as categorisation and discrimination as depicted in the play. Not all the moments listed as 'racist' take place via the same means, and it would be productive to take time to invite discussion about how 'racism' takes place in these various moments.

As such, in going through this activity with the students, you may find the following approaches useful:

- Using these moments as minor milestones to guide students to recollect how the play unfolded
- Facilitating a class discussion about each of the moments, and having deeper discussions based on whether the students were surprised about certain moments listed as being 'racist'
 - o You may also want to draw attention as to whether only a few students were surprised, or, if the majority were surprised, to talk about the class' general threshold of 'racism'
- Brainstorming possible reasons why characters in the play responded as they did, discussing whether the students would have done the same, and challenging whether these comments and/or actions are justifiable, as a way to develop the students' empathy

'Casual Racism'

In this activity, the focus is on bringing the students' attention to moments of 'casual racism' in their day to day life, and then encouraging them to go beyond being a passive bystander.

You may find the following approaches useful:

- Brainstorming with the students more specific examples of 'casual racism'
- Viewing the video from the student guide together in class (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNDZfZ7KYNs>), and then guiding students to brainstorm possible actions using the strategies of Direct, Distract, and Delegate, as described in the video

Racism Internationally

This activity is aimed at broadening the discussion around 'racism' to countries and societies beyond Singapore. Apart from highlighting 'racism' as a global issue, this activity should also encourage students to reflect on ways that individual voices can come together to make a stand on 'racism' and other issues.

You may find the following approaches useful:

- Assigning the different articles listed in the student guide to different groups of students in class, and then having a class debate on whether the depicted ads really are 'racist', or whether people are perhaps being oversensitive.
- Discussing the issues that might arise if
 - i) people are oversensitive, or
 - ii) if people don't call out potentially 'racist' incidents

If you have another half an hour with the students, you can even talk about the issue of privilege. In the play, the character Faizal can be seen to try and highlight one type of privilege – ‘Chinese privilege’ – to another character, but he fails to bring his point across.

But what do we mean by privilege?

- You can screen this 2016 social experiment video by Channel News Asia which looks a bit more closely at the idea of privilege, and how it plays out in Singapore: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2hvibGdg4w>

What about Chinese privilege?

- You can share this article that shares thoughts from two reporters, one from The Straits Times and the other from Lianhe Zaobao:

<https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/being-chinese-in-multi-racial-spore>

- You could also try going through this checklist of Chinese Privilege with the students: <https://medium.com/chinese-privilege/chinese-privilege-checklist-42ca0725e195>

(However, do frame it as a casual activity, as this is not a scientific checklist per se!)

*For your own reference, you can also read this article by a writer who identifies as *Kristang*, a very small community in Singapore:

<http://www.fivestarsandamoon.com/2014/09/outside-the-margins-chinese-privilege-in-singapore/>.

The article is quite long, but it does unpack some of the complexities and concerns about the issues of ethnic privilege versus racism in Singapore.

What else should we take note of about privilege?

“Privilege comes in a myriad of forms, including race, gender, wealth, physical fitness, safety, and educational attainment and indeed height. However, the people who have those things are usually unaware of their power and influence.” - <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/jun/08/workplace-gender-equality-invisible-privilege>

In other words, we could just as easily talk about male privilege, female privilege, middle-class privilege, and so on so forth. All of these lenses affect different people’s lives in diverse ways, and ultimately as individuals it is about being aware that we are privileged in some ways (and disadvantaged in others), and these need to be addressed in order to achieve greater equality.

6 WAYS TO ENJOY YOUR SHOW **(...and how not to attract disapproving stares!)**

1. Shhh...

Being a considerate audience member means that you give your full attention to the performers. So no talking while a performance is going on.

2. Beep Beep!

Switch off your mobile phone. The vibration, beeping and light are going to be a distraction to the performers and members of the audience.

3. Rustle! Rip! Ouch!

Keep fidgeting and noise to a minimum. The rustling from a candy wrapper, the sound of Velcro ripping or even the jangle of your jewellery might sound loud in a quiet venue. Also, always be mindful of ramming your elbows into your neighbour or kicking the seat in front of you.

4. NOm NOm!

Do not eat or drink in the venue unless you are allowed to. Satisfy your hunger pangs before or after the show.

5. Get Comfy

Always arrive early and give yourself ample time to visit the washroom before the start of the performance. Do not leave the venue during the performance unless it is an emergency. If you do leave the venue, you will only be allowed back in during the intermission or at a suitable pause in the performance.

6. Clap! Clap!

Love what you've watched? Show your appreciation by applauding at the end of the performance! If you are not sure when to clap, take the cue from others around you.

Annex B – List of resources highlighted in the Student *Tuned In – Performance Guide*

Everyone’s a little bit ‘racist’

Nil

‘Casual Racism’

- Strategies for bystander intervention –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NNDZfZ7KYNs>

‘Racism’ Internationally

As mentioned in the student guide, there have been a number of ads or products that have been highlighted by netizens as being ‘racist’, but there are also people who have written articles to speak for these ads and/or the parent company. Here are a selection of articles that include various perspectives about these cases:

- Basic overview of recent instances where brands have been denounced by netizens for coming across as ‘racist’ and insensitive –
<https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/dove-facebook-advert-racist-many-beauty-brands-accused-unilever-black-woman-white-nivea-tarte-a7991016.html>

[Ad by a personal care chain store]

- Article about netizens’ reaction –
<http://www.marketing-interactive.com/watson-malaysias-black-face-aya-ad-labelled-racist-by-netizens/>
- Full apology from the chain store –
<https://www.facebook.com/watsonsmalaysia/photos/a.440558124408.215385.311273939408/10156179954349409/?type=3&theater>

[Ad by an online retail store]

- Article about netizens’ reaction –
<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-5316783/Amazon-pulls-22-Chinese-boy-fancy-dress-costume.html>
- **Note: The online retail store took down the ad, but there was no formal response issued by them with regards to netizens’ complaints.*

[A body wash ad]

- Platform that links to articles with different perspectives about the ad –
<https://www.theperspective.com/perspectives/living/doves-latest-ad-racist/>
- Article that discusses the claim that ‘the ad is not racist because there is an Asian model’ – <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2017/10/no-having-asian-woman-dove-ad-does-not-make-it-less-racist>

Did You Know?

- Article about how cameras perpetuated the discrimination against skin tones at one point – <https://petapixel.com/2015/09/19/heres-a-look-at-how-color-film-was-originally-biased-toward-white-people/>

Interested to learn more about the arts? Check out www.esplanade.com/learn for more resources!

END.

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