

## Curricular Connections

A guide for teachers and students to Company One Theatre's Production



Opens October 2 | Boston Center for the Arts

# DRY LAND

A PLAY BY RUBY RAE SPIEGEL

Dear Educators and Students,

We are pleased to share with you our Curricular Connections Packet for Company One Theatre's production of DRY LAND, by Ruby Rae Spiegel, running October 2 – 30, 2015. We've developed the contents of this packet for you to explore the world of the production and we encourage you to adapt it to suit your needs for the classroom or the stage.

Enclosed you will find:

- A Synopsis and List of Characters
- A List of the Cast and Production Staff
- An Interview with the Playwright
- Article & Lesson Plan

Throughout this packet you will find excerpts from the production, photos from rehearsal, and images that highlight central ideas and themes. The discussion questions and lesson plan will provide creative opportunities for students to engage with these themes and connect with the world of DRY LAND. More content and updates about the production can be found on Company One Theatre's production and education blogs:

Production Blog: [drylandc1.wordpress.com](http://drylandc1.wordpress.com)

Education Blog: [c1stageone.wordpress.com](http://c1stageone.wordpress.com)

If you have any questions about this packet, or are interested in reserving group tickets for DRY LAND, please contact us at [stageone@companyone.org](mailto:stageone@companyone.org).

See you at the theater!

Education Department Staff  
Company One Theatre

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## SYNOPSIS

Set in a girls' locker room of a Florida high school, two unlikely friends are put to the most extreme test as they tackle issues surrounding sexuality, abortion, and the pressures of youth. Amy, who recently discovered she is pregnant, enlists the help of a fellow swim team member, Ester, to hide her secret and devise solutions to terminate her pregnancy. The girls develop an intensely interdependent bond with each other, revealing their worst fears and highest ambitions as they grapple with the life-changing experience of moving from adolescence to adulthood.

## TIME & SETTING

Present day, in the girls' locker room of a Florida high school.

## CHARACTERS

**AMY** – Age 17  
**ESTER** – Age 18  
**REBA** – Age 17  
**VICTOR** – Age 20  
**JANITOR** – Late thirties to early eighties

## CAST

**STEPHANIE RECIO** – Amy  
**EVA HUGHES** – Ester  
**ALEX LONATI** – Reba  
**KADAHJ BENNETT** – Victor  
**PAUL TRAINOR** – Janitor

## PRODUCTION STAFF

**STEVEN BOGART** – Director  
**JESSIE BAXTER** – Dramaturg  
**DAISY LONG** – Lighting Designer  
**COURTNEY NELSON** – Set Designer  
**MIRANDA KAU GIURLEO** – Costume Designer  
**SARAH WINTERS** – Props Designer  
**MATT GRAY** – Media Designer  
**LYNN WILCOTT** – Special Effects Designer  
**SARAH ELIZABETH BEDARD** – Fight Choreographer  
**ARIEL WELCH** – Stage Manager  
**ERIN LERCH** – Assistant Stage Manager  
**EMILY BROWN** – Assistant Stage Manager

## PLAYWRIGHT INTERVIEW – Ruby Rae Spiegel



*Playwright Ruby Rae Spiegel*

Playwright Ruby Rae Spiegel and Company One Dramaturg Jessie Baxter recently took some time to chat about the driving force behind DRY LAND’s inception and why it’s important to tell teen stories.

**JESSIE: What was your inspiration for writing this play?**

RUBY: It was a couple things — there was this article that I read called “The Rise of the DIY Abortion” in the New Republic, and that really got the ball rolling in my head. When I work, I usually pair a piece of journalism with my own experience, and I had also helped a friend through, not an abortion, but something similar and quite difficult. That was a very profound experience for me, so that plus the article got me thinking about women’s bodies and friendship, and how those intersect in these times of crisis.

### **Did you swim as a teen?**

Yeah, I was a swimmer on a team in middle school, but I actually wasn't very athletic. I quit right when flip-turns became a thing, because I was just too scared. I wasn't a very good swimmer, but I was a very good pianist. I played piano for 11 years of my life, until I was 15, and I worked really hard at that. So I kind of paired those two experiences together. With piano, I internally pushed myself a lot and worked really hard from a young age, and I think that's something that young athletes have a lot experience with.

**Swimming is also an interesting choice for the play because even though it's a team sport, it's still a very solitary activity.**

Absolutely, swimming has this divide where you might be working together on a relay race or something, but it's really your body alone in the pool. I remember hearing the gun go off, and you just go into your zone. My other interest in talking about swimming and athletes was that we hear a lot about girls being tough on their bodies because of media images, and I was interested in exploring that and eating disorders, but from a different angle — where someone is really pushing their body and obsessed with perfection, but in a way that doesn't have to do with beauty standards.

**I'm interested in your choice to focus on the teen girl experience. How did you approach these characters?**

The dialogue just sort of flowed for me, I think because I'm so close to those ages. In high school I wrote a play about middle school, and in college I wrote a play about high school...I like to write when I have a bit of perspective, but maybe not too much perspective, that I start to narrativize an experience. Something that I get frustrated with is that you see a lot portrayals of teenagers where there's a really simple way that they draw it back to the parenting. If a teen has an issue, it's because they have this certain kind of home or something, and that has always felt like it doesn't give teenagers

enough credit. They have their own issues because they're people, they're not just products of their environment or their parents, though those are obviously a big part of it. It felt really important to me to make them teenagers dealing with a problem that's political and immediate. I was interested in going to that really hot space and trying to find empathy and truth and specificity with it, because every teenage abortion story is specific and has to do with specific people. It just felt very important to me to make them high schoolers.

**We've spoken a lot as a production team about how this play is ultimately a story of friendship, and how two people who begin as strangers grow close after sharing an intense experience. Can you speak to that?**

I'm really drawn to unlikely friendship stories, and so I started with the character of Amy and I thought, she's very guarded, she has a lot of friends, but — and I think this is very common with young women who are guarded — she doesn't want to reach out to her closest friends with an issue, because she doesn't want that kind of institutional memory of this experience. That's why I included Reba, as a way to show that Amy has people, and decided not to reach out to them. So that was part of the unlikely friendship story for me: for Amy to be truly vulnerable, she had to be with somebody who didn't know her at all. I also think female friendship has to be portrayed more. People are really hungry for honest stories — stories without parents, stories about women without boys or men. Taking away these elements shows a female experience that is a huge part of a lot of women's lives and just isn't represented very much. Also, in doing that, you don't get the trope of two super close girlfriends chatting, but two autonomous individuals trying to understand each other and trying to get something done. I was interested in something where the people are quite different, but through a difficult experience find common ground.

**One of the things I love about the play is that you so deftly weave all these various "issues" into the text without it feeling like an "issue play." How did you**

**decide what to include and what to leave out about what's going on in the lives of these characters?**

I know that I have a minimalist style and I'm very allergic to cliché, so that makes me go to these hot spots where I say, "Okay, I'm gonna do a play that deals with abortion, female friendships, eating disorders, alienation...all of these issues." That works well for me because I tend to want to tell the least amount of information that I can. Nobody is going to be like, "Oh, an audience is here, so I'm just going to tell you about myself." So for myself it's about working with this tension where I have all the information I have to convey, but the challenge of how to do it realistically and without cliché. There's also the fact that you see a lot of one-issue things, but nobody lives a one-issue life. We have so many intersecting concerns and problems, and so even though it might seem like a lot — tackling somebody with an eating disorder, suicide, somebody who's going through an abortion — that just really rings true to my life and my experiences. You don't categorize people like that when they're real people, so it was a challenge I was interested in representing.

**Toward the end of the play, Amy muses a little about what her life might be like as an adult. Can you talk about that moment and the importance of voicing her potential future?**

I think that that was a really important moment for me. There was this piece in Elle that actually said it quite beautifully — that the play is about going through an abortion, but also about getting through it and resiliency. So I think that moment is showing that you're not branded by your experiences, no matter how much that seems to be the case. In this day and age, when there's so much stigma around things that women go through, I wanted to show that even though Amy is not a perfect person, she's a resilient person. There are a lot of people in this country who think that that self-abortion is a sin, so there's a lot going against her, and so the fact that she believes in herself is a really important part of the play.



*Eva Hughes (Ester), Stephanie Recio (Amy), and Alex Lonati (Reba) at a pool-side photo shoot for DRY LAND.*

**How did current cultural discussions and depictions of abortion narratives impact the way you approached the play?**

It's easy to be reticent about putting one of these stories out there because there are so few of them. Sometimes I was afraid that this story would become one of the few, and people would take it as a representation of the whole, whereas I just wanted to show that there are so many different kinds of specific abortion stories. So the more media that was coming out, the more excited I was, and the less of a burden I felt about portraying a perfect abortion story — whatever that is. I also did some research and set the play in central Florida, where the closest Planned Parenthood to where I imagine the characters live had been bombed several times in the past ten years. I also wanted to draw attention to the fact that in many states somebody like Ester would be criminalized — it's criminal behavior to aid somebody in a medical abortion. So all of



this was circling around the play, and I absorbed a bit of it, but I also wanted to shut some of it out so that I could make these characters not be representations of the whole, but specific women going through something that I felt was a very true experience.

**We had a few women from the Boston Doula Project come speak to our cast, and a big thing we took away from that conversation was that nobody has the same experience with abortion, it is very individual and specific.**

I think that's huge to talk about. I was really interested in trying to take the play out of the pro-life vs. pro-choice conversation, to try and talk about how it is hard, but a lot of things are hard, and there can be resiliency. It isn't a perfect thing, but it also isn't necessarily this kind of horrifying, scarring experience. There are just so many difficult experiences that we all go through — someone's parents getting divorced could be a lot worse than their abortion, or somebody's friend getting ill could be more difficult. I think it's really important to talk about how it is a difficult experience, but that it shouldn't be stigmatized.

**Do you consider this a political play?**

Yes, I do. There are other representations of abortion that are more like documentary theatre, or about protestors or abortion doctors, and that kind of story is usually labeled as more political. It's important to me to label it a political play, even though they talk about boys and their hair or whatever. Those things can coexist; a story about female friendship that includes an abortion is just as political as documentary theatre piece on abortion providers.

## PRODUCTION PARTNERS – Diving Into The Play



*Stephanie Recio (Amy) and Eva Hughes (Ester) in rehearsal for DRY LAND*

When an artistic company, ensemble, or individual artist tackles a new subject or idea, they will often reach out and connect with experts or organizations that specialize in research, programs, or services connected to that topic. Theatre companies, for example, will develop strategic partnerships with organizations in their community in order to magnify the impact of attending live theatre, bringing together multiple perspectives on issues represented in a play or musical. Theatre places the narratives of characters within the sociopolitical context of a situation or crisis, providing a physical and intellectual space for audiences to consider highly debated and controversial issues.

Ruby Rae Spiegel wrote the script for DRY LAND to tell a story about teenagers dealing with problems that are political and immediate—the characters encounter circumstances that are not uncommon among teenage narratives, but are specific to

every person who experiences them. Because of the politically and emotionally charged content in the play and its graphic staging, the DRY LAND team at Company One Theatre established partnerships with local organizations who specialize in addressing the real-life challenges faced by girls and women in the Boston community. Seeking relationships with experts and specialists in public health, mental health, and reproductive health would inform the rehearsal and production process as well as frame the dialogue between artists and audiences who come to see the show. Through interviews and post-show conversations Company One would lean on these experts to present a full range of best practices and perspectives on issues like women's health, reproductive rights, and teen suicide. Company One Theatre reciprocates this relationship by serving as a platform for these organizations to engage theatre audiences as new constituents, providing a more accessible, arts-based approach to their programs and services.

The young female characters in DRY LAND, like many adolescents, encounter isolation and lack of support from their community in dealing with serious personal struggles. Youth without access to a network of supportive adults, healthcare options, and leadership development opportunities can face many barriers to successfully moving into adulthood. Below is a list of the organizations Company One Theatre has partnered with for the October 2015 production of DRY LAND. Many of these groups serve women in Boston by providing access to programs, information, and resources for reproductive health, leadership opportunities, and advocacy.



### **Boston Doula Project**

The Boston Doula Project provides **free, compassionate and empowering support to people experiencing abortion**. They promote the doula model of physical, emotional, spiritual and informational support for people throughout the full spectrum of reproductive experiences.



Girls' Leadership, Organized Women

**Boston GLOW**  
Boston GLOW empowers girls and women to confidently use their voices and become leaders in our communities. Girls' Leadership (GL) identifies and rewards motivated female youth who possess powerful ideas through scholarship, micro-grant, and mentoring programs. Boston GLOW's Organized Women (OW) engages and inspires a network of women at issue-focused events and in numerous service and leadership training opportunities that help them reach their full potential.



### **Massachusetts Institute of Psychoanalysis**

Founded in 1987, MIP offers a **training program in psychoanalysis** and a one-year postgraduate fellowship program. MIP is an open organization providing a community in which anybody with an interest in psychoanalysis may become a member and participate. MIP offers free psychoanalytic programs where analysts of local, national and international reputation dialogue about comparative positions on topics of current interest and the relevance of psychoanalysis in the larger world.



### **Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts**

The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) is the advocacy and political arm of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM). Formed in 1984, PPAF believes that working within the political process is critical to advancing PPLM's mission to **increase access to sexual and reproductive health services and comprehensive sexuality education for women, men, and families across Massachusetts.**



### Peer Health Exchange

Peer Health Exchange's mission is to **give teenagers the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions**. PHE does this by training college students to teach a comprehensive health curriculum in public high schools that lack health education. The PHE vision is that, one day, all teens will have the knowledge and skills they need to make healthy decisions.



### Suffolk/Center for Women's Health and Human Rights

The Center for Women's Health and Human Rights (CWHHR) at Suffolk University is **the first academic institute in the United States to focus on women's health and human rights in the social sciences, arts and humanities, and public policy**. Founded in 2003, the CWHHR is committed to furthering the dignity and wellbeing of women and girls everywhere by exploring and extending the linkages between women's health and human rights.

*For a full list of community partners and the schedule of post-show conversations, visit [www.companyone.org](http://www.companyone.org)*

## Discussion Questions

**What other organizations operate in your school or community that serve and empower women?**

**What issues and challenges do young women encounter in your school or community? Do you think these issues are unique to your community or part of a national/global trend?**

**How successful is art (music, movies, books, plays, paintings, etc.) at addressing the issues and challenges encountered by women in your community?**

## LESSON PLAN – Process Drama

### Description

Actors participate in an ensemble-driven, peer-generated improvisation that explores multiple perspectives and attitudes about reproductive and mental health, and pressures from within our community. It is highly recommended that a facilitator, outside of the improvisations, guides and prompts the group through the process.

### Objectives

- Explore personal narratives around friendship, loyalty, trust
- Improvise group scenes that foster dialogue around choice, mental health, and reproductive rights.
- Fully engage in the process of exploring alternative perspectives, respecting the voices of individuals and the collective voice of the ensemble.

### Materials

Chairs, tables, and light rehearsal furniture  
Chart paper or white board with markers  
Pens or pencils with writing paper

### Length

Three 45-minute sessions

## LESSON PLAN – Process Drama

The following writing, discussion, and improvisation activities are part of a process-oriented lesson plan, requiring participants to take on multiple roles, identities, and beliefs. Actors engaged in this work should contribute to the group experience with the intention of establishing collective understanding about an issue or idea.

### PART 1 – Personal Narrative

**Writing Exercise:** Think of a time when you were asked to help a friend with an issue or problem related to their personal or mental health. This is a free-form writing exercise, so the goal is to begin writing whatever thoughts, memories, or feelings you have associated with these circumstances. Consider the following questions when writing your response:

- What was the issue or problem?
- Were you reluctant or eager to help?
- How did it feel to be trusted by your friend with this information?
- How successful were you in resolving the situation?
- Was intervention or guidance by an adult necessary?

**Partner Dialogue:** Find a partner and read your written response to them. Provide more explanation about the story you described as necessary, but your free-form writing should serve the purpose of capturing the essence of your experience.

After each partner has shared their response, determine what similarities and differences exist between the two sets of circumstances, e.g. were you both reluctant to help your friend in your respective stories?

**Group Connections:** Bring the entire group into a circle or configuration that suits the needs of the ensemble. Take turns answering the following questions based on the experience of sharing with your partner.

- What similar key words or phrases did you and your partner include in your written response?
- What similarities are there between the circumstances of your respective stories?
- Name the phrase or idea from your partner's written response that was most striking or memorable.

The responses to these questions from the entire group should be documented on a board or chart paper that can be displayed for the remainder of the lesson.

## PART 2 – Group Improvisation

**Scenario:** You and a group of high school students are having a conversation about a mutual friend of yours. She recently told the group that she is pregnant and is not sure how to decide what to do. She does not know what her options are, the identity of the father, and does not want any adults or family members to know about her situation. No one in this group of students knows the identity of the father and your friend is not present for this conversation.

### As A Group of Students:

1. Determine the full range of options for someone in your friend's position, including the benefits and risks associated with each.
2. Share what you believe is the best course of action for your friend.
3. The scenario ends when the group of students makes a collective decision about how to support your friend.

### Determine Before Starting:

1. Your friend's name
2. Time and setting for the student group conversation
3. Your individual relationship with this friend (e.g. sports team member, childhood friend, next-door neighbor)

**Reminder:** The purpose of this exercise is to genuinely process these circumstances and fully explore all of the options as a group. Respect each other's voice in the conversation and allow the other actors in this improvisation to explain or justify their position, even if you disagree with what they say.

### Processing The Work:

- What was challenging or difficult about this improvisation?
- How would you describe these friends and their relationship to each other?
- Describe the community or neighborhood where these students live?

## PART 3 – Reaching Out

**Writing Exercise:** In this exercise you will continue your role as a fictional high school student who just met with a group of peers to discuss the pregnancy of a mutual friend. After the meeting, the group asked you to communicate to your friend what they decided is the best option for addressing her pregnancy. Draft an email, or text, letting her know what her options are, but that you will support her in whatever decision she makes. After completing your email, take turns reading your message to the entire ensemble.

When listening to the messages written by the other ensemble members:

- What stands out to you, or is most memorable, about each message?
- What similarities or differences are there between the approaches taken in each message?



- Based on these messages, how would you describe this group of students and their relationship to this friend?

## PART 4 – Partner Improvisation

In pairs, improvise a scene based on the following scenario. Multiple pairs can play the scene in front of the ensemble, providing an opportunity to discuss different approaches and tactics in each.

**Scenario:** In this scene between two ensemble members, one partner plays a student from the original group improvisation, while the other plays an adult family member. The adult in this scenario has discovered the email message the student was planning to send to their friend. The adult disagrees with the approach the group of students has taken in helping their friend and wants to intervene.

### With Your Partner:

1. Fully explain your position on the issue and why you disagree.
2. Listen to what the other character is saying and convince them that you respect their position.
3. The scenario ends when either character convinces the other to change their mind. This shift must happen mutually, not through physical aggression or violence.

### Determine Before Starting:

1. Time and setting of the scene
2. Your relationship to each other (father/daughter, aunt/nephew, etc.)

**Reminder:** The purpose of this exercise is to genuinely process these circumstances. Respect each other's voice in the conversation and allow your partner to explain or justify their position, even if you disagree with what they say.

### Processing The Work:

- What was challenging or difficult about this improvisation?
- How would you describe the relationship between these two family members?
- How would you describe the community, neighborhood, or school where this group lives/attends.

## PART 5 – Group Improvisation

**Scenario:** You and a group of high school parents are having a conversation about teen pregnancy. News has spread that one of the students at your child's high school is pregnant.

### As A Group of Parents:

1. Determine what programs and services are available for young women in your community that address teen pregnancies, reproductive and mental health.
2. Share what you would do if you knew your own daughter was pregnant.

3. The scenario ends when the group of parents fully explores what can be done to improve access to reproductive health information, programs, and services for teen girls and women in your community.

**Determine Before Starting:**

Time and setting of the parent group conversation

**Reminder:** The purpose of this exercise is to genuinely process these circumstances and fully explore all of the options as a group. Respect each other's voice in the conversation and allow your peers to explain or justify their position, even if you disagree with what they say.

**Processing The Work:**

- What was challenging or difficult about this improvisation?
- How would you describe this group of parents and their relationship to each other?
- Describe the community or neighborhood where these parents live and raise their children.

## Discussion Questions

**What was the most challenging part of this process drama?**

**How are the priorities and perspectives of high-school students different than parents or family members?**

**How are your personal beliefs or attitudes about reproductive rights similar or different to those of characters in this process drama?**

**What moments in the improvised scenes, either from your own scene or from one of your peers, were the most problematic or controversial?**

**What moments in the improvised scenes, either from your own scene or from one of your peers, were the most constructive and contributed towards agreement or understanding?**

**How is the imagined community in this improvisation similar or different to your own community?**