



Presents...

Half-Full

Teacher's Guide

- Relate HALF FULL to the Ontario Curriculum.
- Learn how Forum Theatre creates a unique relationship with the audience.
- Discover effective strategies for dealing with anxiety.
- Get ideas for project activities in your classroom.

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1. Introduction

a. BACKGROUND

Anxiety is defined as "a feeling of worry or unease." Most young people experience anxiety in some form when confronted with, for instance, exams or new social situations, and the notion of "teenage angst" is hardly new or unusual.

However, the proliferation of social media has enhanced and complicated these regular teenage stressors, and it has become increasingly clear that these factors have led to increased experiences of anxiety among young people. This is what HALF-FULL aims to address. In the play, our protagonist, Josh, is faced with the progressively inhibitive presence of Anx - the restless voice of anxiety in the head. Anx feeds off social media, distorting and catastrophizing online interactions and events, leading Josh to increasing feelings of hopelessness, and social paralysis and exclusion.

It is here where anxiety becomes Anxiety Disorder, which affects eight percent of Canadian teenagers.

With only one in five young people getting the help they need for mental health issues, it is vital that educators and counsellors take the initiative to spark an important dialogue about what constitutes anxiety, and how to reach out for help. Sadly, stigma – from both the self and from others - prevents many young people from taking this important step. In HALF-FULL, we see Josh struggling to reach out for fear of being judged.

Friends, family, educators and counsellors all have important roles to play in regard - by acknowledging that we're all in this together, and that help is at hand when it is sought, anxiety and Anxiety Disorder can be tackled effectively.

b. INTRODUCTION TO FORUM THEATRE

HALF-FULL is presented in a Forum Theatre format. This issues-based, interactive form of theatre gives students themselves the chance to participate in realistic and relevant situations. They are presented with a "worst-case scenario" in order to get them to critically engage with what they see, and think of ways in which the scenario can be changed for the better. They get the opportunity to do this through intervention. They become performers themselves - "spect-actors" - by stopping the action and proposing constructive solutions to the problems in the scene. All of these interventions are mediated by a trained Mixed Company Theatre Facilitator who will make sure that the interventions are productive and helpful. This process is often called "rehearsing for reality," in which students can create positive alternatives to what they see in the play, in a safe and theatrical manner.



c. GOALS OF HALF-FULL

HALF FULL was created to address the increasing concerns of the role of anxiety in the lives of Canadian young people.

The goals of the play are:

- To address how anxiety manifests in the lives of young people, and the roles that school stress, home life and social pressure play in the escalation of crippling mental turmoil.
- Ask questions pertaining to the inhibiting factors that prevent young people from reaching out and communicating their fears and worries to those closest to them.
- Explore the possible influences of social media on increased experiences of anxiety, especially as related to friendships and burgeoning romantic relationships.

2. THE PLAY

a. Synopsis

Josh is a good-natured jokester who likes to creep his classmates on Facebook. Life is good – he’s getting ready for track-team try-outs and summoning up the courage to ask his friend Saffy out on a date. But there’s something he can’t quite shake off; a small voice in his head that just won’t keep quiet. This is Anx. Anx is Josh’s anxiety personified – a paranoid character that always assumes the worst and tries to undermine everything that Josh says or does. One day, a misjudged joke in Geography class sparks off a social media campaign against Josh that increases the presence of Anx in his life. Suddenly, the day-to-day stresses of family life and school start to overwhelm Josh – his mother, teachers and friends seem further away than ever before. Anx becomes more menacing and belligerent. Josh struggles to keep Anx in check and gradually alienates himself from his friends. Is this the only option available to Josh? Though open and supportive facilitation, this play leads students to discuss what Josh and others in the play can do to deal with anxiety.

b. CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

- **Josh:** a good-natured jokester who is well-liked by his peers and teachers. He does, however, have a predilection for creeping his friends on social media and struggles to connect with his mom. He experiences increasing bouts of anxiety, and ends up excluding himself from his friends when anxiety’s grip gets too tight.
- **Anx:** the imaginary friend from hell. Anx is the inner voice of Josh’s anxiety. He starts out as an irritating but small voice, but slowly strengthens his grip on Josh’s grasp of reality.
- **Saffy:** Josh’s partner-in-social-media-creeping-crime, Saffy is a kind-natured and supportive friend. She is also heavily involved with social media and tends to overdo the selfies. She



becomes increasingly concerned about Josh's behaviour and tries to reach out to him when isolates himself from school.

- **Mom:** a well-intentioned, if overbearing parent who is prone to making frequent phone calls to Josh's school. In spite of her involvement in Josh's school life, she fails to spot the signs of anxiety that slowly begin to strangle Josh's ability to cope with life's stresses.
- **Ms. Tam:** Josh's teacher, who takes an active interest in Josh's academic and personal development. She is empathetic to Josh's difficulties and tries to offer him guidance.
- **Internet:** a seductive force in Josh's life, Internet will stop at nothing to derail Josh's peace of mind.

3. THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Please review the following theatre guidelines with your students prior to the performance:

Please be considerate audience members. Talking, whispering, snacking or shuffling about in seats disrupts the actors and distracts the audience.

Please ensure that your phones are turned off. Texting during a performance is also a major distraction to the actors and other audience members.

Please try not to leave and re-enter during the performance. Plan washroom visits for before or after the show.

Taking photographs and recording sound or video during a performance is strictly prohibited by Canadian Actor's Equity regulations.

4. PRE-SHOW ACTIVITY

NOTE: Before starting each class exercise, it is important to establish the classroom (or venue in which the activity is taking place) as a safe space. At MCT, we reiterate the expression: "No harm to yourself, no harm to others, and no harm to the space."

The Big Question: "What is anxiety?"



1. This exercise will begin with a brainstorm session involving the entire class. Ask students to throw out words they think associate with the concept of "anxiety."

Write these words on the board as they are suggested by the students. Then, ask the class which of the words on the board are most relevant to them and why. Information to elicit includes:

- How are these words associated with anxiety?
- What feelings/emotions are connected with these words?

2. "Auto Sculpting" - self-sculpting the body to express ideas through physical images

By creating still images with the body, participants are often able to represent more than they could communicate with words. This is an opportunity for students to begin observing and sharing their own thoughts pertaining to anxiety in a more immediate, less verbal way. It is also an expressive opportunity for students to start working with their bodies, exploring gestures, space and character motivation.

*****NOTES ON SCULPTING*****

This is a non-verbal exercise, and students should be careful not to talk while sculpting takes place.

Students must take care not to place each other in physically harmful or uncomfortable positions.

The sculptor can move parts of the body (e.g. arms or legs), but she can also demonstrate a posture and have the other student imitate her. This is called "mirroring."

Facial expressions should also be included in the sculpture.

All students form a circle and face outward with their eyes closed. Announce a word or phrase associated with anxiety. You can use some of the words on the board from the brainstorm session, or other ones, like: "rumors, whispers, click, forgotten, like, selfie, loser, creeping, internet, newsfeed, pressure, connection, pestering, isolation, gossip, mockery, distraction, competition, Fear of Missing Out, lonely."

When the word is called out, everyone shapes their body in whatever image comes to mind, realistic or abstract, whatever it means to them.

After the students have sculpted themselves, they turn into the circle and open their eyes.

Pick out certain images and ask others to describe what they see. Choose a student/sculptor to share a few words about what they are feeling or thinking in that moment.

Repeat this exercise with another word or phrase.



Discussion Questions

- What were some observations that arose from the sculpted images? Were there any common or recurring images for each of the themes?
- Based on what we have gathered from the Brainstorm session and from the sculpted images, what are some of the underlying triggers of anxiety?
- With what feelings and actions do people respond to anxiety?
- What are some of the physical, emotional and mental signs of anxiety?

5. CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

This exercise touches on the following elements of the Drama, Language and English curricula.

❖ Drama

Grades 7 and 8: Creating and Presenting; Reflecting, Responding and Analysing

Grades 9 and 10: Creating and Presenting

The Creative Process

Elements and Conventions

Presentation Techniques and Technologies

Grades 9 and 10: Reflecting, Responding, Analysing

The Critical Analysis Process

Drama and Society

Connections Beyond the Classroom

❖ Language Oral

Grades 7 and 8: Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Oral Communication Skills and Practices.

❖ English Oral

Grades 9 and 10: Listening to Understand, Speaking to Communicate, Reflecting on Skills and Strategies.



6. A NOTE ON OTHER THEATRE ACTIVITIES

These activities were compiled to slot into the requirements of the Ontario Curriculum for Grades 7 to 10 in Dramatic Arts, and English/Language. Each exercise will consist of five parts: The "Big Question," Objectives, Materials, Activity Outline, Post- Activity Discussion, and Curriculum Connections. You can view the Other Theatre Activities Handbook [here](#).

7. COMMUNITY and INTERNET RESOURCES ¹

1. History of Madness in Canada: Madness in the Classroom (Canada: *History of Madness (2002-)*)

The History of Madness in Canada is a website run by a group of Canadian, American and British scholars and activists from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds. A curriculum for young adults was developed that fosters new understandings of how professional power, socio-economic circumstance, and intolerance of difference served to disempower and stigmatize mental health patients in the past and continue to do so in the present. Below are links to some important pages.

More for the Mind: Histories of Mental Health for the Classroom (HTML, 1 page)

Caring Minds: Youth, Mental Health and Community (Grades 7 - 12) (HTML, 1 page)

2. TakingITGlobal - Mental Health Thematic Classroom

A free online classroom pre-loaded with activities and resources designed to help your students explore mental health and related issues.

Click Here to Access Teacher and Student Resources (HTML, 1 page)

3. Healthy Transitions: Promoting Resilience and Mental Health in Young Adolescents

Healthy Transitions is a mental health promotion, early identification, intervention program for young adolescents. Interactive and activity based classroom sessions give middle school students the opportunity to enhance knowledge, attitudes and skills important for resilience and mental health. Follow the links below.

¹ This list of resources for educators was gathered from Children's Mental Health Ontario and can be accessed via the link: http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/professionals/mh_for_teachers_classrooms.php



Healthy Transitions document (HTML, 1 page)

4. Making a Difference - An Educators' Guide to Child and Youth Mental Health Problems (Third Edition)

This guide has the essentials that educators need to know in order to identify and support students with mental health needs in the school setting.

Making a Difference (PDF, 72 pages)

5. When Something's Wrong: Ideas for Teachers (Quand ça ne va pas: Aide aux enseignants aux prises avec des élèves en difficulté)

Learn how to recognize and deal with mood, thinking and behavior problems in young people.

Handbook (PDF, 56 pages)



8. ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

We compiled this information for you to share with your students. Feel free to integrate these facts into your lessons after the show. The importance of this information lies with giving students the tools to learn about the differences between everyday feelings of worry and inhibiting experiences of anxiety disorder and discover healthy strategies for the alleviation of anxiety.

a. SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ANXIETY

<p>For acute experiences of anxiety or anxiety disorder, symptoms can fluctuate or vary. Most young people who suffer from this experience a combination of some of the features outlined below.</p>		
<p>Emotional symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Constant worries running through your head * Feelings of being overwhelmed * An inability to tolerate uncertainty; you need to know what's going to happen in the future 	<p>Behavioral symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Inability to relax, enjoy quiet time, or be by yourself * Difficulty concentrating or focusing on things * Putting things off because you feel overwhelmed * Avoiding situations that make you anxious 	<p>Physical symptoms</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Feeling tense; having muscle tightness or body aches * Having trouble falling asleep or staying asleep because your mind won't quit * Feeling edgy, restless, or jumpy * Stomach problems, nausea, diarrhea



b. STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY²

Put your worries into "boxes."

Heightened anxiety comes from within. Often, anxiety is triggered by things that haven't even happened yet, or is centered on worrying that is unproductive. It is therefore important to gain perspective on your worries, and learn to distinguish between productive and unproductive worrying. If the scenarios begin with the words "what if...", they are unproductive.

"Normal" Worry:

Your worrying doesn't get in the way of your daily activities and responsibilities.

You're able to control your worrying.

Your worries, while unpleasant, don't cause significant distress.

Your worries are limited to a specific, small number of realistic concerns.

Your bouts of worrying last for only a short time.

Anxiety:

Your worrying significantly disrupts your job, activities, or social life.

Your worrying is uncontrollable.

Your worries are extremely upsetting and stressful.

You worry about all sorts of things, and tend to expect the worst.

You've been worrying almost every day for at least six months.

² The strategies in the diagram above were referenced from HelpGuide.org. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): Symptoms, Treatment, and Self-Help: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad.htm>



Practice relaxation techniques

Acute anxiety filters into the body's ability to relax. This comes from the "flight or fight" reaction that is often triggered by anxious episodes - fast heart rate; shallow, rapid breathing, and muscular tension. Progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing and meditation have all been proven to neutralize the physical effects of anxiety, promoting feelings of serenity and well-being. In fact, yoga in some middle and high schools has yielded many benefits in combating anxiety, with teens scoring better on psychosocial tests than those others who have not taken up the practice.

Reach out

It is important to talk to others about your worries and fears, especially when feelings of anxiety start to escalate. Reach out to a trusted friend, family member or teacher. Just talking about your worries can help you see them in a new light and make them seem less menacing. Get involved in activities in which you can build a healthy social network. Make time for face-to-face communication, and ration your time spent online - it may lead to feelings of isolation, not inclusion.

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³ The information in the diagram above was referenced from HelpGuide.org. Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD): Symptoms, Treatment, and Self-Help: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad.htm> and Lippincott Williams & Wilkins: Yoga shows psychological benefits for high-school students. Wolters Kluwer Health. Science Daily. <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/04/120404101824.htm> respectively.



9. WORKS CITED

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The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1 – 8. The Arts. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts18b09curr.pdf>

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10. The Arts. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/arts910curr2010.pdf>

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1 – 8. Language. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/language18currb.pdf>

The Ontario Curriculum Grades 9 and 10. English. <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/arts910curr2010.pdf>

