

ŪTSZAN

to make something better

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY YVONNE WALLACE

STUDY GUIDE



**GWAANDAK
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INTRODUCTION:

B.C./YUKON CURRICULUM CORE COMPETENCIES AND RELEVANCE

TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Gwaandak Theatre acknowledges with deep gratitude that we are sharing this production of *űtszan* (to make something better) on the traditional territory of the Kwanlin Dűn First Nation and Ta'an Kwűch'űn Council. We acknowledge the Tagish Kwan as the original people of the land in this region at the headwaters of the Yukon River.

We also acknowledge that we are touring this production to the territory of the Tr'ondűk Hwűch'űn, and are honoured by their invitation to us.

To these Nations, their leadership and their citizens hosting us on their lands: Thank you from the depths of our hearts.

**This Study Guide addresses the following
Core Competencies in B.C./Yukon's curriculum:**

- Communication
- Creative Thinking
- Critical Thinking
- Social Responsibility
- Personal Awareness and Responsibility

**This Study Guide content has relevance
to various secondary courses including:**

- English 8-12, Composition, Creative Writing, Literary Studies
- Social Studies 8, 9, 10
- Social Justice 12
- First Nations 12
- Arts Education: Drama, Theatre Production
- Career Education

This Study Guide is a relevant curriculum resource under Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action 63.

Gwaandak Theatre believes strongly in sharing thought-provoking theatre in school matinees, with study guides and artist outreach, to make the performing arts accessible to youth. We are proud to have done this for many years.

We welcome teachers and students into the creation and performance of *űtszan* (to make something better), written and performed by Yvonne Wallace. We invite you to watch the play, meet the artists involved, and to think, feel and respond as the next generation of critical thinkers, citizens, and leaders in of our community.

Sincerely,

Patti Flather, Artistic Director

SYNOPSIS

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In her final days, Aunt Celia hatches a plan. She refuses to speak English anymore to her niece Margaret, only Ucwalmicwts from now on. This one-woman show unearths Indigenous knowledge, humour, strength and resilience through language reclamation. Margaret discovers that the tools she needs to speak her first language are all around her in the land, stories, and memories

****A UN Year of Indigenous Languages event****



Ts'il Mountain on traditional Lil'wta Territory. Photo Vania Stager.

WORDS FROM PLAYWRIGHT/PERFORMER

YVONNE WALLACE

ŪTSZAN (TO MAKE SOMETHING BETTER) – STORY AND DEVELOPMENT.

I HAD BEEN INTERESTED IN THEATRE SINCE I WAS A TEENAGER. I told my English teacher of my interest and he began to organize classes that attended theatre shows, and we would write about our experience. Later, I moved to Toronto and attended Humber College for theatre acting from 1998-2001. I graduated with an outstanding body of work achievement and at the same time the Screen Actors Guild went on strike and I struggled to earn a living as an actor. I began developing plays and making \$300 per week. I was forced to get a real job.

I returned to school in 2013 at Capilano University for the liberal studies program. I combined my theatre training and my love for my first nation's language "ucwalmicwts" into my graduate project which was writing ūtszan (to make something better), a one-woman play. I started writing the play by writing monologues from Margaret's – the main character's – perspective. I then wrote monologues for Auntie Celia's perspective regarding language. In a creative writing class, I wrote a micro-fiction about both characters and wanted to integrate that into the story. It was about my cousin who I believed transformed into a seal.

The graduating program allowed me to have three advising professors. The first professor helped me to flush out the stories through monologues. The second professor helped me to shape the world of the story and extract and develop other characters. The third professor was my language teacher who helped me with three hours of translations. She would speak in our language and I would

transcribe. I presented the show to 70 people who consisted of language learners, language teachers, elders, faculty and students. The play was received positively and the university invited me back. The second viewing was during the truth and reconciliation week on campus. People from my home community came to watch the show and encouraged the Whistler Arts to produce the show because I thought it was important to open the show on my traditional territory.

I applied for workshops to further develop the play with Native Earth Performing Arts and we worked shopped with a dramaturg and movement specialist for one week. I then applied to the Vancouver Playwrights Theatre Centre for a second workshop with another dramaturg for one week. This workshop focussed on aesthetics and character arc.

The third development was offered through the Gwaandak Theatre Creators Lab. This provided me time for edits, rewrites, discussions with my original dramaturg and final translations with my mom who is my first language teacher. My mother helped me to translate the song in less than 10 minutes. It took me 6 to 8 hours to match the words to the music.

I intended to have a first fluent speaking moment and surprisingly I began to tell my truth and through the storytelling process began to heal. I realize that as I began to share my story other people were compelled to tell me of their experiences. The story in one small way did make things better.

YVONNE WALLACE



**YVONNE WALLACE
ARTIST STATEMENT:**

My Grandmother once said to me, “You have the best of both worlds; look, you can go to school. I only went until I was in Grade 2.” I quickly stopped feeling sorry for myself and carried on. I promised myself I would continue in school because my Grandma presented the idea as a gift. I think about all of her obstacles. She had to send her children to Indian Residential School and day school even though she knew what they could potentially endure. Here I am now, living a dream I promised to myself in my earlier days. I keep thinking as we move from the hurt into the light, let’s all collectively live our lives according to our optimistic younger selves. Then it will have reaffirmed that our Ancestors survived unimaginable trauma for their next generations to flourish. I dedicate this show to my Grandmother, my Auntie Celia. I also dedicate this show to my mother who has persevered in teaching one word at a time despite a challenging journey (You are stronger than you know), to my cousin Nadine who’s been an incredible light in my life, and to my daughter because you are living your life in a way that makes your Ancestors smile, you are loved.

ABOUT YVONNE:

Yvonne Wallace is Ucwalmicw from the Lil’wat Nation, and a graduate from the Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree program at Capilano University. Her enthusiasm for playwriting began while she worked at The Centre for Indigenous Theatre. Later, she graduated with honours from Humber College Theatre Acting program. She has written three plays – *Smothered Sweetly*, *The Last Dance*, and *űtszan*, which premiered in Whistler, B.C. in September. She is currently writing *7 Misconceptions of a Half-Breed Mother*, a tragicomedy about the public-school system.

SCRIPT EXCERPT:

SCENE 1 NQWAL'UTTENS. MY LANGUAGE COMING BACK TO ME

Margaret writes the next scene title on a school slate. The translation appears on the title banner. She hangs the slate.

Actor walking out on to the stage while house lights are up. Calling in the medicine wheel, to bring in Celia's world of the story.

Lights up in dream world. Margaret speaks ucwalmicwts in reflection and discovery.

MARGARET:

Ucwalmicwts: Our language. Nqwal'uttens. my language coming back to me.

Kalhaka7min. Let it Go. Nsq'aw – when someone cries or screams uncontrollably early morning.

Black out. River sound is heard.

VOICE OVER MARGARET:

Nqwal'uttens. my language coming back to me. I want to tell you a story about our language. Auntie Celia's last act of decolonization here in this World. She taught me that our Ancestor's left tools for us deep-rooted into our language, and that if one person speaks then we can't lose our culture.

Projection: nsq'aw

VOICE OVER MARGARET:

The word Nsq'aw – translates when someone cries or screams uncontrollably, but in brackets it said early morning.

Projection of translation appears. "(In the early morning)" the brackets flash.

VOICE OVER MARGARET:

The lesson was in the brackets. I went home and asked people what it meant. My friend told me about a woman, who lost her children because they didn't come home from Residential School. Disease killed her children. Away from home.

Mountain image appears. Lights up on a woman crouching on her knees and hands on the earth. Screaming but no sound escapes her mouth.

VOICE OVER MARGARET:

In the early morning she'd go out into the bush along the river and she'd wail. Not a cry at all, but a soul-piercing scream that everyone could hear for miles around. Her nsq'aw, her heartbreak was inconsolable. **(beat)** In one small moment, a 5-letter word changed me and what I thought I knew. This one word in the spiritual beliefs list taught me that our people, my Ancestors' went out in the early morning, the time of day when spirits were least likely to wander, to let go of their grief so that they wouldn't carry their hurt with them all day. Kalkaka7min.letting go.

Sound of river fades and a heartbeat can be heard

Lights shift. Celia begins searching for her suitcase and rises up.

CELIA:

We may have lost you already. The idea that spirits wonder sounds far-fetched, but this is our story. The kind of things we went through made spiritual help necessary. From the time I arrived on this earth, my life has been a struggle. My mom, she had it harder than me. My grandmother and great grandmother had it the worst.

(beat) she begins to pack her suitcase. The first item she looks for is Sam's coat.

I go walkin' after midnight. My late husband Sam's coat.

When I was 7, I lived with my kwekwa7 my grandmother and my cousin Brian. He looked after us he was a good fisherman. The water was rough, and the lake was big. One night, the canoe tipped. Brian drowned. That day Grandmother's heart broke her N'sqaw. I prayed to the Creator that we would find Brian's body. Then I learned to fish all by myself. I put the net in the water and at that moment, not too far, a seal was bobbing his head out of the water. We stared at each other. It was Brian, he turned into a seal ascw. To make sure the nets were full before he said goodbye.

Moment to check if all items are together. Settles her heart with deep breaths.

Uts'zan means to make things better. Just like Brian. Transformation can happen at any time. I'm here to tell you about Nqwal'uttens. my language coming back to me. Total language transformation. My way of testing the Colonial fence. The day I woke up and refused to speak English. Remember this is our time and OUR space so if you need to laugh, cry or spiq's you can do that here.

REFLECTION & DISCUSSION

These also may be used as individual or small-group writing exercises.

1. How do you think the writer/actor can benefit from using her first language in this play?

2. If only one person speaks their first language is it still a “living language”?

3. How many words in a language do you need to know to comfortably converse in that language?

4. The show title *űtszan* means ‘to make something better’. What does this mean to you after seeing the play?

5. What was your experience hearing ucwalmicwt? What words did you learn?

6. What did you learn from Margaret’s challenges of being a “half-breed”, feeling caught between white and Indigenous perceptions?

7. Has your family lost or maintained its traditional language, whether Indigenous or other? What impact has that had on family relationships?

8. How can non-Indigenous people be effective allies for Indigenous people and for Truth and Reconciliation?

CREDITS

Ūtszan

to make something better

Written and Performed by Yvonne Wallace

Directed by Jefferson Guzman

CREATIVE & PRODUCTION TEAM:

Sound Design/Animations	Jefferson Guzman
Stage Manager	Andrea Bols
Technical Director	Martin Nishikawa
Production Manager	Léa Roy Bernatchez
Photo images	David Ward
Dramaturgy	Reg Johanson, David Geary, Jiv Parasram, Heidi Taylor, Jefferson Guzman, Penny Couchie
Language translations	Gloria Wallace and Martina Pierre
Graphic Design	Michelle Ziezke, render
Marketing	Kathleen Napier, render

GWAANDAK THEATRE STAFF:

Artistic Directors	Patti Flather, Colin Wolf
Managing Director	Paige Galette
Artistic Producer	Léa Roy Bernatchez

ABOUT GWAANDAK THEATRE

One meaning of “Gwaandak” in the Gwich’in language is “storyteller”.

Gwaandak Theatre, the Yukon’s only Indigenous theatre company, was founded in Whitehorse in 1999 by theatre artists Leonard Linklater (Vuntut Gwitchin) and Patti Flather (Anglo- settler).

Gwaandak Theatre’s vision is to illuminate Indigenous and Northern stories around the world.

We develop, produce and tour plays for both youth and adults. Our programming also includes new play workshops, readings and training for theatre artists.

Our stories question, honour and celebrate. We explore themes around decolonization, cultural identity, social justice, underrepresented voices and human rights. We tour to many places, from tiny Yukon communities to major cities across Canada.

CONNECT WITH US AT:

gwaandak.theatre.ca |  /GwaandakTheatre | info@gwaandaktheatre.ca | 867-393-2676

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

President	Joella Hogan
Vice-President	Savannah McKenzie
Treasurer	Carrie-Lyn Robinson
Secretary	Lianne Charlie
Director	Leonard Linklater

AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Creating and performing a play is hard work. It takes a lot of guts to get on stage. So, please, teachers and students, when you are in the audience, show respect to the performers, and everyone involved in the play. Be sure to:

- Only get up, move around, and/or talk before or after the play.

Turn off your cell phone and other electronics.

If you liked the play, clap loudly when the theatre company takes their bow

If there is a Talkback session with the artists after the play, don't be shy – ask questions!

HOW TO GET INVOLVED IN THEATRE!

There are many roles for people on stage or off stage in theatre – sound designer, animations designer, stage manager, set and props designer and builders, director, and more!

There's lots of ways to get involved in theatre, through volunteering at performance events, or taking a creative writing or theatre workshop in your community.

The Music, Art, Drama program in Whitehorse is a great opportunity to try a lot of different roles in theatre. MAD is a unique fine arts program offered at the grade 9/10 level and the 11/12 level which allows any Yukon student the opportunity to take a full semester away from their home school to focus on the performing arts: music, art, drama, stagecraft, theatre production, video and sound recording/editing, script writing, dance, and directing.

For writers there's also the annual high school Young Authors' Conference for aspiring writers and storytellers from all over the Yukon. Each spring a variety of published authors offer workshops and readings for two days to students. This conference is open to any writers: poets, novelists, playwrights, and more!

In Whitehorse, young people can get involved with a production by companies such as: Gwaandak Theatre, The Guild, Moving Parts Theatre, Nakai Theatre, Ramshackle Theatre, Open Pit and Yukon Young Peoples' Theatre. The Heart of Riverdale Community Centre offers after-school drama and theatre workshops for children and youth. Splintered Craft is a Whitehorse arts space for young people from ages 15 to 25.

If youth can't find any productions to be a part of, they can create their own. It's always helpful to have support from teachers, community rec directors, First Nations, families and friends in order to do this.

If students are interested in pursuing a career in theatre, there are many college and university programs across Canada that offer training for all aspects of theatre – writing, directing, acting, stage managing, designing. Examples of programs close to the Yukon are: Studio 58 (Langara College), Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia and Capilano University in the Vancouver area; the University of Victoria; the University of Alberta in Edmonton. The Centre for Indigenous Theatre is based in Toronto and the National Theatre School in Montreal. Yukon College also offers writing courses.



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