

# YOUTHTEATRE

## J'ai jamais...

By Rhiannon Collett

Translated by Pénélope Bourque

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### STUDY GUIDE

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## ABOUT YOUTHEATRE

Founded in 1968, Youtheatre is Quebec's oldest professional theatre for young audiences. For more than 50 years, Youtheatre's productions have been performed to over two million young people throughout Quebec and Canada. Youtheatre engages its audience through compelling theatre which provokes, questions, challenges and entertains.

# Synopsis

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Kate and Sam are best friends, but there's a tension building in their relationship. When Kate's sister falls victim to an act of violence, they are determined to bring the perpetrator to justice. On a summer evening, their actions tear a hole in reality as the assailant's heart falls out of his chest and onto the pavement, just as it begins to snow in the middle of summer. Their relationship crumbles in the aftermath and the girls are left to question whether any of us are truly worthy of forgiveness.

*J'ai jamais...* is an urban fantasy that explores love, betrayal, friendship, and identity.





# Characters

**Sam:** a 16-year-old girl who lives with her mother and brother. Her parents are currently going through a nasty divorce. She's a bit of an outsider at school and spends most of her time alone. Her friendship with Kate raises questions about her sexuality, and her parents' divorce is shaking her sense of stability.

**Kate:** a 16-year-old girl who lives with her older sister, Frankie, and is new to Sam's school. She's fiercely independent and protective of her family. Kate is extremely smart. She's an outsider too, but in a cool way.

**Victor:** Sam's brother. Also feeling destabilized by the divorce, he is turning more to anger than Sam.

J'ai jamais... & Genre



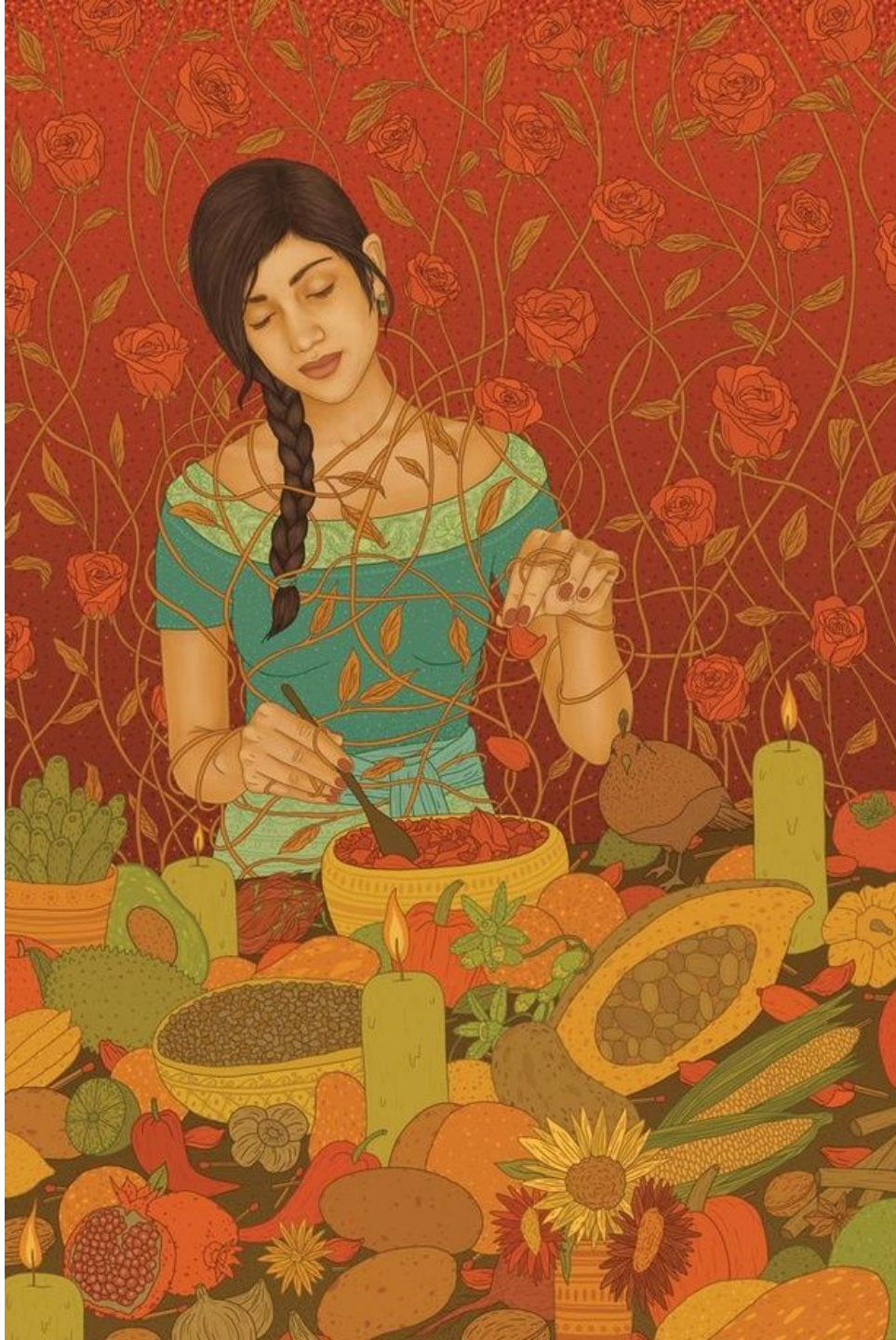
# Genre & Literary Devices

- **Genre** is a category of art, music or literature characterized by similarities in form, style and/or subject matter.  
For example, science fiction, mystery, and fantasy are all examples of genre.
- **Literary Devices** are specific techniques that allow a writer to convey a deeper meaning that goes beyond what's on the page. Literary devices work alongside plot and characters to elevate a story and prompt reflection on life, society, and what it means to be human. For example, allegory, dramatic irony, imagery, metaphor, personification are all literary devices.

Source: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/22-essential-literary-devices#22-different-types-of-literary-devices-and-how-to-use-them>



Art by Sébastien Thibaut



# J'ai jamais... is inspired by the genre of Magical Realism

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Magical Realism is a literary movement that originated in Latin America.

Magical Realism is a genre that encompasses the magical and the mundane. It often has a very matter-of-fact tone as supernatural things happen in the otherwise ordinary world of the characters. Characters tend to go along with the strange events that unfold, because of the unusual rules that govern their world.

Art by Gaby D'Alessandro

# Magical Realism as Political Subversion

In Latin America, Magical Realism, was often a method of political subversion.

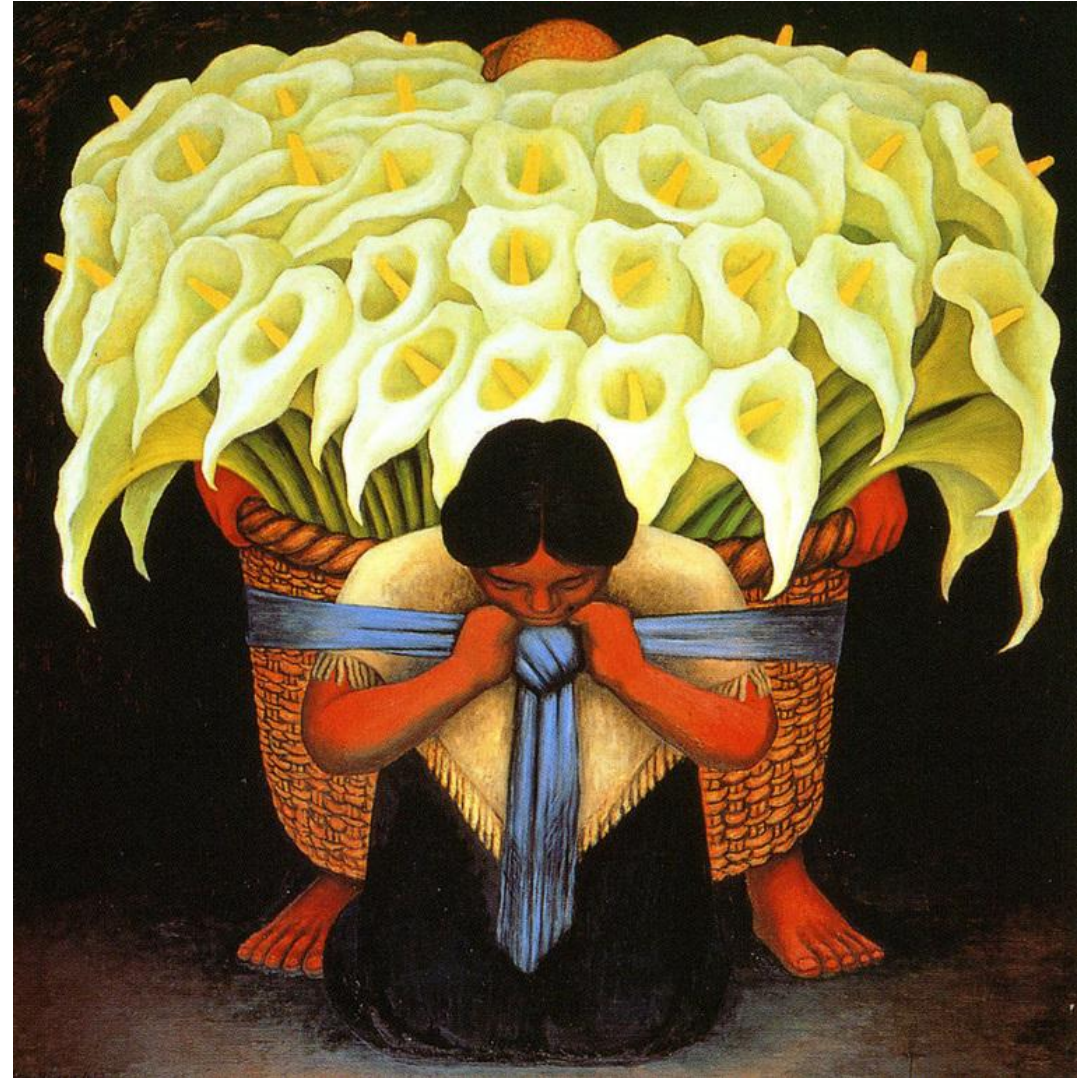
Many Magical Realists lived under oppressive regimes and dictatorships; they were unable to make political commentary for fear of their lives.

Magical Realism proved an excellent way to disguise their views; what seemed to be harmless fantasy was actually sharp political criticism to the more knowledgeable reader.

Living under a dictatorship was a surreal experience in and of itself, so oftentimes, the fantastical elements of magical realism communicated the emotional experiences of the authors in a more intimate, visceral way.

SOURCE : [<https://bookriot.com/2018/02/08/what-is-magical-realism/>]

SOURCE : [<https://www.shmoop.com/magic-realism/>]



Art by Diego Rivera





# Magical Realism as Subversion

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As a result, authors today still use magical realism to unsettle their audiences, and cause them to reconsider what they know to be “true” or “real.”

When magical elements are presented as normal, the standard structure of routine life is put into question, causing the audience to reconsider the structures they take for granted as normal (ie. political regimes, gender roles etc).

**Discussion Question: Why might writers from marginalized communities turn towards magical realism to tell their stories?**

*Art by Frida Kahlo*

# Surrealism and Magical Realism

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Around the same time that Magical Realism was growing as a literary movement in South America, surrealism was growing as an art movement.

We've already seen two pieces of art by renowned Mexican surrealist artists - Diego Rivera (below) and Frida Kahlo (above).

Surrealism sought to release human creative potential from the restrictions of reality. In the visual arts, Surrealism often juxtaposes unexpected images together in absurd and mysterious ways meant to channel dreams, hallucinations, nightmares, or simply the artist's imagination.

For artists like Kahlo and Rivera this was additionally a means to express subversive ideas through the use of fantastical elements.

Source: <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/surrealism-guide#what-is-surrealism>



# Final Recap of Magical Realism

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**Fantasy** tends to take place in a mythical setting such as Narnia or the Shire where the world has different rules from our own (and dragons, elves, talking lions etc).

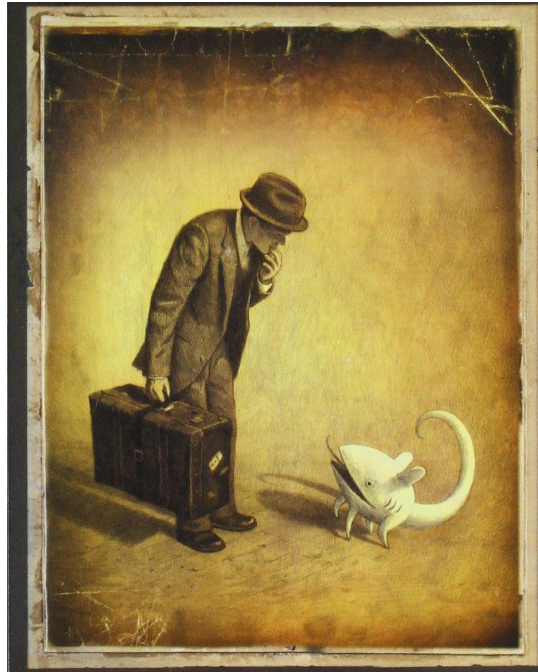


Art by Rodney Matthews



Art by Tjalf Sparnaay

**Realism** takes place in our world, and follows the rules as we know them to be in our day-to-day lives.



Art by Shaun Tan

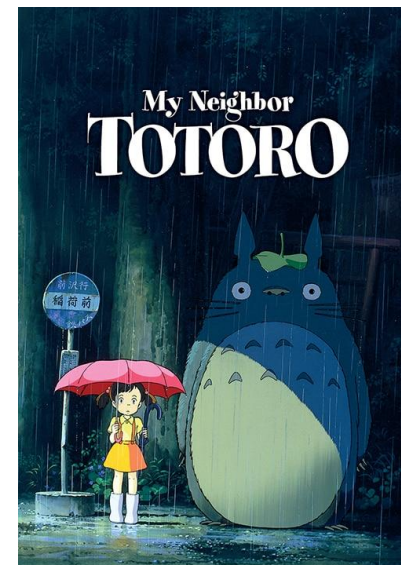
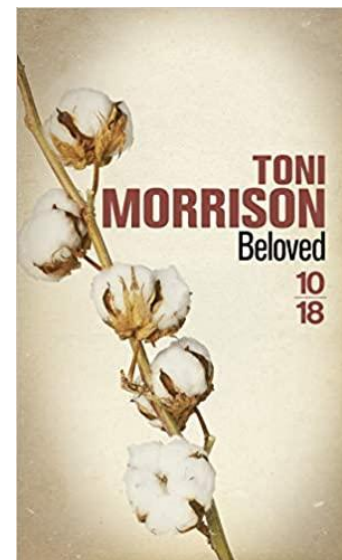
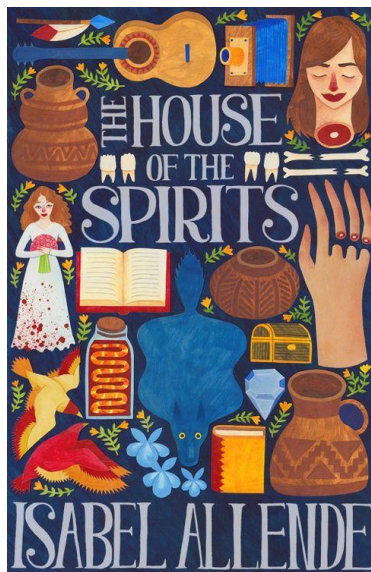
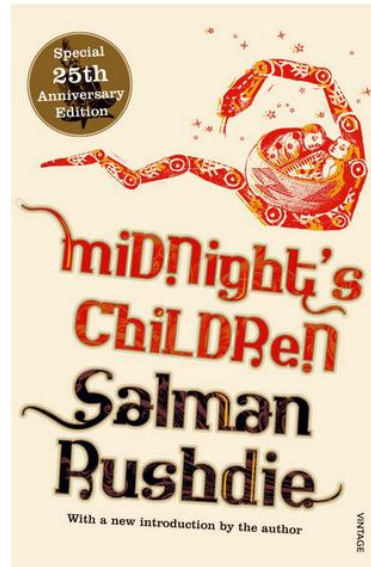
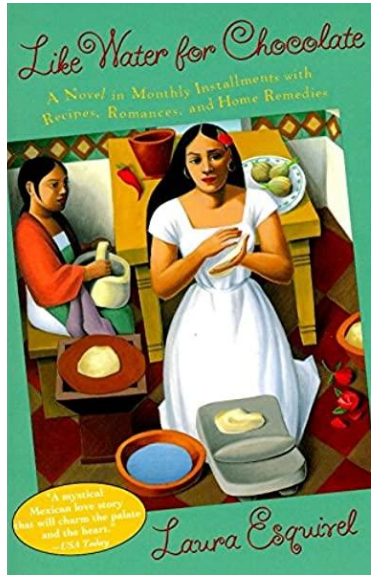
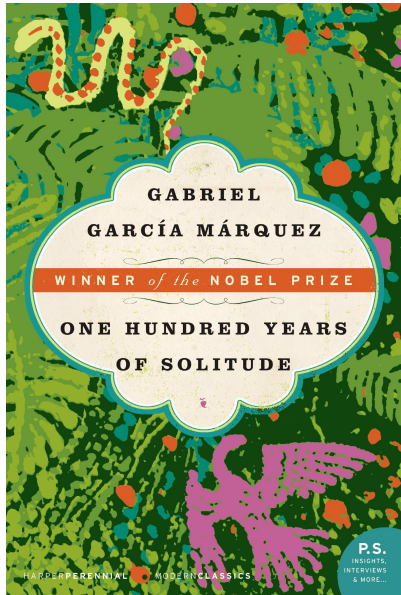
**Magical Realism** is a little bit of both - all of the magic with none of the distance.

## Additional Helpful Sources

[:https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-magical-realism](https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-magical-realism)

<https://www.vox.com/2014/4/20/5628812/11-questions-youre-too-embarrassed-to-ask-about-magical-realism>

# Examples of Magical Realism





# Questions about the play

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1. Identify the moments where fantastical elements enter into the reality of the play.
2. Describe the emotional state of the characters in these moments. Are there any parallels?
3. Why do you think the playwright chose to use magical realism in the story?
4. Identify two examples of imagery from the play.
5. What do you think these images represent in the larger meaning of the play? To the girls?

# Activity

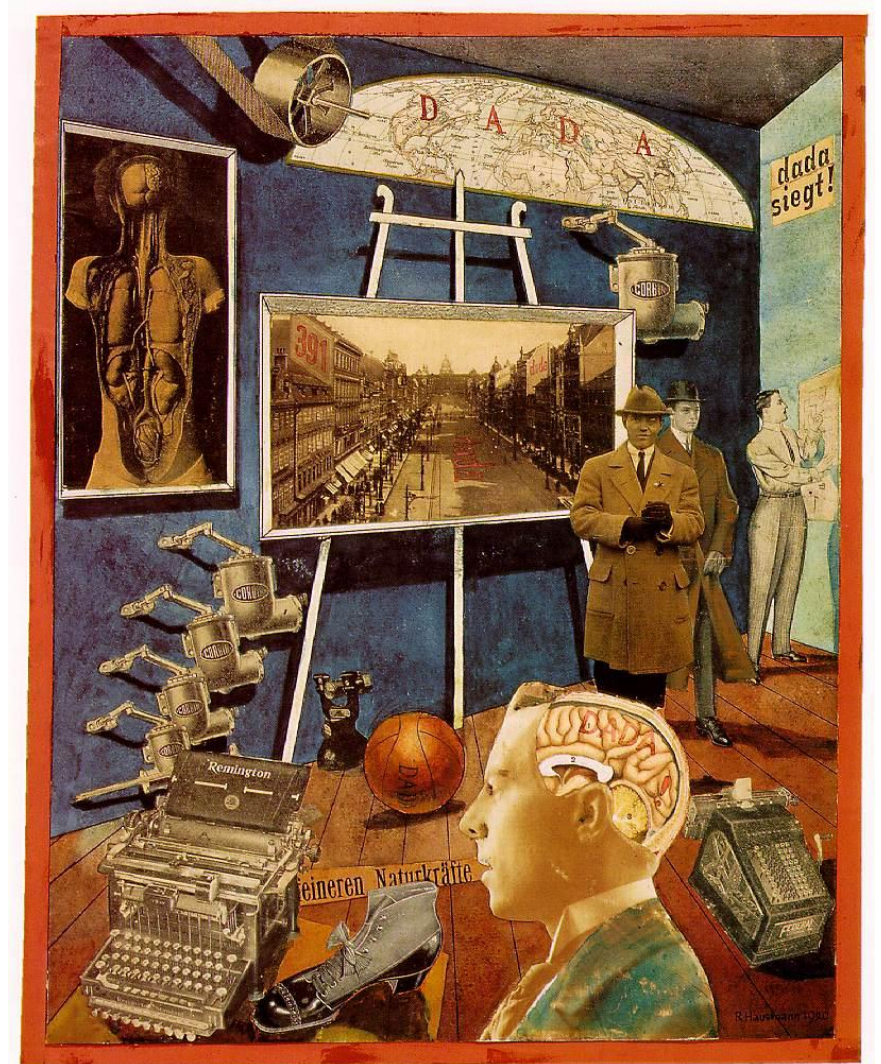
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Create your own story based in Magical Realism.

- Don't forget to place it in the real world, but add something fantastical.
- You can also use this an opportunity to talk about a cause (ex. the environment, human rights, etc.) that's important to you.

You can:

- Write a short story/play.
- Draw/paint a 'surrealist' art piece, and write a short blurb explaining your piece.
- Create a collage by cutting images from magazines, to create a real but magical place. Write a short blurb explaining your piece.



Art by Raoul Hausmann



J'ai jamais...  
& Justice

# Questions about the play

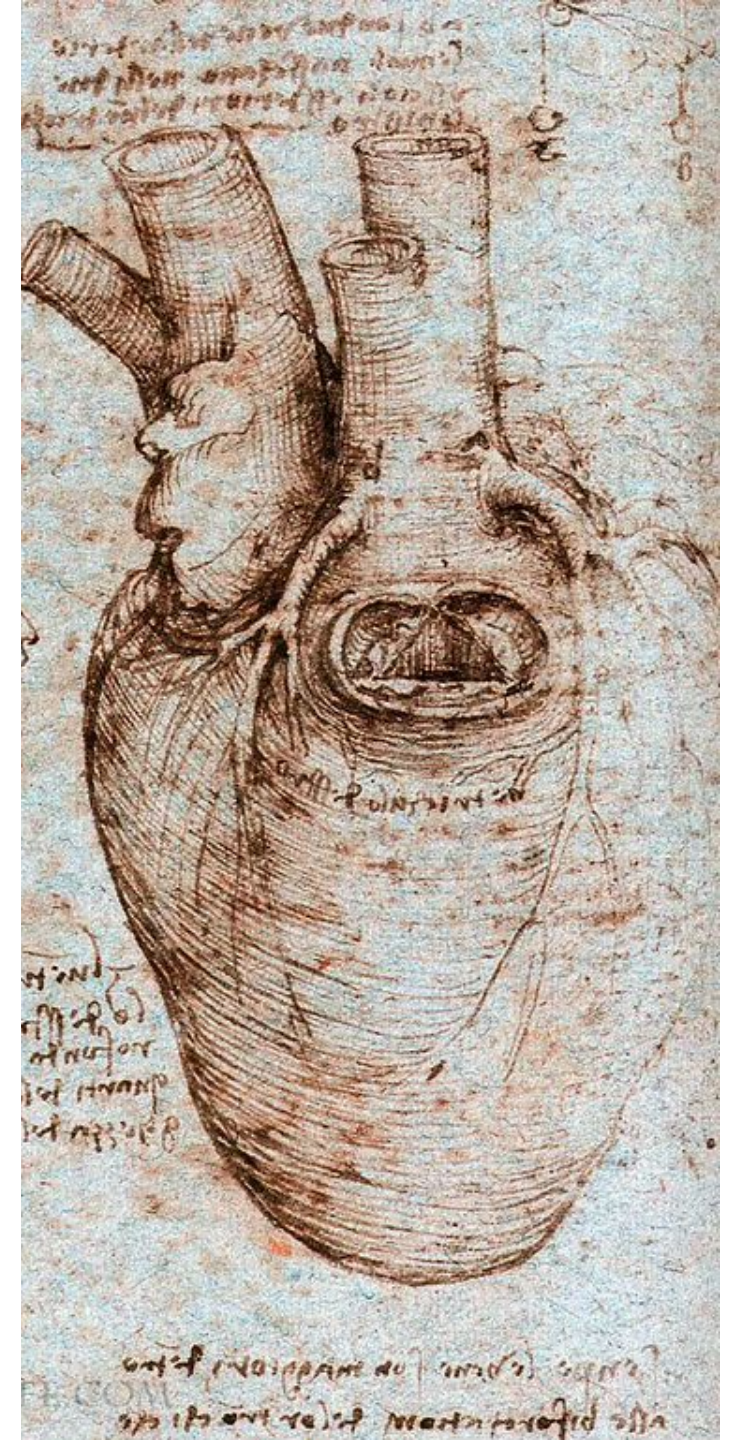
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**‘I’m the bait,’ she says. ‘And you’re the justice.’**

In *J’ai jamais...*, Kate and Sam are given a supernatural opportunity to avenge themselves against the man who assaulted Kate’s sister. Kate feels justified in her anger towards him, and by stealing his heart, she feels that she has enacted justice upon him.

1. From your perspective, what is the difference between revenge and justice?
2. What does stealing someone’s heart in the play represent for you?

Art by Leonardo DaVinci





# Questions about the play (cont.)

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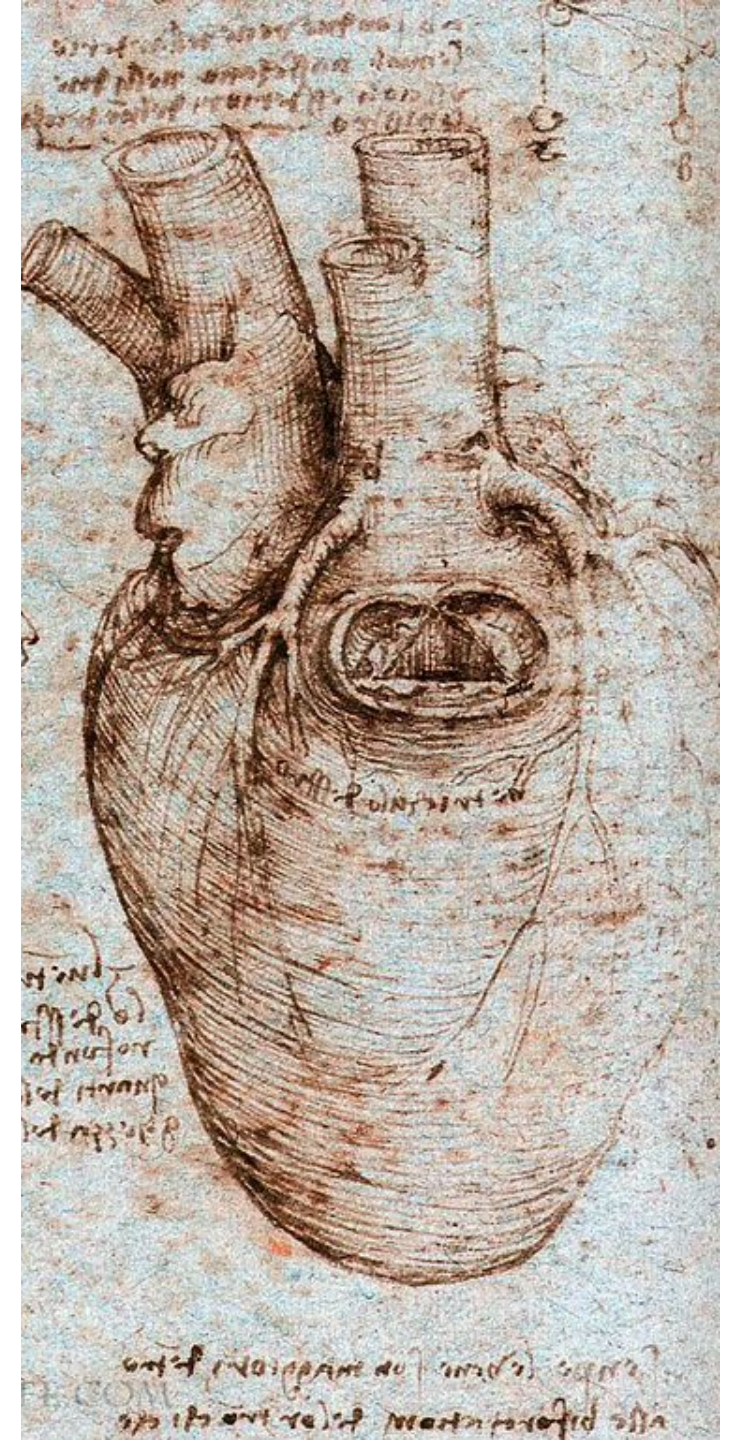
3. 'A man like that doesn't need a heart. He doesn't get one.'

What does Kate mean when she says this? Do you agree?

4. Do you think stealing someone's heart is revenge or justice?

5. Who gets to decide what is just?

6. From Sam's point of view, what do you think offering her heart to Kate symbolizes? Is this an act of revenge, justice or something else?





# Three Models of Justice

## 1. Retributive Justice

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This model argues that justice is committed to the principle that

1. those who commit certain kinds of wrongful acts, morally deserve to suffer a proportionate punishment
2. that it is intrinsically morally good if some legitimate punisher gives them the punishment they deserve
3. that it is morally incorrect to punish the innocent or to inflict disproportionately large punishments on wrongdoers

Source: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/justice-retributive/>  
Art by Dale Edwin Murray

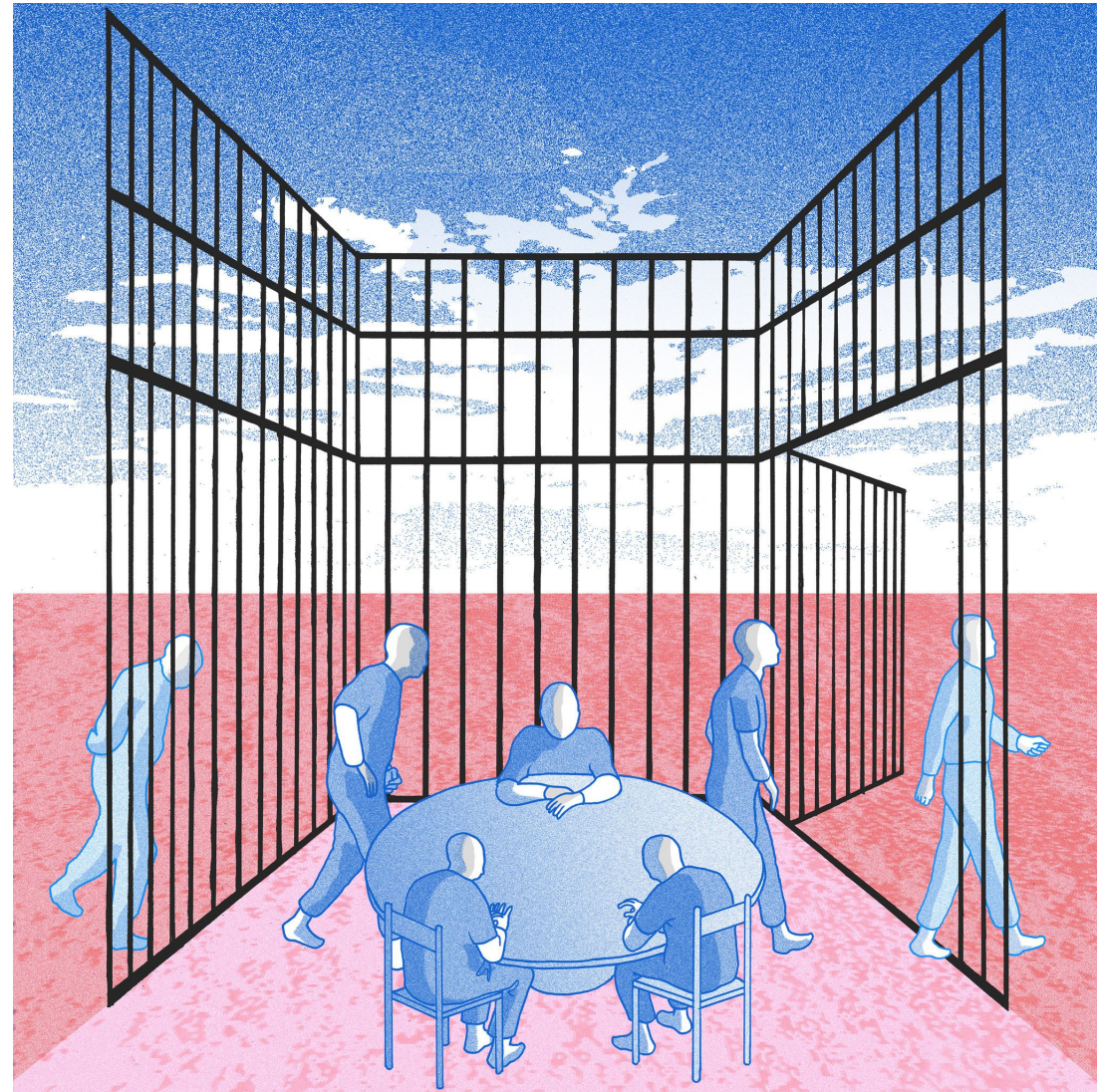
# Three Models of Justice

## 2. Rehabilitative Justice

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Rather than focusing on the offense, this approach focuses on the therapeutic rehabilitation of the offender. Examples of rehabilitation include counseling, educational programs, or anger management courses.

Art by Liam Cobb



# Three Models of Justice

## 3. Restorative Justice

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Restorative Justice is a process where all the stakeholders affected by an injustice have an opportunity to discuss how they have been affected by the injustice and to decide what should be done to repair the harm.



*Art by Davide Bonazzi*



## Discussion Questions

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1. Which model of justice most interests you?
2. Do the actions of the girls fall under one of the three models of justice?
3. Why do you think the girls didn't just call the police?
4. Are the girls seeking revenge, justice or punishment?
5. Does harming the man bring any healing to Kate's sister Frankie?



# Activity

Choose an issue of justice you feel passionate about (ex. gun control, preventing sexual assault, access to education, etc.)

Choose a justice model you would apply to those who commit wrongful acts.

Explain why you chose that justice model through a persuasive writing piece, a powerpoint, or a poster. You can do this individually or in pairs.

*Art by Michelle Robinson*



J'ai jamais...  
& Identity

# Activity

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Each student should write “Who am I?” in the center of several blank pages of paper. Students should create a series of mind maps where they write down/draw who they perceive themselves to be in various areas of life.

Spend a few minutes on each of the following mind map topics:

- **Relationships** – List all the different relationship roles you have, such as sibling, child/son/daughter, nephew/niece, student, employee, romantic partner, etc.
- **Cultural** – List cultural aspects of life like religion / faith, ethnicity, language, nationality, etc.
- **Likes** – List favorite activities, hobbies, music, sports, TV shows, etc.
- **Dislikes** – List the activities, music, sports, TV shows, etc. that you don’t care for
- **Hopes** – List things that you want to do in the future, such as jobs, going skydiving, etc.

Source: <https://youthworkinit.com/5-who-am-i-activities-youth-group/>





# Questions about the play

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1. What words would you use to describe Sam's identity? What words would you use to describe your own?
2. Why do you think Sam stops talking to Kate after they kiss?
3. Why do you think Sam's brother reacts with violence when they see their dad with his new partner and then again when Sam outs Kate?
4. Why does Sam out Kate and Frankie?



# Questions about the play

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5. Considering the previous questions on justice, how would you describe the motivations behind the characters' following actions:

- Victor throwing a stone through the window of his father's new house?
- Sam telling Victor that Kate and Frankie are gay?
- Kate telling Sam to never talk to her again?



# Tomber dans l'œil : regards sur la diversité sexuelle

## Musée des beaux-arts Montreal

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To extend the in-class conversation on homophobia, identity and sexual diversity, please take advantage of the excellent activity resource 'Tomber dans l'œil' developed by Fondation Émergence with the Musée des beaux-arts Montréal.

Guide D'Activitee:

<https://bit.ly/3dE3WRc>





J'ai jamais...  
& Theatre



Art by Kelly Malka

## Questions about the play

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1. Why do you think the playwright chose to make this a one person play? How would this be different if it was portrayed with an ensemble cast?
2. From whose perspective is the story told? Is the narrator reliable?
3. What do you think was the significance of filming the show outside? How did the lighting affecting the staging?

# Activity

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Write your own play in a monologue style about a significant event in your life. You can also think about it as a 'vlog-style' video.

It can be a positive or a negative event, as long as it is presented from your perspective.

Consider whether you would include any props, if you were to present it.

You could also take a series of photographs that might tell a story from your perspective. Caption each photograph to make the narrative clear.



*Art by Rama Duwaji*

A woman with short dark hair, wearing an orange jacket over a black turtleneck and a denim jacket with a yellow patch, stands on a film set. She has her right arm raised. In the foreground, a camera rig is visible, with a monitor showing a reflection of her. The background features a chain-link fence and some equipment. The text "Thank You" is overlaid in white in the center.

Thank You