

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS

a play for grades 4-6

by Jennifer A Kokai & Oliver Grey Kokai-Means



PLAN-B
Theatre Company



ZOMBIE THOUGHTS received its world premiere October 1, 2019-January 18, 2020 as Plan-B Theatre Company's Sixth Annual Free Elementary School Tour, funded in part by an ArtWorks grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. Directed by Cheryl Cluff, stage managed by Sharah Meservy, designed by Arika Schockmel (costumes) and Aaron Swenson (artwork), featuring Katie Jones/Sharah Meservy as Sam and Alicia Washington as Pig.

Following is an excerpt. To receive the full script and inquire about production rights, please contact Jennifer A. Kokai at jkokai@randomtree.org

Two-actor and three-actor versions of the script are available. A previous middle school production further subdivided the roles so that the Machine was played by multiple actors and each individual villain was played by an individual actor. In all cases, actors of any race or gender may play any role or combination of roles.

CHARACTERS

SAM	Our hero. Male or female. 9 years old. Has an anxiety disorder and sometimes gets depressed. Tries to be brave, but often fails. Gets upset and frustrated easily. Smart with words but not always smart with emotions.
PIG	Sam's friend and sidekick. A wacky pun telling pig.

SETTING

We are in a video game. It is also life. The levels get harder and harder and you don't get to quit playing.

Note: The two actors who play Sam and Pig should know both characters. They should be able to do both parts. The play functions as a "choose your own adventure" and the audience plays a big part in selecting how things go.

If necessary, Sam or Pig can have the App tell the players (the audience):

*"You have temporarily been locked out and the game is on autopilot"

Or

*"For temporal adjustment reasons the game is skipping to level [x]"

Note: This script has been reviewed and endorsed by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Licensed Behavioral Analyst for its depiction of and treatment suggestions for Generalized Anxiety Disorder.

TUTORIAL

(Zippy music, like the theme song to Pokemon or Zelda. Something that tells us we are on an adventure. The two actors stand on stage, they are not in character yet.)

PLAYER A

Welcome players to Zombie Thoughts. First you must choose your avatars. There are two avatars available. Raise your hand if you want Avatar A, that's me, to be Sam. Raise your hand if you want Avatar B to be Sam. Avatar B you have been chosen to be Sam. Avatar A you will be Pig. The tutorial will now commence.

(Sam puts on something that indicates Sam, Pig puts on something that indicates a pig.)

SAM

Yes! I'm the main character!

PIG

Wait what? I'm who?

SAM

Your name is Pig.

PIG

Like, oink, oink?

SAM

Yes.

PIG

This is very disappointing. I wanted to be Sam.

SAM

Maybe they'll choose you to be Sam next time?

PIG

Ok.

SAM

You're a very attractive Pig.

Am I?

PIG

Oh yes. Very.

SAM

Well, ok then. What's this?

PIG

I think it's a phone?

SAM

There's an app open on it called Zombie Thoughts. It says I should read this. Um. Ok. Bossy phone. Players, there are three choices for Sam's hat. Choose: baseball cap, cowboy hat, or top hat. Do you vote for baseball cap? Cowboy hat? Top hat? You have chosen [x hat].

PIG

Oh. I wear [x] hats?

SAM

Seems like it!

PIG

I didn't know I was the kind of person who could pull this off.

SAM

Sam, you are a 9 year old human. Abilities: intelligence, creativity, communication. Weaknesses: anxiety, irritability, moody. Equipment: book.

(Pig hands Sam a book)

SAM

Um... I'm moody? I'm not moody. What does moody even mean? Give me that phone. Pig, you are the side kick. Abilities: cheerfulness, empathy...

PIG

Very good looking.

SAM

Seriously?

PIG

Say it! Say it!

SAM

Very good looking. Players do you want Pig to wear a giant flower headband, a fedora, or a great deal of blue eye shadow? You have chosen [x].

PIG

I didn't think I could get any better looking, but I was wrong. The players are the best!

SAM

I don't know. I'm worried that this hat is not going to be very helpful. And what do you do with a book?

PIG

Oh, you worry too much.

SAM

I do? I guess I do. I'm concerned about my character traits.

PIG

What are mine?

SAM

Pig. Weaknesses: silliness, inability to focus, habit of telling bad puns. Equipment: a rubber chicken and a phone with an app that tracks your progress.

(Pig gets a rubber chicken and phone)

PIG

I can't see how any of those things could be weaknesses. Ok. It says players: Choose your first location. You can choose Mount Doom or Whisperrun Ghost Town.

SAM

Wait. What? Offer them other choices.

PIG

I can't. That's all the screen says. Raise your hand if you choose Mount Doom. Raise your hand if you choose Whisperrun Ghost Town.

IF THE AUDIENCE CHOOSES MOUNT
DOOM CONTINUE TO THAT SCENE
AND USE DIALOG CHUNK I FOR
THE REST OF THE TUTORIAL, IF
WHISPERRUN GHOST TOWN, GO TO
THAT SCENE AND USE DIALOGUE
CHUNK II FOR THE REST OF THE
TUTORIAL

I. You have chosen Mount Doom. Advance Sam and Pig to
Mount Doom.

II. You have chosen Whisperrun Ghost Town. Advance Sam
and Pig to Whisperrun Ghost Town.

(I.)

SAM

Wait. What?

PIG

Well, let's get going.

SAM

To Mount Doom? Um. I'm too tired today to go hiking.

PIG

I don't think we have a choice. The players pick and we have to do what they say. Cause we're their avatars.

SAM

I changed my mind. You can be Sam.

PIG

No, they picked you to be Sam. You have to be Sam. And we have to go to Mount Doom.

SAM

That's stupid.

PIG

Well, that's not a very nice thing to say.

SAM

Sorry. I just think this is a terrible idea.

PIG

Why?

SAM

It makes me feel very worried. That's all.

PIG

I think it sounds awesome!

SAM

That's because your character is silly! You don't take anything seriously!

PIG

Of course I don't! It's a game!

SAM

It's called Mount Doom. Why would anyone choose to go there?

PIG

It will be an adventure! Imagine the view from the top of the mountain! Come on Sam! Let's go on adventure! If anything bad happens, I'll save your bacon!

SAM

No.

(Go to Mount Doom scene)



Plan-B Theatre Company's Sixth Annual Free Elementary School Tour: ZOMBIE THOUGHTS
a world premiere by Jennifer A. Kokai & Oliver Kokai-Means
created specifically for grades 4-6 but accessible to select K-3
running time 35 minutes
planbtheatre.org/zombiethoughts

Contact Sarah Meservy, Education Coordinator, at sarah@planbtheatre.org or 801.297.4200
 to bring this FREE assembly to your school in October/November 2018
 (booking preference given to Title I schools)
 presented in Davis County by Davis Arts Council's Active Stages Program

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ZOMBIE THOUGHTS STUDY GUIDE



Last fall, Plan-B Theatre Company's Free Elementary School Tour helped 8,000 elementary students navigate grief through RIVER.SWAMP.CAVE.MOUNTAIN. In 2016, body image was the focus of THE EDIBLE COMPLEX. In 2015 and 2014, differences were celebrated and affirmed through RUFF! and DIFFERENT=AMAZING.

This year's Free Elementary School Tour, ZOMBIE THOUGHTS by Jennifer A. Kokai and her 11-year-old son Oliver Kokai-Means, is inspired by Oliver's experience living with General Anxiety Disorder (GAD). Constructed like a video game, the play is interactive, inviting students to make choices throughout the play to help Sam (who has anxiety) and Pig (who is punny) progress through the game-within-the-play. The only path to victory is if students make a series of choices that help Sam and Pig learn empathy for each other. *Oh...and it's really, really funny.*

Why ZOMBIE THOUGHTS?

According to Wasatch Mental Health, Utah has the highest rate of mental illness nationwide. This includes GAD and other anxiety disorders, which the Anxiety and Depression Association of America estimates affects 1 in 8 children in the United States. By dispelling misunderstandings surrounding anxiety for the students, teachers and administrators experiencing ZOMBIE THOUGHTS, our hope is to help your school become a safer space for each of its students.

Recent Harvard research (Jones, Brush, Bailey, Brion-Meisels, McIntyre, Kahn, Nelson & Stickle, 2017) shows that social and emotional learning (SEL) is comprised of three skills areas:

Cognitive

- managing and shifting attention
- controlling impulses
- planning and goal setting
- critical thinking

Emotional

- recognizing and expressing emotions
- regulating emotions and behavior
- empathy

Social

- understanding social cues
- prosocial behavior
- conflict resolution
- problem solving

SEL skills, *essential* for student success, work in tandem with beliefs, character, values and personality. They are malleable and sensitive to outside stimuli from infancy through adolescence. When we only focus on cognitive issues without attention to the other components of SEL, major aspects of students' social-emotional development go unsupported. Thus it is crucial to incorporate SEL into classroom activities.

Will ZOMBIE THOUGHTS make a difference?

SEL interventions impact both social-emotional skills and academic outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). They have short and a long-term effects on a child's academic progress, behavioral adjustment and emotional health and well-being.

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS addresses the topic of childhood anxiety and depression, two internalizing behaviors that often go unrecognized in schools. While externalizing behaviors are more noticeable because they are more likely to lead to school and classroom disruptions, internalizing behaviors are just as serious and are easily overlooked if educators aren't primed to look for, recognize and intervene.

A school environment where SEL learning is a focus both formally (in the relationships between adults and children) and informally (in the overall climate and culture of the building) will better equip our students for dealing with life's stressors.

Where does ZOMBIE THOUGHTS fit in my Core?

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) lists self-management, which includes stress management, as one of the core competencies. The Utah State Board of Education's Health Education Core identifies SEL is an important component for grades 3-6. Below are some of the Core standards and objectives addressed by and through ZOMBIE THOUGHTS:

Grade 3

Standard 1: Students will learn ways to improve mental health and manage stress.

Objective 1: Demonstrate responsibility for self and actions.

- a. Identify personal responsibilities.
- b. Predict the consequences of neglecting responsibilities, such as increased stress, grades, punishment, no sense of accomplishment, impact on other people.
- c. Report the outcomes (sense of accomplishment, feeling good, contribution to cause, less stress) of completing responsibilities.
- d. Determine how positive decision making can help complete responsibilities.

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Grade 4

Standard 1: Students will learn ways to improve mental health and manage stress.

Objective 4: Explore positive options for managing stress.

- Define stress.
- Identify behaviors or situations that may cause conflict or stress.
- Create a personal stress management plan.

Grade 5

Standard 1: Students will learn ways to improve mental health and manage stress.

Objective 1: Summarize how communicating with others can help improve overall health.

- Compare the benefits of social interaction and time alone.
- Communicate the need for social interaction and time alone.
- Adopt behaviors to help maintain mental health, such as reading, exercise, lifelong learning, abstaining from substance abuse.

Objective 4: Demonstrate constructive ways of managing stress.

- Explain how both positive and negative events can cause stress.
- Identify physiological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses to stress.
- Predict how neglecting personal responsibilities may increase stress.
- Develop and apply a personal stress management plan.

Grade 6

Standard 1: The students will learn ways to improve mental health and manage stress.

Objective 1: Develop strategies for appropriately and safely expressing emotions.

- Recognize the range of emotions, including extremes.
- List situations that elicit strong emotions; e.g., winning or losing a competition, losing a friend, family changes.
- Predict the effect of substance use on emotions and the ability to appropriately manage them.

Objective 4: Demonstrate positive strategies for managing stress.

- Identify situations or circumstances that cause stress.
- Recognize personal reaction or response to stressful situations.
- Design a personal plan that includes options for managing stress and stressful situations.

ZOMBIE THOUGHTS Classroom Activities

Vocabulary

Define anxiety. List synonyms and antonyms for anxiety. Create a concept web with anxiety in the center. Repeat the process with the word stress.

Drawing

Have students draw a picture of something that makes them anxious, then share those drawings in partnerships and possibly the entire class.

Writing & Family Engagement

Write about a time you felt anxious. What did you do? How did it feel?

Extension: Have students interview someone (a classmate, a friend, a community or family member) about an anxious experience or event and record it in writing. SEL work is strengthened through out-of-school partnerships such as family engagement.

Book/Story

Read one of these books aloud and discuss it.

- What To Do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety* by Dawn Huebner
- Don't Think About Elephants* by Susanne Merritt
- Wilma Jean the Worry Machine* by Julia Cook

Discussion & Role Play

Pose a scenario and ask students to think about how they would react to the stressor. Then invite them to discuss or act out a response with a partner. Finally, invite them to share their ideas or perform their role play for the class. Suggested scenarios:

- You forgot to do a homework assignment and it is due today.
- You have the end-of-year test coming up and your stomach hurts every time you think about it.
- Your brother or sister keeps getting into your things. You are nervous about leaving your room unattended because you are afraid things will be missing or misplaced.
- You wake up with an anxious, worried feeling nearly every day and feel like you don't want to go to school.

STUDY GUIDE



Do's & Don'ts

- **Do** understand there is a difference between feeling stressed and/or anxious and an anxiety disorder.
- **Do** understand these children want to fit in, have friends and meet classroom expectations but their disorder may prevent them from doing so.
- **Do** see a child with an anxiety disorder as more than their disability or mistakes.
- **Do** understand that anxious children want you to like them; they become paralyzed by fear that you won't.
- **Do** take a moment to see and recognize strengths, not just weaknesses.
- **Do** provide accommodations that will help a child with an anxiety disorder succeed: give them a safe place to go or a cue to remember to breathe when they start to become irritable, frustrated, or upset.
- **Do** understand that a child with an anxiety disorder is a child without the executive function to overcome or cure their disorder.
- **Do** understand that a child with an anxiety disorder is not trying to challenge your authority out of spite.
- **Do** understand that if a child is anxious and you get upset or anxious in response, they will mirror your emotions and melt down.
- **Don't** tell anxious children their fears are stupid or irrational. Their brain tells them otherwise.

Post-Show Discussion

Following the play, have a discussion about what happens to Sam and Pig and how this relates to students in the class:

- What were some of Sam's characteristics? What were some of Pig's characteristics? How were they similar? How were they different?
- What are some of your characteristics? How are you like Sam or Pig?
- How did Sam deal with his anxiety? What did he learn from going through all of the game's levels?
- Is there something that worked for Sam, that he learned, that you could also use to help when you feel anxious?
- What are zombie thoughts? Connect this to the topic of metaphors: Zombie Thoughts are irrational thoughts and worries that are scary, but (like Zombies) not real.

Problem Box

Set up a problem box to collect class problems for future discussion. Tie some of the problems to ZOMBIE THOUGHTS and discuss how we can manage our thinking about certain situations to reduce the associated anxiety.

Stress Management Plan

Have students create a personal stress management plan and report back on their successes and struggles. We recommend this healthychildren.org template - https://planbtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BR3_My_Personal_Stress_Plan.pdf.

Breathing Exercises

Sam uses breathing to help him deal with the effects of anxiety. Try one of the following breathing exercises with your class (see Mindful Schools, following page):

- Close your eyes and take three breaths. Feel your feet on the floor.
- Feel the anchor of your breath. Now open your eyes and scan the room without speaking. What did you notice after doing this? How did your body react? How did things look after you re-opened your eyes?
- Have students use their hands as an object of focus. Each student should stretch out their hand and then trace each outstretched finger with the index finger of the other hand, breathing as they do so. This is great for a transition during class time.
- Sphere breathing allows children to pretend they are holding a balloon in their hands. As they breathe in, their fingers slowly move apart to indicate the blowing up of a balloon. As they exhale, the fingers gradually and slowly come back together.

REFERENCES

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011). The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.

Jones, S., Brush, K., Bailey, R., Brion-Meisels, G., McIntyre, J., Kahn, J., Nelson, B., & Stickle, L. (2017). Navigating SEL from the inside out. Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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ZOMBIE THOUGHTS Online Resources

Anxiety and Depression Association of America

<https://adaa.org>

An international nonprofit membership organization and leader in education, training, and research for anxiety, depression and related disorders.

- Understand the difference between anxiety and an anxiety disorder
<https://adaa.org/living-with-anxiety/ask-and-learn/faqs/generalized-anxiety-disorder-same-general-anxiety>
- A booklet on anxiety disorders and treatment options for children
<https://planbtheatre.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Anxiety-Disorders-in-Children.pdf>

KQED.org | 20 Tips to Help De-escalate Interactions with Anxious or Defiant Students

Classroom strategies from Jessica Minahan, a certified behavior analyst and special educator.

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/2016/04/21/20-tips-to-help-de-escalate-interactions-with-anxious-or-defiant-students/>

Child Mind Institute

<https://childmind.org/>

An independent, national nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families living with mental health and learning disorders.

- "Anxiety in the Classroom: What It Looks Like, And Why It's Often Mistaken for Something Else"
<https://childmind.org/article/classroom-anxiety-in-children/>
- "Tips for Beating Test Anxiety"
<https://childmind.org/article/tips-for-beating-test-anxiety/>
- "How to Help Kids Who Are Too Hard on Themselves"
<https://childmind.org/article/how-to-help-kids-who-are-too-hard-on-themselves/>

The Calm Schools Initiative

<https://www.calm.com/schools>

Offering educators free subscriptions to guided meditations and mindfulness exercises.

Pure Edge

<https://pureedgeinc.org>

Education resources, curricula, and training options supporting the philosophy that all educators and students deserve to be taught strategies to help combat stress to support the development of social, emotional, and academic learning competencies with an open heart and an open mind.

Mindful Schools

<http://www.mindfulschools.org/>

Courses and curricula designed for under-resourced public schools facing high turnover rates and toxic stress; offering educators practical skills for self-care, facilitation, and connecting with youth, providing simple, effective mindfulness practices easily integrated into the school day and adaptable for diverse environments. (requires paid subscription)



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Thursday, October 25: Glendale Branch at 4:30pm