

THE CODE

BY RACHEL ABERLE

STUDY GUIDE

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 **ACTUALIZEB**



COMPANY LIST

Playwright

Moira
Connor
Simon

Rachel Aberle

Elizabeth Barrett
Joe Rose
Teo Saefkow

Director
Assistant Director
Stage Manager

Patrick McDonald
Bronwyn Carradine
Melissa McCowell

Set Designer
Costume/Sound Designer

Ruth Bruhn
Elizabeth Wellwood

GREEN THUMB THEATRE:

Artistic Director
General Manager
Associate Artistic Director
Tour Manager
Production Manager
Education & Outreach Coordinator
Accountant

Patrick McDonald
Breanne Harmon
Rachel Aberle
Aliya Griffin
Ruth Bruhn
Bronwyn Carradine
Susan Cai

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USING THIS GUIDE

Green Thumb is committed to telling stories that spark thought and provoke dialogue. To us, a really successful show gets people talking. The following study guide is intended to facilitate classroom discussions both before and after the performance.

In this guide we'll look deeper into understanding the themes of **THE CODE**. The pre- and post-show questions, activities, and discussions will invite exploration of the main topics of the show: healthy relationships, social responsibility, online bullying, and consent.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Healthy Relationships | Leadership | Social Responsibility | Self Esteem | Personal Politics | Discrimination | Online Bullying



SHOW ETIQUETTE & TIPS

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE PLAY

When young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time, they often don't realize how different it is from watching a movie or TV show. Here are some important things for students to know:

PRE-PERFORMANCE

Please remind students of the following:

- Use the washroom and get a drink before the show
- Excessive movement can be distracting to the actors and to others watching the play
- It is rude and disruptive to talk, eat and drink during the play
- Photos or recordings of any kind are not allowed

ACTIVE VIEWING

To make the most out of watching this live performance, please encourage your students to focus on more than just the story. Remind them to pay attention to things like the set and costumes. These aspects are an important part of a live performance and will enhance later discussions about the play and the students' experience while watching it.



THE PLOT AT A GLANCE

When Moira organizes a protest at school that results in the spring dance being cancelled, students lash out at her online and in-person – so she turns to her best friends Simon and Connor for support. But when Simon reveals his romantic feelings for Moira and she doesn't return them, the two fight about whether she misled him or he misinterpreted her. Feeling 'friend-zoned', an angry Simon goes too far and joins the barrage of Moira's online abuse with a post that ends up going viral. Stuck in the middle, Connor is forced to consider where his loyalties lie.

FULL SYNOPSIS

SCENE 1: Best friends Moira and Connor are joking around on their lunch break at school. Their other best friend, Simon, an aspiring videographer, enters while filming; with a gift for Moira. Moira gets a text from the dance committee saying there has been a 'dance committee crisis' and jets off. When she's gone, Simon and Connor talk about the romantic feelings Simon has developed for Moira.

SCENE 2: Moira discovers that the school has implemented a strict dress code for the spring dance, and wonders how to best address the situation since she's in charge of planning school dances. Making matters worse, it's clear that many students think Moira came up with the new dress code, and they are now venting their feelings about her online. In an effort to try to cheer her up and assure her that the dance will still be fun, Simon suggests they go to the dance together, offering to take her for dinner and a limo ride beforehand. When Moira agrees, Simon is over the moon, and loses sight of the problem at hand. Meanwhile, Moira is still blind to Simon's actual feelings for her.

SCENE 3: Connor and Simon meet up early before school the next day, summoned by Moira, who has yet to arrive. Simon tells Connor that Moira said she'd go to the dance with him, and he starts day-dreaming about his 'new girlfriend'. Moira arrives and reveals their task for the morning: distributing fliers to promote a school-wide walk-out in protest of the new dress code. After a night of reading mean comments about her online, Moira is convinced this is the best way to make her classmates understand she is not responsible for the new rules. The three set off to distribute the posters, and we hear the speech Moira makes at the protest. She rallies their support and everyone begins chanting "Our bodies, our clothes, stand up, break the code." Simon proudly films it.

SCENE 4: Immediately following the speech, Moira and Simon meet up on their way to class and talk excitedly about how well it went. The two depart to their separate classes; Moira still buzzing from the success of her speech and Simon thrilled to see his 'new girlfriend' so happy.

SCENE 5: Simon and Moira meet up at lunch to celebrate the successes of the morning, but their good mood is quickly spoiled when Connor arrives and tells them that the school dance has been cancelled because of the protest. Moira's social media platforms are quickly swarmed with hateful and hurtful comments blaming her for the cancellation. Moira believes she did the right thing by standing up for the people that the dress code affected, but she's frustrated that no one else sees it that way, not even Connor, who storms off enraged. Simon tries to cheer her up by offering other plans to replace their dance date, and quickly realizes that Moira didn't think it was a date. Hurt, Simon lashes out at Moira who is left even more confused and upset.

SCENE 6: Before school the next day, Simon and Connor meet up and discuss a hurtful video that appeared online overnight, using footage of Moira's speech from the protest cut together to make fun of her. Connor expresses anger at the video and concern about Moira's well-being, and prods Simon about who he thinks might have done it. When Simon doesn't have an answer, Connor confronts him, saying that he figured out it was Simon based on the angles in the video. The two argue about whether or not Simon needs to come clean to Moira about the video's origins. Moira enters, upset about the video, and a number of additional videos made by other classmates who have recut the first one. Connor leaves Simon to explain himself to Moira, and while he apologizes for the argument they had the previous day about the dance, he doesn't bring up the video. Thinking that Simon has come clean about everything, Connor reenters and inadvertently reveals the truth to Moira. Moira demands an explanation from Simon, who brushes the video off as 'just a joke' and something he did because his feelings were hurt. Moira expresses how deeply the video has hurt her, how far-reaching it has been, and how toxic and threatening the additional recut videos have become. Moira makes it clear that this has damaged their friendship beyond repair. Simon departs, realizing that his rash action has cost him his two most important friendships. Connor comforts Moira, and the two of them head in to school to face a still angry student body together as friends.

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

RACHEL ABERLE



It feels to me that we are in the middle of a global conversation about consent. About what it is, how you define it, how one obtains it, and the intense and dire ramifications of what can happen when things happen without it. I think this is good – it’s an important conversation, especially for young women and men to have as they begin to engage in their own relationships – romantic or otherwise.

What strikes me about the current conversation however, is that it feels reactionary. It feels like something we talk about after something bad has already happened – like a report of harassment or assault. With **THE CODE**, I wanted to roll that conversation back earlier in a relationship, to before anything irreversible has taken place. Specifically, I wanted to look at how seemingly healthy and positive relationships can fall apart when communication breaks down.

So I wrote a show about friendship, and about what happens when people have different ideas about the nature of their friendship. Our main characters, Simon and Moira, are best friends – but Simon has been secretly hoping that they will become more. When Simon suggests that he and Moira go to the Spring Dance together, and she says ‘yes’, Simon is over-the-moon to be going on his first official date with Moira. But when it becomes clear that she thought he meant they’d go as friends, their friendship starts to break down. The two of them fight over whether she misled him or he misinterpreted her, and it becomes clear that everything he’s put into their friendship, the energy and care, has been – in his mind – an investment. When he doesn’t receive a return on that investment, he feels like it’s all been a waste of time.

I can’t tell you the number of times in my life I’ve heard someone complain about feeling like they’ve been stuck in the ‘friend-zone’. But is romance ever a fair thing to feel entitled to? How do we deal with rejection when it comes? In a situation where one person feels led on, but the other feels misinterpreted, who is right?

It’s important to note that I don’t think Simon is wrong to feel hurt. Handling rejection is really hard, and finding out that someone you like doesn’t feel the same way about you is painful. The question is – what do we do with that pain? How do we navigate the bumps in a relationship without doing things we regret?

The questions this play prompts are tricky. There is no easy answer to any of them, but I think that’s the point. It’s only by having these complex and sometimes uncomfortable conversations that we can begin to move forward.

DEFINITIONS

WORDS AND PHRASES IN THE CODE

FRIEND-ZONED: A situation in a friendship where one person has unreciprocated romantic or sexual interest for the other. Often the person who is not in the 'friend-zone' is unaware of the other person's romantic feelings or intentions.

DRESS CODE: A set of rules, usually written and posted, specifying the required manner of dress at a school, office, club, restaurant, etc.

CONSENT: Permission for something to happen or the agreement to do something.

RELATIONSHIP: Any time people are in relation to one another they are in a relationship, whether that means professional, friendly, platonic, romantic, or sexual.

EQUALITY: The state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities.

FEMINISM: The advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes. To be a feminist is to advocate those rights.

TROLLS/TROLLING: To post inflammatory or inappropriate messages or comments on the Internet for the purpose of upsetting other users and provoking a response. To set out to upset or provoke other users by posting such messages or comments.

SJW: An abbreviation for "social justice warrior," typically used in a derogatory and often sarcastic way. A person who advocates a progressive view, especially involving the treatment of racial, gender, sexual orientation or gender-identity minorities.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS/LIBERATION: Rights that promote a position of legal and social equality of women with men. A movement to combat sexual discrimination and to gain full legal, economic, vocational, educational, and social rights and opportunities for women, equal to those of men.

INTEGRITY: To adhere to moral and ethical principles; rooted in honesty.

GENDER EQUALITY: Having the same rights, status, and opportunities as others, regardless of gender.

PRE-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is appropriate to post online? Of yourself? Of others? Is there a difference?
2. Do you ask your friends permission to post photos of them on your profile?
3. What does consent mean to you?
4. What are some major differences between friendship and romantic relationships?
5. What does a healthy relationship look like to you? How would you handle a disagreement/misunderstanding in a healthy relationship?
6. What is an appropriate way to tell someone you like them?

POST-PERFORMANCE QUESTIONS

7. Why do you think Simon kept his feelings secret from Moira?
8. Have you ever been in a situation where you've been stuck between two of your friends who are fighting?
What would you have done if you were Connor?
9. If your friend had feelings for another friend, would you tell them? Why or why not?
10. What should Simon have done when his feelings were hurt?
11. Have you ever done something you regretted when you were hurt or angry?
12. Who would you reach out to if you saw something inappropriate online? Would you ever go to the police?
How bad would it have to be?
13. What would someone have to do online to make you report or block them?

DISCUSSIONS & ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION #1: ONLINE BULLYING

What constitutes cyberbullying?

The facts of cyberbullying: 3 million kids per month are absent from school due to bullying. 20% of kids who are cyberbullied think about suicide, and 1 in 10 attempt it.

The legalities of online posting:

Posting a photo of something without consent, or with intent to hurt the person captured in the image, has been a criminal offence under Canada's Criminal Code since 2015. Judges now have the authority to order the removal of intimate images from the internet if those images are posted without the consent of the person or persons in the image. However, even though the image is deleted, there is an irreversible psychological impact on the people involved in the post.

Anyone convicted of distributing an intimate image without consent can face serious legal consequences, such as:

- Imprisonment for up to five years.
- The seizure of your computer, cell phone or other device used to share the image.
- The enforced financial reimbursement to the victim for costs they incurred removing the intimate image from the Internet or elsewhere.

Discuss the ramifications of cyberbullying in class. Connect it to Simon's video in the play - one that wound up being shared much further than he anticipated. Discuss what consequences Simon may face for what he put online.



DISCUSSION #2: FRIENDSHIP, ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS, & HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Punctuation and Perception

In **THE CODE**, Simon takes Moira's constant texting and use of emojis to mean that she likes him. Moira sends Connor emojis as well, but somehow Simon still thinks that she is flirting with him. How does our use of specific words and punctuation change the way that something is perceived?

Take this well-known example:

"A panda eats shoots and leaves"

VS

"A panda eats, shoots, and leaves"

The commas completely change the meaning of the sentence.

Questions for Discussion:

When you send a text:

- How aware are you of others' interpretations of your messages?
- Is it something you notice or think about, when you text someone? Do you ever re-type a text, realizing the earlier texts might not make your point clear?
- Do you take responsibility for their interpretation, based on the way you communicated your message?

When you receive a text:

- How closely do you analyze the messages you receive from others to interpret their meaning?
- Have you ever sat with a friend and dissected a text to try to find its hidden meaning? What did you do when you felt like you couldn't figure it out?

ACTIVITY:

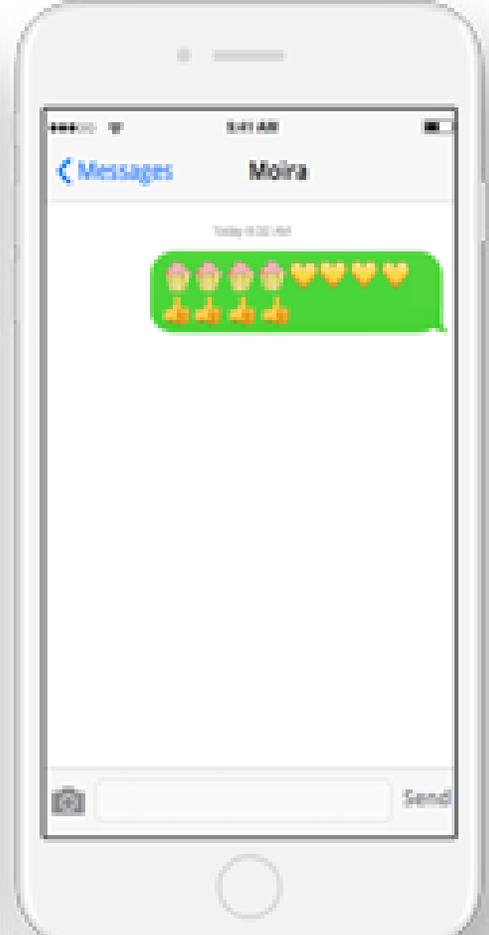
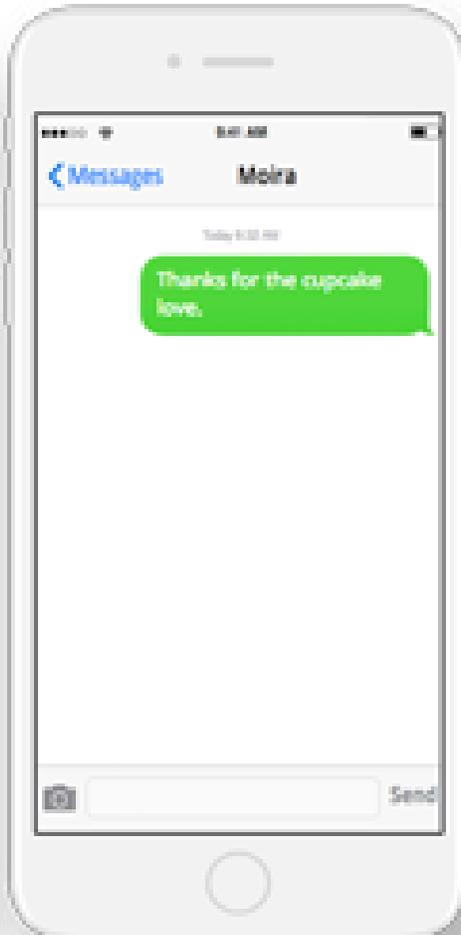
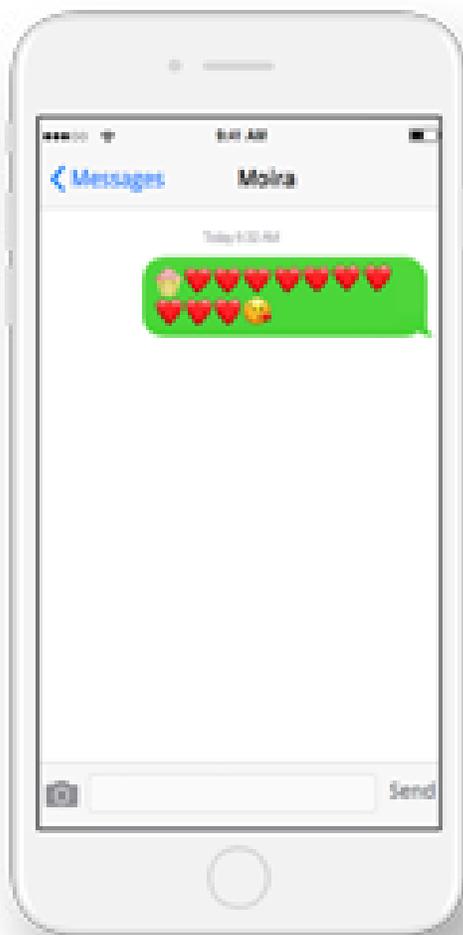
Deciphering Texts

Let's look at this text conversation between Simon and Moira where they don't use punctuation.

Show these three texts to the class saying roughly the same thing: **(see next page)**

Questions for Discussion in Groups:

- What are your assumptions based on how their messages seem to one another?
- How does use of dialogue and different phrasing lead someone to believe the other person is flirting with them?
- How does the way you word something convey more than what you're actually saying (e.g: tone, slang, grammar)?
- What is the most effective way to get your message across?



ACTIVITY:

Blowing Off Steam

Part 1: A Letter from Simon to Moira

Have students write letters from Simon to Moira, or scripts for a scene between Simon and Moira where he talks to her about why he's upset.

Use these prompts to support their writing:

Imagine you're Simon – you were sure Moira felt the same way as you did.

How do you feel?

What do you do with those feelings?

Is there anything she did that you think was unfair or unkind?

How can Simon tell Moira that she hurt him, without resorting to hurting her, too?

Part 2: Alternate Ideas for Simon

Discuss an alternate situation where Simon realizes he is too hurt and angry with Moira to have a respectful conversation. What should he do? Who can he talk to?

Part 3: A Conversation Between Simon to Connor

Have students write scripts for a scene between Simon and Connor, where Simon talks about why he's upset.

How can Connor be a supportive friend to both Simon and Moira?

Close the activity with a group discussion about the importance of navigating disappointment and rejection in a respectful and safe manner.



DISCUSSION #3: SOCIAL CHANGE AND SCHOOL

How much does it cost?

MALALA YOUSAFZAI: AN EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL CHANGE



We are never too young or too few to create social change. Take Malala Yousafzai for example. Born in Pakistan during the Taliban occupation of Swat, her life was far from easy. But, she believed that every child, especially girls, should have a right to a free and accessible education and she advocated for that, even though she lived in a country where women don't have the same rights as they do in North America. When Malala was 14, she wrote a blog under a fake name, which was then featured in the New York Times. Though it was written under a pseudonym, this article gave a platform to her voice and the issues she was trying to resolve. Unfortunately, life became dangerous for her after it was printed.

She was shot in the head in 2012, but survived and was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work at the age of 17. To this day, she is still the youngest person to be awarded the world's most prestigious title. (The average age of a Nobel Peace Prize winner is 62). While Malala's story is an extreme example, that doesn't mean that each of us doesn't come up against social injustice in our own lives as well.

In **THE CODE**, Moira sees that her fellow female students aren't being treated fairly when a school-wide dress code is implemented, and she sees that as an opportunity to make a change in her school. When her plan backfires, she is forced to solely take the brunt of the accusations and hateful comments directed towards her.

Questions:

How far are you willing to go to stand up for what you believe in?

How can we gauge when something is hard to do but still important, and when something is hard to do but isn't our place?

Is there anything that affects us that isn't our place to talk about?

Discuss with the class how Moira went about dealing with a dress code she found to be unfair:

What did she do that worked? What did she do that didn't work?

Were her actions fair to the student body at large?

Was she ready for the consequences of her actions?

What would you do in the same situation?

These are questions with no easy, or right answers. What one student may deem to be a reasonable sacrifice, another may not. Allow students a forum to dig into how they think they should go about making positive changes in their communities.

ACTIVITY:

Implementing social change

This activity is designed to help students initiate social change in a responsible, respectful way.

Be a social change maker in your school.

What are some things you want to change in order to create a more positive school environment?
How would you change those things, and what roadblocks can you anticipate you might run into on the way?

Structure the process and decisions as outlined by the examples in this chart:

CHANGE	POSITIVES	NEGATIVES	HOW TO FIX THE NEGATIVES
Implement a 'no dress code' dance at school.	Everyone can wear whatever they feel comfortable wearing.	<p>People might use this as an opportunity to dress inappropriately or feel like they have to.</p> <p>The school might be worried students may dress in a way that they deem disrespectful.</p>	<p>Have a costume themed dance instead.</p> <p>Educate students about empowering themselves through self-expression.</p>
Healthier food in the cafeteria.	<p>Everyone will feel better and have more energy after lunch break.</p> <p>More people will be exposed to balanced meal options.</p>	<p>These options might be more expensive and therefore might deter people.</p> <p>How will the school get access to these options?</p>	<p>Talk to local politicians and get a funded community garden to grow vegetables.</p> <p>Have the cooking class/ environmental club take care of it.</p> <p>Talk to local grocery stores to see if they'll donate a portion of the ingredients.</p>

ABOUT THE CODE ARTISTIC TEAM



PLAYWRIGHT: RACHEL ABERLE

Based in Vancouver, BC, Rachel Aberle is a playwright, actor, and the Associate Artistic Director at Green Thumb Theatre. A graduate of Studio 58's professional theatre training program, Rachel has appeared across Western Canada in venues ranging everywhere from a sold out 700 hundred seat theatre, to a stage on the back of a flatbed pickup truck, performing in public parks for free. Rachel's acting work has included new works, classics, musicals, and voice-over for television and radio. Rachel's debut script, *STILL/FALLING*, was premiered by Green Thumb Theatre in 2016. Following the story of a fifteen-year-old girl struggling with anxiety and depression, *STILL/FALLING* received a Jessie Richardson Theatre Award for Significant Artistic Achievement, a Dora Mavor Moore nomination for Outstanding Production, and has been seen by over 30,000 young people to date. As a writer, Rachel is interested in exploring complex issues faced by today's young people, in the hopes that her work will encourage youth to start their own conversations and examine their place in the world.



DIRECTOR: PATRICK MCDONALD

Patrick McDonald has been the Artistic Director of Green Thumb Theatre since 1988; prior to that he was the Artistic Director of Great Canadian Theatre Company in Ottawa. He has directed over 75 productions for Green Thumb and has overseen the commissioning and development of more than 50 new plays for children, teens and young adults. He has commissioned work from emerging writers like Dave Deveau and Michele Riml and established writers Morris Panych, Joan MacLeod and George F. Walker. During his tenure, Green Thumb productions have won numerous Jessie Richardson Awards, several Betty Mitchell Awards, and three Canada Council Awards for Outstanding Production for Young Audiences. McDonald has been nominated for many awards and has received Jessie Richardson Awards for both directing and "continued excellence in the field of theatre for Young Audiences". In 2009 he received the Jessie Richardson Award for Career Achievement, and in 2013 he received the Vancouver Mayor's Arts Award. He has directed across the country at theatres including The Belfry, The Grand Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, National Arts Centre, Vancouver Playhouse, Gateway Theatre, Manitoba Theatre for Young People and Arts Club Theatre. He has been a two-time member of the Canada Council's Theatre Advisory Committee and has sat on many peer juries at the provincial and federal levels.



ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: BRONWYN CARRADINE

Born in rural Ontario, Bronwyn started acting in theatre at the age of 5. Since then, she's been involved in theatre all over Canada, and eventually found her way to Vancouver to attend Studio 58. As a writer she's worked with companies such as Intrepid Theatre, Zee Zee Theatre, Studio 58, The Livery and Bishop's University, and as a director and assistant director with Resonance Theatre Collective, Zee Zee Theatre, The Chop, Solo Collective and Green Thumb Theatre, where she is currently the Artistic Associate Intern. Carradine is a graduate of Studio 58.



COSTUME DESIGNER: ELIZABETH WELLWOOD

Elizabeth Wellwood is an emerging theatre artist based in Calgary and Vancouver. Elizabeth's previous Green Thumb credits include sound design for *ALONE TOGETHER* and set design for *NOT SO DUMB*. Elizabeth has also worked with Bard on the Beach, Alberta Theatre Projects, Vertigo Theatre, and Studio 58.



SET DESIGNER: RUTH BRUHN

Ruth grew up in Steveston, British Columbia. In 2014 she graduated from the Production Program at Studio 58, where she was awarded the John F. Parker scholarship for Demonstrating Exceptional Promise. Since graduation, Ruth has worked as a professional stage manager in Vancouver for companies including Bard on the Beach, Newworld Theatre, Theatre Replacement, Carousel Theatre for Young People, Full Circle First Nations, Gateway Theatre and most recently Green Thumb Theatre for the 2016/2017 season tour of *ALONE TOGETHER*. Ruth is the Production Manager at Green Thumb.

COSTUMES:



SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS!

We love getting mail and your students' feedback!

GREEN THUMB THEATRE:

Mailing address: 5522 McKinnon Street, Vancouver, BC, V5R 0B6

Email: info@greenthumb.bc.ca

Phone: 604-254-4055

Fax: 604-251-7002

Write a Letter!

Ask your students to write us a letter to share their thoughts and opinions on the performance of **THE CODE**.
Send it to us at Green Thumb!

Write a Review!

Have your students write a theatre review about this performance of **THE CODE**.
Send it in to us at Green Thumb!

A theatre review usually includes the following:

- A brief summary of the story.
- A comment on the quality of the play itself.
- A description of the costumes and set and a comment on whether these were interesting and appropriate.
- A comment on the actors' portrayal of the characters and on the director's skill at pulling the whole show together.

There are many examples of reviews in newspapers and online that you could use to introduce the concept and format of a theatre review.
Take a look at "How to Write a Play Review" on Wiki How.

<http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Play-Review>

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THANK YOU!