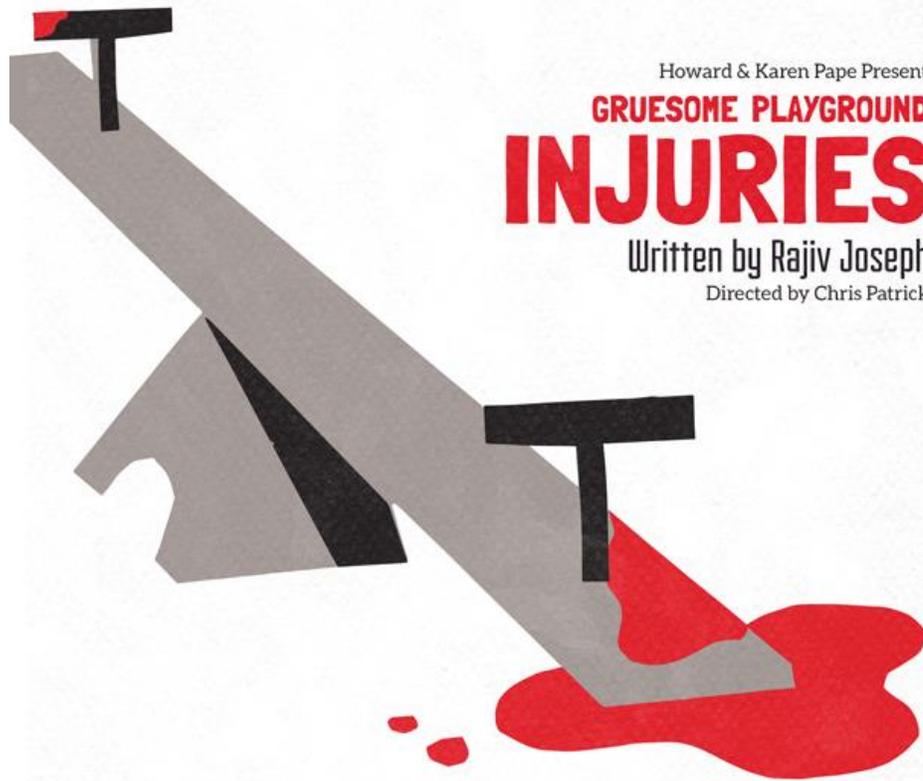
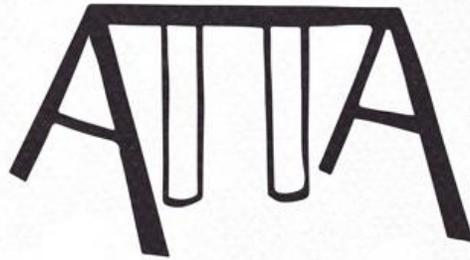


# *Gruesome Playground Injuries:* The Study Guide



Howard & Karen Pape Present

## **GRUESOME PLAYGROUND INJURIES**

Written by Rajiv Joseph

Directed by Chris Patrick

**April 10-May 3**

Running in Repertory with *The Mountaintop*

Founders Theater / 123 East Water Street / 434.977.4177 / [livearts.org](http://livearts.org)

# Meet the Playwright: Rajiv Joseph



American playwright Rajiv Joseph was born and raised in Cleveland, Ohio. He graduated with a degree in Creative Writing from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio in 1996, where he also performed with the Glee Club, an a cappella group called the Cheezies, and competed for the forensics team.

In 2004 Joseph earned a Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Since then he has taught Essay Writing at NYU and wrote for Seasons 3 and 4 of the Showtime series *Nurse Jackie*.

For his work as a playwright, Joseph has received numerous awards: in 2008 he received the Vineyard Theatre's Paula Vogel Award for emerging playwrights. *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo* was chosen as an Outstanding New American play by the NEA (US State Department), and became a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2010. In 2009 he received a Whiting Writer's Award, an international award given to 10 writers of any style of work who demonstrate "exceptional talent and promise in early career." Joseph later received the Steinberg Playwright Award, and in 2015 he received the Laurents/Hatcher Foundation Award for his new play *The Guards at the Taj*, set to premiere at the Atlantic Theater Company in May 2015.

Other plays by Rajiv Joseph include: *Huck & Holden*, his first full-length play which was based on his father's experience immigrating to the United States; *All this Intimacy*, about a man who impregnates 3 women at the same time; *Animals out of Paper*, in which a world-renowned origami artist opens her studio to a South-Asian teenage prodigy; *The North Pool*, which deals with race and alienation in a conversation between a transfer student and his vice principal.

A noticeable trend in Joseph's work is how they feature ethnically diverse characters. Some influence comes from his racially mixed background, with a Euro-American mother and a father from Kerala, India. However, Joseph has stated that there never seems to be consistency with themes of race in his plays – in *Animals Out of Paper*, for instance, the teenager Suresh is Indian, but the play itself is never about race. Joseph has also stated, "From a very simple perspective, there's enough American plays with all white people in it."

## ***Gruesome Playground Injuries***

Two longtime friends Doug and Kayleen meet frequently over moments of accidents and hospital stints. Over the course of 30 years (ages eight to 38 for these characters), we notice that Doug is a daredevil prone to accidents while Kayleen is more apt to being psychically damaged. Through these wounds the characters find intimacy and share these experiences together.



*Gruesome* premiered at the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas in 2009. Selma Blair (*Hellboy*, *Cruel Intentions*) was cast as Kayleen and Brad Fleischer (*Kev*, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*) as Doug. The play was directed by Rebecca Taichman. In 2011 the play was performed at the Second Stage Theatre in New York and was directed by Scott Ellis. Kayleen was played by Jennifer Carpenter (Showtime's *Dexter*) and Doug was portrayed by Pablo Schreiber (HBO's *The Wire*).

## Transitions and Time Jumps

The play jumps around time periods out of chronological order, but each scene develops something new among the characters. Additionally, there is a consistent pattern of time period changes: a scene will jump forward 15 years or backwards 10 years. These changes in times provide the audience with a unique way to piece together the development of Doug and Kayleen's relationship. Beginning at ages eight until they eventually reach 38, the transitions in time test both the actors and the audience to fully absorb how relationships impact people and how memories and moments of reflection are not typically linear. Such transitions, including costumes and makeup, are typically done by the actors on stage, with leisurely scene changes. Rajiv Joseph explains the long periods of transitions to signify the passages of time in these characters.

The general usage of time jumps is not unique, although Joseph's specific structure and order is extremely particular. *Di and Viv and Rose* is a comedy by Amelia Bullmore that tracks the friendship of three friends beginning in college and carries on for nearly three decades between the years 1983 and 2010.



Stephen Sondheim's *Merrily We Roll Along* also depicts time jumps, looking at a character's professional career and how that impacted his friendships and romantic relationships. Sondheim's musical is noted for moving chronologically backwards, starting at the "end" of the story and traveling back to the innocence of the characters. Additionally, playwright Lanford Wilson created *The Rimers of Eldritch* with a structure that also travels and back-and-forth in time.



The play is centered on the murder of the girl, and certain moments are repeated to ingrain certain parts into the minds of the audience. The play as a whole challenges the audience to piece

together the puzzle of what happened in this town.

So what is the fascination of using time jumps and an unconventional progression of scenes? The structure is fascinating, but does the message come across differently than if the story were presented chronologically? Keep this in mind when experiencing Rajiv Joseph's play and see if you can piece together the puzzle he creates.

