

people like Vince

BY C.E. Gatchalian

Study Guide



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Green Thumb Theatre presents "**People Like Vince**"

Written by C.E. Gatchalian

Production Credits

"Myrtle"

Jennica Grienke

"Vince"

Stephen Aberle

Directed By

Patrick McDonald

Stage Manager

Shannon Macelli

Scenery & Props Design

Kevin McAllister

Costume Design

Connie Hosie

Sound Design &

Composition/Video

Corbie Fieldwalker

Props Coordinator

Jill White

Scenic Painter

Omanie Elias

Green Thumb Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages, under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement, professional Artists who are members of Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

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Note: Many of the exercises in this guide are not original creations of the author. The author of the guide is not attempting to claim the exercises as her own invention. They have been acquired and obtained from other learning materials. Where no credit is given, the original source is unknown.

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“People Like Vince” and the BC Curriculum

This Study Guide will help you decide how to prepare your students to see the play ***People Like Vince***. It includes suggestions on how to work the performance into your curriculum and ideas on how to promote classroom discussion about the themes presented in the play.

Synopsis

Myrtle is having a hard time making friends at her new school. Then, her Uncle Vince shows up in town and she finally feels like she has someone who understands her and with whom she can really be herself. Her friendship with her Uncle Vince becomes the closest and most important relationship in her life but sometimes his behaviour confuses her and even causes the other kids at school make fun of her. When Uncle Vince suddenly stops coming to see her, Myrtle learns how to deal with and accept his lifelong struggle with mental illness. Written specifically so younger youth can understand and relate, *People Like Vince* is an light-hearted, sensitive and compassionate look at a serious subject that affects us all.

Characters

Myrtle: Age 10

Vince: Her Uncle and Best Friend

Preparing Students for the Play

When young people attend a live theatrical performance for the first time they often do not realize how different it is from watching a movie or television show. Live presentations can be more challenging for performers, because anything could happen and affect their performance. Mistakes cannot be edited out! This makes for a more dynamic experience for both performers and the audience.

Pre-performance

Please remind students of the following:

- ☐ It is rude and disruptive to talk, eat and drink during the play.
- ☐ Photos or recordings are not allowed.
- ☐ Excessive movement can be distracting to others watching the play,

Active Viewing

To make the most out of watching this live performance, **please encourage your students to** not only watch the play for the story, but to also pay attention to the set, costumes, music and lighting. These aspects are an important part of a live performance and will enhance later discussions about the play and the students' experience watching it.

The next section includes some background information about the themes presented in the play.

What is Mental Illness?

The term mental illness is used to describe a wide range of different conditions. What they have in common is that they all affect a person's emotions, thoughts and behaviours--how they see themselves, see the world around them, and how they interact in that world. Of course, all of us go through times where our world view changes, but what makes it a disorder is how long it goes on for and how much it negatively impacts your life. Although mental illnesses have a lot in common with each other, each group and each type within each group is quite different and the symptoms can look different from person to person. Just like a physical illness, symptoms can be mild, moderate or severe. They can come and go and do not always follow a regular pattern.

Mental illness affects all Canadians at some time either directly or indirectly, through a family member, friend or colleague. The Canadian Mental Health Association lists STIGMA or DISCRIMINATION attached to mental illnesses as one of the most serious barriers to diagnosis, treatment and to acceptance in the community.

QUICK FACTS:

- 1 in 5 Canadians will personally experience mental illness in their lifetime
- Mental illnesses are caused by a complex interplay of genetic, biological, personality and environmental factors.
- Mental illness does not discriminate : it affects people of all ages, incomes and cultures.
- Most mental illnesses start in adolescence or young adulthood
- Mental illnesses can be treated and people who have a mental illness can and do live quality lives.



An Overview of Mental Illnesses:

Here are brief descriptions of some common mental illnesses:

Mood Disorders...

involve changes and disruptions in a person's mood and emotions. Depression and bipolar disorder are examples of mood disorders

Anxiety Disorders...

are the most common type of mental illness. They cause people to be overly anxious and afraid of situations or events that most people consider normal. Panic disorders and post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety disorders.

Schizophrenia...

involves people losing the ability to know what's real and what isn't (this feature is called psychosis). Schizophrenia also makes it difficult for people to think, speak and interact in an organized way. Psychosis is not just a part of schizophrenia, it may also be seen on its own, or with other disorders like mood disorders.

Eating Disorders...

involves a distorted body image along with serious behaviours to manage food and weight, making it difficult to nourish oneself properly. Eating disorders can be life-threatening. Examples of eating disorders include anorexia and bulimia.

(mental illnesses con't)

Personality Disorders...

affect the way a person acts, feels and gets along with other people. They can also cause people to be more impulsive. Borderline personality disorder and antisocial personality disorder are examples of personality disorders.

Substance Use Disorders (commonly called addictions)...

occur when a person becomes dependent on a substance such as alcohol, tobacco or other drugs.

Dementia...

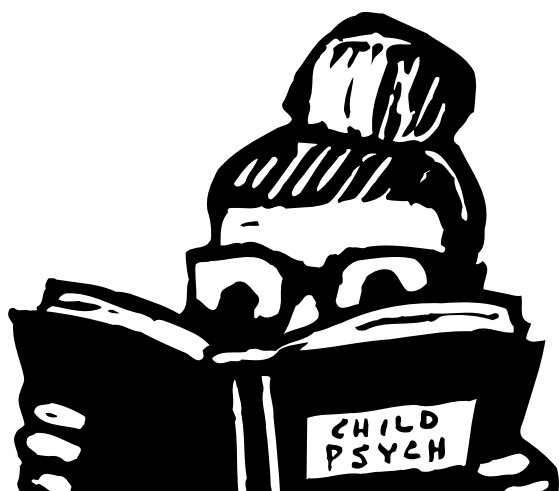
involves the loss of brain cells and results in loss of memory, judgement and reasoning, along with changes in mood, behaviour and communication abilities (beyond what might seem to be normal aging). Alzheimer's disease is the most common form of dementia.

Attention Deficit (hyperactivity) Disorder (ADD or ADHD) ...

can be diagnosed in adults but is usually found in children and youth and affects their ability to focus their attention. This condition may also include hyperactivity, which is when a person becomes easily over-excited.

For more information about mental illnesses please visit **www.heretohelp.bc.ca** where you will find fact sheets about specific disorders.

Please turn to the next page for some details about bi-polar disorder which is the mental illness featured in *People Like Vince*.



FOCUS on Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is a type of mood disorder. Bipolar disorder used to be called manic depression. It was called manic depression because people with bipolar disorder go through periods of intense depression and other periods where their mood is extremely high. These “high” periods are known as mania. It’s important to note that most people with bipolar disorder also have periods where their moods are “normal.” There are different types of bipolar disorder depending on how serious your symptoms are and how long your mood swings last.

About 1% of Canadians will experience bipolar disorder.

Bipolar Disorder in People Like Vince:

Myrtle notices that Uncle Vince sometimes acts strange and that he seems to get sad for no apparent reason. She has heard her mom talk about “meds” on the phone and wants to know how it all fits together. Uncle Vince explains that he is bi-polar and that he takes medication to help him “stay between happy and sad”. Medication is one of the ways that bipolar disorder is treated and Uncle Vince’s mood swings in the space of the play may be a result of not sticking to his treatment. Uncle Vince is a fictional character that was developed to give children a chance to approach the issue of mental illness in their families and communities. There is no attempt to create a “typical” case of bi-polar as we do not believe that any mental illness can be simplified in such a way. Our goal was to create a character that is complex but also human and relatable for young audiences.

Children and Adults With Mental Illness:

While there are some mental illnesses that affect children, People Like Vince focuses on the relationship between a child and a mentally-ill adult. With 1 in 5 adults suffering from mental illness, it is likely that all children know someone with a mental illness and many have a mentally ill parent. Whether they are aware of their parent's mental illness or not, it has a deep impact on the child and it can, in some cases, affect the child's participation in school.

KEY POINTS:

- **Mental illness can happen to anyone**
- **Mental illness makes a person think, act and feel differently.**
- **You can not cause another person's mental illness.**
- **Mental illness happens for lots of reasons.**
- **You cannot "catch" mental illness**
- **Mental illness is nobody's fault.**



Post performance

Now that your students have seen the play it's time to further enrich their experience.

This study guide includes some ways to connect the play to the lessons in your classroom, in keeping with the **BC Curriculum** guidelines. There are a few suggested activities and pull-out worksheets, as well as resources for further information about mental illness and mental health.

The activities in this study guide best apply to the following BC Curriculum guidelines:

Health and Career - Healthy Relationships

Language Arts – Self and Society (Personal Awareness & Working Together)

Fine Arts – Exploration & Imagination, Context

Social Responsibility

For more information about curriculum guidelines, the study guide, additional exercises and the themes in the play, please contact our education liason at:
education@greenthumb.bc.ca

Here are some general discussion questions to think about after the play:

What did you think of the play?

What was your favourite part?

How is watching a play different from watching T.V. or a Movie?

Discuss the production. How did the set/costumes/sound/acting/writing/directing get the story across? What worked? What didn't? Why?

What some examples of bullying in *People Like Vince*?

Why do you think Myrtle lied to Uncle Vince?

Have you ever lied to someone? Why? How did it make you feel?

What would you have done if you were Myrtle?

What did Myrtle learn from Uncle Vince?

What do you think Uncle Vince learned from Myrtle?

What did you know about bi-polar disorder before the play? Did you learn anything new?

What does it feel like to be called "crazy"?

What are some of the ways that we can make people feel welcome and special?

Did you like the ending of the play? If not, what do you wish happened?

Some more in-depth discussion questions or prompts for journal writing:

At the ice cream shop, do you think Myrtle might have been embarrassed if Uncle Vince had not been acting strangely? Have you ever been embarrassed by a relative in front of your friends? Why were you embarrassed? Describe the situation and how you felt.

Do you think you can tell that a person has a mental illness just by looking at them? Can you think of any stereotypes about mental illness? Can you find facts to disprove these stereotypes? Describe another example of stereotypes and how they can make people feel. Maybe there is even a time when people made assumptions about you?

Example to think about: just because Uncle Vince is an artist, does it mean that all artists have mental illnesses? Does it mean that all people with mental illnesses are talented artists?

What does it mean to be unique? What does it mean to be “normal”? Which would you rather be? Why?

What are some helpful things that you do when you are really sad?



Websites geared to elementary age students about Mental Health:

www.cyh.com

Kids Health Website. Information for kids about a wide variety of health topics.

Includes games and activities.

www.headroom.net.au

A website of information about mental health for young people by young people.

There is a section for children 6-12 as well as youth age 12-18.

www.itsallright.org

An Australian website that tells the stories of four fictional young people who have a family member with a mental illness. The stories take the form of online journal/blogposts. There are very helpful FACTSHEETS directed at youth.

www.kidshelpphone.ca

The website has a section for kids and a section for teens and includes information about emotional well-being.



Websites about Mental Health for Teens:

www.youthinbc.com

A BC based website that has a real-time chat for youth with trained, helpful and non-judgemental volunteers.

www.mindyourmind.ca

A Canadian website geared towards youth and young adults who are seeking resources, information and tools for mental health.

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

Here are some helpful websites with more information about mental illnesses and mental health:

www.heretohelp.bc.ca

Has toolkits and educational materials provided by the British Columbia Partners for Mental Health and Addiction Information. The Teacher's Guide to mental illness/mental health in the classroom is worth checking out!

www.mdabc.net

The Mood Disorders Association of BC website.

www.bcscs.org

The BC Schizophrenia Society's website is an excellent resource for information about a variety of mental illnesses and provides options for seeking help locally.

www.kidsmentalhealth.ca

A website from Ontario that has a collection of resources for teachers, including tips for identification and intervention of common mental health issues in the classroom. Click on "For Professionals" and the "Resources for Teachers"

www.parentalmentalillness.org

A website designed to help support families with parental mental illness.

www.copmi.net.au

An Australian website: Children of Parents with a Mental Illness. It has tons of information for families caring for someone with a mental illness. Includes downloadable files, a comprehensive list of resources available and links to lots of other websites about mental health.

<http://www.bckidsmentalhealth.org>

The website for F.O.R.C.E Society for Kids' Mental Health. F.O.R.C.E. provides excellent resources for kids, parents and educators and supports the "Friends for Life" program in schools and in the community to promote mental health for young people.

www.keltymentalhealth.ca

The Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre is located at BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver and provides information for children, youth and families about all topics related to mental health. Their website also provides comprehensive resources for educators.

www.teenmentalhealth.org

A Canadian website that is helpful for parents and educators.



My FEELINGS.

Name: _____

I feel happy when.....

When I feel happy, I like to...

I feel sad when...

When I feel sad, I like to...

I get frustrated when....

When i feel frustrated sometimes I....

I get angry when....

When I feel angry sometimes I....

Something I wish for....

Family Project

In *People Like Vince*, Myrtle does a project about her Uncle Vince. She chooses to tell the story of his life in a slideshow of pictures and videos. Now is your chance to tell the story of YOUR family. Collect pictures, videos, letters, birthday cards, fabrics, objects, and anything else that will help you to create a project about your family.

Some questions to help you get started:

- Who are the members of your family?
- What makes each member of your family special?
- What makes your family unique?
- What is important to you about your family?

Some cool ways to present your project:

- A collage: On a canvas or a big piece of poster board make a collage about your family using pictures, letters, birthday cards, fabrics, objects, old magazines, etc.
- A powerpoint presentation: With videos, pictures and music, make a presentation on your computer that you can play as a slideshow in class
- A news report: Interview members of your family on camera and make a mini news report that tells the story behind the door of your family home!
- A picture book: Write a story about your family as if it were a children's book. You could even create your own illustrations!
- A play: Write a short play that tells the story of your family, just like *People Like Vince* tells a story about Myrtle's family.

Be Creative! There are lots of ways to tell a story! Find a way that suits you!

Emotions and Body Language

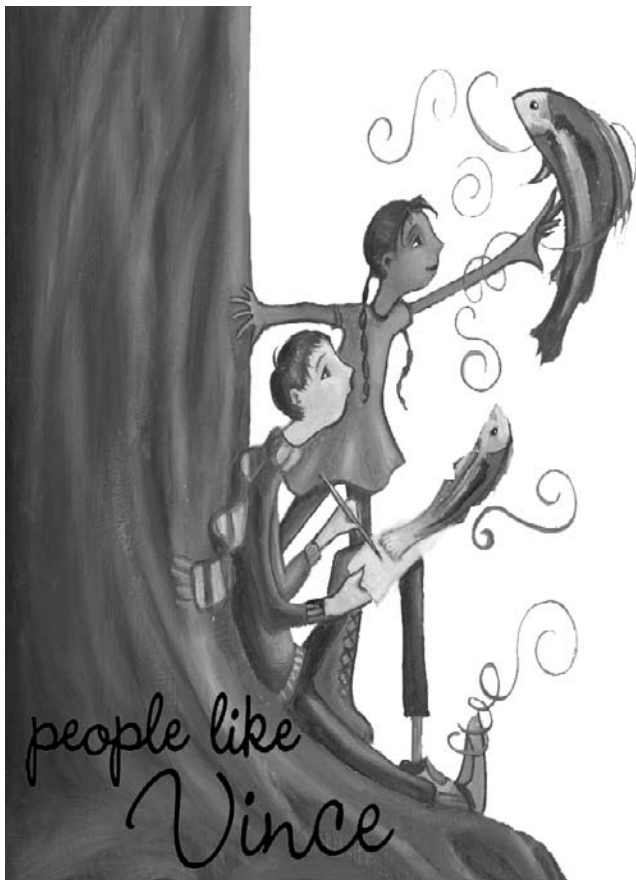
A variation of the game "Simon Says".

Make a list on the board of as many emotions as you can think of as a class. Talk about how we use facial expressions to show our emotions. Get students to volunteer to draw a face on the board to match each emotion.

Then, talk about how the actors in the play showed emotions using both their facial expressions and their body language. Practice making your body look: Sad, Mad, Happy, Frustrated, Excited, Confused, Nervous, etc.

Now, pick someone to be "Simon" and play a round of "Simon Says" but instead of "Simon says... touch your nose" Simon says an emotion and the kids have to make their body and their face show the emotion that "Simon Says."

If the leader (Simon) says an emotion but doesn't say "Simon Says" first...then whoever acts out that emotion is out and returns to sit at their desk until the next round.



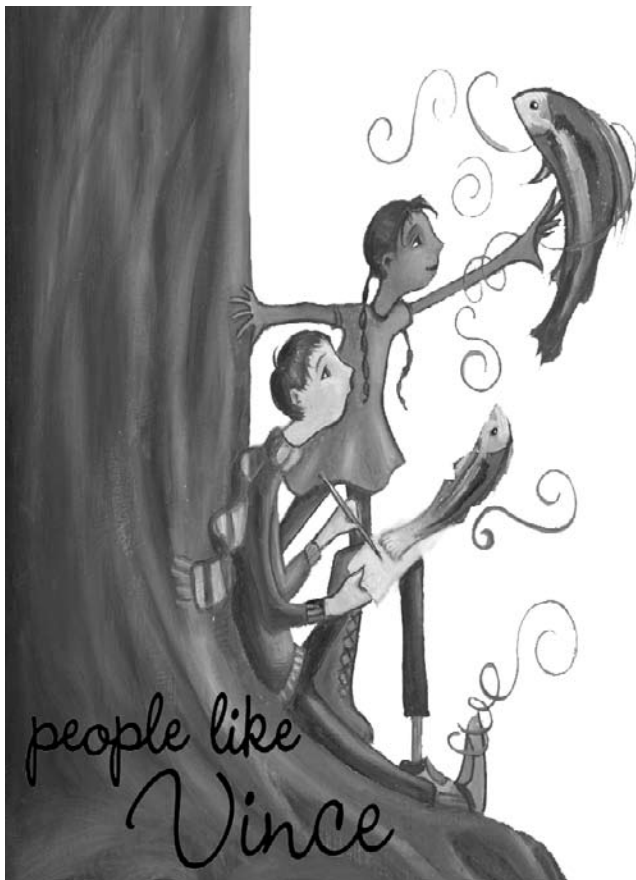
Art Project

What does Mental Illness Look Like?

In *People Like Vince*, you learned a little bit about bipolar disorder, which is a mental illness that affects a lot of Canadians. Vince is an artist so he finds it easiest to express what he is thinking and feeling through art...in his case...painting. Now is YOUR chance to be an artist! Make an art project that represents what mental illness looks like to you...

Your work of art can be about mental illness in general, about bipolar disorder, about your own feelings, about how you think Myrtle might have felt, about how you think Vince might have felt...or anything that represents what you see in your head when you think about the themes in the play.

Remember what Uncle Vince says:



“There is no right or wrong in the kingdom of art! If that’s what you see, then that’s what it’s about. That’s the great thing about art---it can be whatever you want it to be and no one can tell you that you’re wrong...or crazy”

Write your own Theatre Review!

Today I saw the play _____

Written by _____

The play was about _____

My favourite part of the play was:

Three things I liked about the play (these can be about the story, the actors, the costumes, the set, the music, or anything else you noticed):

1.

2.

3.

Three things that could have been improved (these can be about the story, the actors, the costumes, the set, the music, or anything else you noticed):

1.

2.

3.

Overall, I thought the play was.... _____

Reviewed by: _____

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to use and review the **People Like Vince** Study Guide as a resource to further enrich your students' experience watching the play.

We want to hear from you and your students!

Visit our website at **greenthumb.bc.ca** and tell us what you thought about the play, your experience and future play ideas- we welcome letters as well. You can also add our link to your classroom website to explore the site as an activity.

Good luck in the school year and we hope to see you next year!

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