

# COMPANY OF FOOLS

A proud part of the Sun Valley Center for the Arts

## Study Guide



By  
**Molly Smith Metzler**

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# WELCOME TO COMPANY OF FOOLS

Dear Educator,

Company of Fools and the Sun Valley Center for the Arts are pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our performance of *CRY IT OUT*, by Molly Smith Metzler. Working with schools is a fundamental part of Company of Fools' and The Center's mission.

We hope this study guide will serve as a useful resource for you as educators and parents. It is designed to enhance student learning both before and after the performance, to support your classroom lesson plans and deepen the educational value of your students' experience. The resources and activities in this study guide support the Idaho Content Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy for grades 11–12.

Thank you for the sharing the magic of performing arts with your students!

—Company of Fools



## ABOUT THE PLAY: *Cry It Out*

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**CRY IT OUT** takes place in Manorhaven, a village of Port Washington, located in Long Island, NY. Manorhaven, while having much socioeconomic diversity itself, abuts one of the wealthiest neighborhoods in all of America; Sands Point. Jessie, a corporate lawyer and a recent Manhattan-transplant, is having difficulty coping to her new life of motherhood and seclusion until one day when she gathers up enough courage to invite her next-door-neighbor Lina over for coffee and conversation. Lina is a brash community-college dropout that is dreading the end of her maternity leave and the inevitable return to her entry level position as a receptionist at a hospital. During one of Jessie and Lina's routine nap-time coffee breaks, Mitchell, a wealthy resident of Sands Point, stops by to ask if his wife Adrienne could join in on their "Coffee Klatch."

Molly Smith Metzler's *Cry It Out* takes its name from the 1986 book *Solve Your Child's Sleep Problems* by Dr. Richard Ferber (although Dr. Ferber relied heavily on Dr. Emmet Holt's 1895 book *The Care and Feeding of Children*). The "cry it out" method refers to a means of solving infant sleep problems by relying on the infant self-soothing rather than on intervention by parents. Although widely practiced, the "cry it out" method has had many detractors, including pediatricians who have openly criticized the method due to the bodily stress that crying causes in babies. More recently, medical practitioners and social scientists have called into question the method as a result of the challenges faced by the different demographics of new parents. For example, the method was developed largely in response to research done on an exclusively white and middle/upper-middle class cohort. Recent research indicates that race and class have a huge impact on new parent's abilities, understanding, and approach to child rearing and the "cry it out" method has been described by a number of researchers as an expression of white, wealthy privilege. *Cry It Out* the play is a rich and complex reminder of the trials and tribulations for the old moms, reassuring solace for new moms, and an outright eye opener for the childless.

**CONTENT ADVISORY:** *This production includes adult themes and language and includes the smoking of an electronic cigarette.*

**RECOMMENDED AGE:** *This production is recommended for audiences 16 years of age and older.*

**APPROXIMATE RUN TIME:** *Cry It Out is approximately 1 hour and 35 minutes with an intermission..*

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

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**MOLLY SMITH METZLER** grew up in Kingston, New York, an economically depressed city in the 1990s that was starkly divided by income. Having grown up around people of limited means, Molly developed an interest in discussing and dissecting the issue of class. She did not, however, always want to be a playwright. In fact, it wasn't until the semester before graduation from SUNY Geneseo that Molly took an introductory playwriting class that changed her life forever. To date, Molly has written six full-length plays and has received the Lecomte du Nouy Prize from Lincoln Center and a finalist nod for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize. While Molly is first and foremost a playwright, she also writes heavily for television, including *Orange is the New Black*, *Casual*, *Codes of Conduct*, and *Shameless* (which she also produces). *Cry It Out* evolved from scribbled notes she wrote during the first two years of her daughter's life and the friendships that came from it.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

## "THE PARENTHOOD TRAP" BY PLAYWRIGHT DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU

A conversation with the playwright of *Cry it Out*, a comedy/drama about bonds and conflicts among neighbors with young children.

**DOMINIQUE MORISSEAU:** It's funny, when I first heard the title *Cry it Out*, perhaps because I'm not a mom yet, I wasn't thinking of it in the way the phrase is used in the play. I was thinking of it like, we're crying out to the world, you know? Can you talk about how you chose your title?

**MOLLY SMITH METZLER:** I was almost done with the play and I still didn't have a title. I was super-stressed out about it, because I had only bad ideas, like *Two Coffees in a Yard*, or *Over Coffee*. Just horrible. Then I remembered that the two main characters briefly talk about the "cry it out" sleep method—a disputed, controversial method of "teaching" your baby to sleep through the night by leaving them to scream their lungs out. It's aggressive, and it's not unlike what new parents go through: It's terrifying and you can cry out for help all you want, but no one is coming to your side with answers. You have to figure it out on your own. So I liked this idea for a title, and selecting it actually helped me finish the play because I started writing towards it. To earn it as a title. And I wanted it to make sense in a bunch of ways, so I'm thrilled you experienced it the way you did. I don't think *Coffee Klatch* would have had quite the same effect, do you?

**The word "cry" is in the title. Do you feel like people carry a bias against that word itself, coming from a woman writer?**

It's funny, I've attended three productions of the play so far, and at all three, people have come up to me afterwards to say they were surprised it wasn't a "chick play." I think the title leads people to expect something soft, with lots of tears and breast milk. Which is not completely inaccurate—there's plenty of breast milk. But what's surprising is who is doing the most crying: the male character. He's the one "crying out" most loudly. It's an important texture of the story. To me this play is about the challenges facing new parents. It's about how unfair the socioeconomics of child care are in this country. It troubles me when the play is marketed as a "chick play." That's only 50 percent of who should be in the house. And it's contrary to the play's point: that parenthood isn't a women's issue.

**When I look at your character descriptions, you explain the layered history of what these characters represent socioeconomically. Why is class so important in this story?**

New parenthood is the perfect lens through which to examine socioeconomics. People talk about going back to work after you have a child like it's always a choice. Or they make it a feminist issue, making new mothers feel like they're stuck in the 1950s if they want to stay home, or they're cold-hearted careerists if they don't want to stay home. We make it black and white, and we're so judgmental. But it's a very complicated, personal, emotional, and financial thing.

We had a daughter at a time in my life where we did not have money. It was shocking to wake up one day and realize that I did not have the money to send my daughter to the outstanding preschool that I wanted to send her to, that I didn't have the money to get a nanny, that I did not have the money to get a babysitter so I could write a play. We don't actually talk about it, but it's a socioeconomic issue in this country, who gets to have the luxury of choice. Many people do not get one.

So here I was with a newborn, grappling with this very thing, while living in a town that was divided by class, in a visual way. Port Washington, N.Y., the city, is made up of a couple of different villages. Manorhaven, which is on sea level, is working-class and mostly rentals and duplexes, some of which are Section 8 housing. It's very diverse and family-friendly, so that's where Colin and I lived. But literally right above Manorhaven, staring down at us from a cliff, is Sands Point, one of the wealthiest villages in the country. A bunch of really famous people live up there. And they're truly looking down from their palatial estates over this rental community in Manorhaven. I would go for walks and look up at the cliffs and be like, "How can I not write about this? This is incredible. Our kids are all gonna go to the same school, but our experiences are so different."

**Is there some place where motherhood and parenting defies socioeconomics?**

The equalizer is friendship. That's what was wonderful about my maternity leave in Port Washington. I can't think of another time in life when you get to make new friends as an adult. You're home with a baby, you need to socialize the baby, and you need company to survive. So for the first time in decades, you're out at the library or coffee shops trying to make a new friend. I remember baking elaborate banana breads and trying to lure potential friends back to my crappy duplex. Finally I met the world's nicest new mom and she saved my life by introducing me to the new parents in the community. We were from all walks of life, from Sands Points to food stamps. We had nothing in common except one huge thing: We all had little newborns. That's why I cross my fingers that the play feels hopeful at the end. The characters may not have easy answers to their questions, but at least they have each other. I'm still friends with all the parents that got me through that time in my life. They're not people I would've ordinarily gotten to meet, but now they are some of my most cherished friendships.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER **BEFORE** SEEING THE PLAY

1. What relationships have an impact on your life and why?
2. How does socioeconomic status affect your relationships?
3. Do you believe that some issues are “women’s issues” or men’s issues”? How do gender stereotypes reinforce behavior in our society?



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER **AFTER** SEEING THE PLAY

1. What themes do you recognize as most important in the play?
2. How do the characters embody or challenge gender and socioeconomic stereotypes?
3. What would be an alternate ending to the play? How would that ending reinforce or challenge stereotypes?



### ★ Teacher Tip!

### WAYS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS **AFTER** SEEING THE PLAY

Using the above questions as potential prompts, here are some ways to encourage further examination of the play-going experience.

#### EXPLORE

Write a scene, short play or story about a stereotype  
Write an alternative ending

#### ANALYZE

Draw a connection to a current event or cultural reference

#### INTERACT

Improvise scenes  
Talk to others in your community about stereotypes

# CAST & CREATIVE TEAM:

## CAST:

Adrienne ..... **Michelle Carter\***      Jessie..... **Ariel Puls\***  
 Lina ..... **Paula Rebelo\***      Mitchell ..... **Joel Vilinsky**

## CREATIVE TEAM:

Direction ..... **Denise Simone**      Production Assistant/Dramaturg .... **Chris Henderson**  
 Costume Design ..... **Maria Gerhardt**      Stage Manager ..... **K.O. Ogilvie\***  
 Lighting Design ..... **K.O. Ogilvie\***      Technical Director ..... **Patrick Sczcotka**  
 Scenic Design ..... **Joe Lavigne**      Producing Artistic Director ..... **Scott Palmer**  
 Sound Design ..... **Russell Simone**



**MICHELLE CARTER (Adrienne)** is thrilled to be back in the valley with her Foolish family. You've seen her on the Liberty stage in *Welcome Home*, *Jenny Sutter*; *Doubt*; *Violet*; *Noises Off*; and *110 In*

*The Shade*. A native of Richmond, Virginia, Michelle and husband Cliff have called Los Angeles home for the past 19 years. When not working in commercials and TV shows (*Toyota*, *Chick-Fil-A*, *Nissan*, *Grimm*, *Mom*, *The Librarians*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *The Runaways*) she's cheering on the Atlanta Braves with their 3-year-old daughter, Hailey, or getting lots of snuggles from Hudson Dog. *This performance is dedicated to the one who made the call 12 years ago. Love and miss you so much, JCG.*



**ARIEL PULS (Jessie)** is very happy to be part of the family here at Company of Fools for their 24th season. She earned her BFA at the University of Portland and her MFA in acting at

Columbia University. Ariel is a proud Associate Artist with Original Practice Shakespeare Festival and loves working to make theatre accessible to all. *A big thanks to Scott Palmer for bringing her into this family; to Denise Simone for trusting her to share this story; to the cast and crew; to her own family; and to all the new moms out there—you can do this!*



**PAULA REBELO (Lina)** is a Brazilian actress based in Los Angeles. Select credits include *The River Bride* (Arizona Theatre Company), *The Clean House* (Boise Contemporary Theater),

Four Larks's *The Temptation of St. Antony*, Sheila Callaghan's *That Pretty*; or *The Rape*

*Play* (Son of Semele) and Theatre Movement Bazaar's *Grail Project* and *Big Shot* (South Coast Repertory, Bootleg Theatre, and tours to China and Scotland). Paula has received two Ovation Awards for her work in *The Temptation of St. Antony* (2015) and *Grail Project* (2019). She holds a BFA. from CalArts. Paula is thrilled to be making her debut with Company of Fools. [www.paularebelo.com](http://www.paularebelo.com)



**JOEL VILINSKY (Mitchell)**, a founding COF member since its 1992 inception in Richmond, Virginia, was last seen as Aster in *Life Sucks*. Favorite COF roles include Mike in *Good People*, Gordon in *Dead Man's*

*Cell Phone*, Hannay in *The 39 Steps*, Howie in *Rabbit Hole*, Harold in *K2*, Jonathan in *Sight Unseen*, Gabe in *Dinner with Friends*, Gabriel in *James Joyce's The Dead*, and Danny in *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*. Joel also mentored students as part of COF's New Voices program, directed *Welcome Home*, *Jenny Sutter*; and served as editor/director and co-contributor of COF's February production of original writings, *Dinners with Friends*.



**DENISE SIMONE (Direction)** grew up in a small town in New Jersey, exit 135 off the Garden State Parkway, to first-generation Italian-American parents who regarded the arts as the highest form

of achievement and the secret to a rich life. She is a founding member of Company of Fools, and from 1996 to 2016 she served as its Co-Producing Artistic Director, helping to guide the Company in becoming one of the leading arts organizations in the state. Her directing credits with COF include *Heisenberg*; *Clybourne Park*; *Proof*; *Constellations*; *Almost, Maine*; *Doubt*; *Dead Man's Cell Phone*; *Distracted*; *Collected Stories*; *Frozen*;

and *The Laramie Project*. In recognition of her experience and achievement in the theatre, Simone was awarded the Idaho Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts by Governor Butch Otter in 2014. In addition to her work as a director, Denise also works as an actor, voice actor, teacher, communications coach, and arts consultant. *This one—and all the ones to come—are for you, friend.* [www.denise-simone.com](http://www.denise-simone.com)



**SCOTT PALMER (Producing Artistic Director)** received his bachelor's degree from the University of Oregon, earned his master's degree from Oregon State University, and studied for his Ph.D.

in Contemporary Theatre Practice at the University of Glasgow in Scotland. He is the founder of both Glasgow Repertory Company (Scotland's only Shakespeare-dedicated theatre company) and Bag&Baggage Productions, a professional theatre based in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon. Scott joins The Center as Producing Artistic Director of Company of Fools after 15 years of artistic leadership in Oregon, active involvement with the Theatre Communications Group and National Theatre Conference, and more than 20 years as a director and internationally recognized adapter of classical dramatic literature. In addition to his work as a director, Scott has also worked in cultural policy, advocacy, capital campaign fundraising, and social justice/equity work in the performing arts.



\*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the US #EquityWorks

# IDAHO CONTENT STANDARDS

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Reading Standards for Literature that apply to Company of Fools performance of CRY IT OUT.

## KEY IDEAS & DETAILS:

Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

**11th–12th grade:** Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

## CRAFT & STRUCTURE:

Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

**11th–12th grade:** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

## INTEGRATION OF KEY IDEAS:

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words..

**11th–12th grade:** Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

### Materials for this study guide were gathered from the following sources:

Morisseau, Dominique. “The Parenthood Trap.” *American Theatre Magazine*. 6 Dec 2018: n pag. Print.  
[www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/ela-literacy/booklets/ELA-Literacy-Standards.pdf](http://www.sde.idaho.gov/academic/shared/ela-literacy/booklets/ELA-Literacy-Standards.pdf)  
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