

# The Little Mighty Superhero

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# Study Guide for Teachers

## Cycles I, II & III

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .....	3
About the Study Guide .....	3
A Note On Content .....	4
Curriculum Competencies .....	4
The Myth of Bakunawa .....	6
Synopsis .....	6
Meet the Characters .....	8
Setting .....	9
Themes/Concepts .....	9
Glossary .....	9
Activities .....	10
Pre-Show Discussion Questions .....	10
Activities and Lesson Plans .....	12
- Pre- and Post-Show Activities .....	12
- Lesson Plans: Exploring Myths Parts I, II & II .....	13
- Lesson Plans: Being Brave Parts I, II & III .....	13
Post-Show Discussion Questions .....	14
Resources .....	15

## INTRODUCTION

Geordie Theatre is a Montreal-based professional theatre company that has presented live English-language productions for young audiences in Quebec and abroad since 1980. Pushing artistic boundaries with provocative and important stories, Geordie delivers more than 200 performances each season and reaches more than 40,000 young people and their communities annually.

Land Acknowledgement: We would like to begin by acknowledging that the territory on which Geordie Theatre operates is the traditional territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka Mohawk nation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Montreal is known in the Mohawk language as Tiotià:ke or Broken in Two because of the way the river breaks around the island. It is considered unceded territory of the Kanien'kehà:ka nation. This land has also existed as a meeting ground of many peoples including the Abenaki, St. Lawrence Iroquians and Huron-Wendat people. We extend our deepest respect to the elders of these communities and to all Indigenous peoples who carry the history of the land -caring for it and calling it home. We are privileged to share a story with you on this land.

A note on acknowledging territory: A crucial part of Geordie Theatre's visit happens at the beginning of the performance- the Land Acknowledgement. The Land Acknowledgement is researched and customized for the territory on which your school is located, and acts as a crucial bridge between Geordie Theatre and Indigenous Peoples.

## ABOUT THE STUDY GUIDE

This study guide was created as a tool for teachers to help introduce young students to the world of theatre, as well as engage them more deeply with the themes and concepts developed in *The Little Mighty Superhero*. The guide contains a description of the myth on which the play is based to provide cultural context, a detailed synopsis, character and setting information, a summary of the themes and concepts at play, as well as pre- and post-show discussion questions, activity ideas and lesson plans.

The activities in the unit have strong pedagogical grounding and are class-ready for easy distribution to students. Additionally, most activities can be adapted to an online-learning platform. Corresponding cross-curricular and subject-specific competencies from the Quebec Education Plan (QEP) are indicated for each lesson plan.

## A NOTE ON CONTENT

The main character, Max, misses his grandmother, his *Lola*, who has died, and goes on a journey to visit her in the Underworld. While her death is not directly mentioned nor detailed, the fact that she *has* died is implied and serves as the basis of Max's journey. The plot culminates when he finds his grandmother in the Underworld and they are reunited in a warm moment. Max's Lola explains to him that she cannot

leave with him to the Land of the Living, but that she lives on in his memories of her and the stories she told him. It is to be noted that the Underworld consists mainly of a beach filled with mango trees (reflecting the childhood memories of Max's grandmother), a coconut grove and a courtyard. None of the characters "look dead" or "look zombie-like".

\* Also, please note that there are loud sounds in some parts of the play that may startle more sensitive ears.

Excerpt of when Max is reunited with his *Lola*.

**LOLA**

*Just close your eyes, think of me and I will be there. The stories, the memories will come alive. Whenever you forget something, let your imagination take over and it will help you remember, like tonight – you were thinking about me and your imagination took you here, to the places I showed you in my photos. Look – it's almost sunrise. It's time for you to go home. I love you, Anak.*

**MAX**

*Lola, I love you  
forever.*

**They hug.**

Resources for helping young students dealing with grief

If a child in your class appears distressed during the topic of loss, please speak to the school counsellor.

- [Helping Children Deal with Grief](#) by the Child Mind Institute
- [Kids Grief](#)

## QEP COMPETENCIES

### English Language Arts

- Uses language/talk to communicate and to learn
- Reads and listens to written, spoken and media texts
- Produces texts for personal and social purposes

### Cross-Curricular Competencies

- Uses information
- Exercises critical judgment
- Uses creativity
- Adopts effective work methods
- Uses information and communications technologies
- Cooperates with others
- Communicates appropriately

### Arts Education - Dramatic Arts Competencies

- Creates dramatic works
- Performs dramatic works
- Appreciates dramatic works
- To invent and interpret short scenes

# THE MYTH OF THE BAKUNAWA

*The Little Mighty Superhero* is based on the story of the Bakunawa from Filipino mythology. Consider implementing the lesson plan Exploring Myths: The Bakunawa to build background knowledge before viewing the play with your students.

The Bakunawa is a sea serpent/dragon, typically believed to cause eclipses, earthquakes, rains and wind. In the version of the myth used as the basis for *The Little Mighty Superhero*, developed to explain lunar eclipses, Bathala, Creator of the World, creates the moons and Bakunawa, finding them delicious, eats the moons. Bathala warns the Bakunawa not to eat the last moon, but, unable to resist, Bakunawa devours the moon, resulting in the moon disappearing from the night sky. The people, scared that the moon has disappeared forever, scream “RETURN OUR MOON” and make noise with pots and pans until Bakuwana returns the moon. Bathala banishes him to the Underworld, the place where souls go to rest after their death in the Living World. He is to guard the Underworld from the living who desire to visit the dead. Occasionally, Bakunawa leaves his post to devour the moon, at which point the living may sneak into the Underworld to visit the souls.

"BAKUNAWA: The Moon Eating Dragon of Philippine Mythology". *The Aswang Project*.

<https://www.aswangproject.com/bakunawa/>

## SYNOPSIS

The play begins with Jayson, Max’s imaginary friend also known as the little mighty superhero, explaining to the audience that he was invented by Max, a young Filipino boy, to help him deal with the loss of his grand-mother, his Lola. In the next scene, Max and his imaginary friend, Jayson are in his bed telling the story of Bakunawa, the water dragon, who steals the moon.

Max misses his Lola who used to tell him the story of Bakunawa. Lola has passed some time ago and her soul now rests in the Underworld. Upon realizing that the moon is not in the sky, Jayson and Max decide to attempt to visit Lola in the Underworld, while Bakunawa is not standing guard. Max is afraid of the dark but Jayson reassures him and he takes his headlight.



As they leave Max's bedroom, they find themselves on an island. The Ferryman, who transports souls to the Underworld, takes the children to the Underworld to find Lola. Max is scared but is again reassured by Jayson.

The Ferryman drops them off at the Underworld, an island beach which Max recognizes as the place where his Lola grew up. Jayson and Max begin to search for Lola but run into Bathala, the Creator of the World. He will only let them see Lola if they find the Bakunawa and release the moon. Jayson's hands and arms disappear and Max becomes worried that Jayson will leave him, as did his Lola. They decide to be brave and complete their task.

Suddenly, the Bakunawa appears before them. The Bakunawa threatens to eat them but fast thinking Max sings him a lullaby and Bakunawa, tired from being chased by souls, falls into a deep sleep. The moon rolls out of his mouth and back into the sky.

They find Bathala and she is impressed that they have fought the Bakunawa. Bathala encourages Max to look around him for his Lola. The Bakunawa suddenly and gracefully stands up from his sleeping position and removes a dragon head, revealing Lola. She describes how she transitioned into the underworld as a very long and magical dream. She also explains to Max that he can use his imagination and his memories to remember her and to feel brave.

Jayson and Max leave with the Ferryman and Max falls asleep on the boat. As the sun rises, Jayson explains that as Max fell asleep, he closed his own eyes and disappeared, like into a dream, just as Lola had described. Max wakes up in the morning and realizes Jayson is gone. He removes his headlight and puts it away. He no longer needs it. He smiles and falls back to sleep.

# MEET THE CHARACTERS



Max Fernandez

- Young boy; only child
- Filipino
- Is afraid of the dark
- Misses his grand-mother, his *Lola*
- Has an imaginary friend called Jayson

Douglas Peerless



Jayson, the Little Mighty Superhero

- Is Max's imaginary friend
- Gives Max courage

Alyssa Angelucci-Wall



Bathala

- Creator of the world
- Banished Bakunawa to guard the Underworld as a punishment for eating the moons

Lola

- Max's grandmother
- Lived with and babysat Max before she died
- She and Max were very close

Bakunawa

- A flying water dragon who guards the Underworld
- Occasionally eats the moon, creating a lunar eclipse

Ferryman

- Transports the souls to the Underworld in his boat
- Transports Max and Jayson to and from the Underworld



## SETTING

The Land of the Living:

- Max's bedroom
- Kitchen
- Backyard

The Underworld:

- Ferryman's boat on the River of the Underworld
- The Island of the Underworld: Where souls are. It resembles the beach and courtyard Max has seen in pictures of Lola's childhood home in the Philippines.

## THEMES/CONCEPTS

- |                                   |                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| → Mythology                       | → Friendship           |
| → Cultural tradition and identity | → Personal growth      |
| → Loss and Death                  | → Emotional support    |
| → Fear/Courage                    | → Family relationships |
|                                   | → Symbolism            |

## GLOSSARY

Anak: Child in Filipino

Apo: Grandson in Filipino

Aswang: Bad spirit in Filipino

Dalena: Hurry in Filipino

# ACTIVITIES AND LESSON PLANS

To help engage students with the themes and concepts developed in *The Little Mighty Superhero*, we are proposing a variety of activities:

- Pre-show discussion questions
- Pre- or Post-show activity ideas
- Lesson plans: Exploring Myths I, II & III
- Lesson plans: Being Brave I, II & III
- Post-show discussion questions

## PRE- SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The following discussion questions may be used to initiate conversation and build background information of the main themes in *The Little Mighty Superhero*. They might also be used as writing prompts or as an introduction to lesson plans. Please note that the discussion questions have been put in order of most appropriate for youngest to oldest students. Please select the questions that are most appropriate to the age group you teach.

### Friendship

- \* How do you make a friend?
- \* What is a friend? What makes a good friend? Can you give examples?
- \* What characteristics do you look for in a friend?
- \* Did you have a friend that you don't talk to anymore? Why?
- \* Have you ever been in a situation in which you and your friends don't agree? What happened? How was it resolved?
- \* How can a friend help you grow and become a better version of yourself? Based on what you find difficult to do in life, or perhaps a shortcoming, what are things a good friend can do to help you improve yourself?

### Loss (as appropriate)

- \* What does it feel like to miss something or someone? What do you miss?
- \* Have you ever lost a toy you loved? How did it feel?
- \* Have you ever moved homes?
- \* What is death?
- \* Have you had a pet die?

- \* Have you experienced the death of a loved one?
- \* What reminds you of them? What do you remember the most about them?
- \* Are you afraid of death?

### Fear/courage

- \* Is there something that worries you? Is there something that scares you?
- \* What is fear? How does it feel to have fear?
- \* Do you have any fears? What are typical fears?
- \* What does it mean to be brave?
- \* Have you ever helped someone who was scared? What did you say to them? Have you ever had someone help you when you were scared? What did they say to you?
- \* What can you do to show courage and be brave when you are scared? Who can help you?
- \* What is the difference between fear and anxiety? What are situations that might induce fear? What are situations that may induce anxiety?
- \* What happens to your body when you are scared or anxious?
- \* What are strategies you can use when you are scared? When you are anxious?
- \* What can you do if you feel like your fears or anxieties are often difficult to manage? Who can help you manage?

### Personal Growth

- \* Describe a time when you had to do something difficult. Were you able to do it? How?
- \* Have you ever had to make a difficult decision? Why was it difficult? Did you feel satisfied with the outcome?
- \* Describe a time you had to ask for help. How did it feel? What was the outcome?
- \* Have you been through a situation that changed you for the better; that taught you an important lesson? Describe it.

# PRE-SHOW OR POST-SHOW ACTIVITY IDEAS



## What Would Your Superpower Be? (Cycle 1 & 2)

Jayson is a superhero and his special power is that he helps Max with his fears and anxieties. Following a discussion using a selection of the *Friendship* and *Personal Growth* discussion questions, have students explain what their superpower would be if they could choose one, either in drawings or in writing. Ask students to describe how their superpower could help others, either individuals or society at large.

## An Imaginary Friend (Cycle 1) or An Ideal Friend (Cycle 2 & 3)

Following a discussion using the *Friendship* discussion questions, have students tell a story about, draw or describe an imaginary (younger) or ideal friend (older) that demonstrates friendship traits that they value the most. For inspiration, they can think about positive traits in their own friends or characters in books or media.

## Tableaux by Theme (Cycles 2 & 3)

Students create a live tableau (a scene in which all students are “frozen” in their action) based on the themes of *The Little Mighty Superhero*. Assign each group of 3-4 students one of the themes (friendship, fear/anxiety, courage/being brave, personal growth/self-progress, emotional support) and have them practice a tableau. It is recommended to leave “loss/death” from the list as students might not address the theme with desired seriousness. Have them present and hold the tableau for the rest of the class. Have the class guess the theme and have the group describe their tableau. For online learning, the students can either draw a tableau or may send a picture of a live tableau created with their sibling or parent.



## Write a Review (All Cycles - Post-Show Only)

Have students discuss the show. What was the play called? What was it about? What was the acting like? What were the set design and special effects like? What did you think of the play? Why? Have older students write a critique using the following sections: (1) introduction, (2) plot summary, (3) performance, (4) design elements and (5) personal reaction and recommendation.

## Lesson Plans: Exploring Myths (all cycles)

It is suggested that Part I & II are implemented before the show to create background knowledge of myths, but Part I and Part III may be done before or after the show.

### → Exploring Myths I: What Is A Myth?

- To explore the definition and components of myths
- To explore myths from Indigenous communities

### → Exploring Myths II: The Bakunawa

- To become familiar with the myth of the Bakunawa **prior** to viewing the play
- To apply an understanding of common elements of myths

### → Exploring Myths III: Create Your Own Myth

- To understand the cultural value of oral tradition and storytelling
- To understand the role of elders in oral tradition
- To explore other cultures
- To create and orally present a narrative using common elements of a myth

## Lesson Plans: Being Brave (All cycles)

Part I is designed as a preparation for the play, while Parts II & III are designed to take place after the viewing of the play. Please note that these lessons are designed to help students with age-appropriate and normal fears, they are not designed to address serious or underlying fears, anxiety or phobias. If a child in your class appears distressed during these conversations, please speak to the school counsellor.

### → Being Brave I: FEARS?

- To explore the vocabulary and emotions associated with fear, worry and courage
- To begin exploring strategies to help manage fears

### → Being Brave II: Busting Through Fear

- To learn how to self-coach
- To demonstrate understanding of *The Little Mighty Superhero*
- To learn how to help others to manage their worries

### → Being Brave III: A Cupful of Courage

- To learn about the different ways in which we can be brave
- To explore positive leadership traits

## POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The discussion questions may be used to build understanding of *The Little Mighty Superhero* and its messages. They can be used as writing prompts or as an introduction to lesson plans. Please select the questions that are most appropriate to the age group you teach.

- \* How did Max change from the beginning to the end of the play? How did Jayson change?
- \* What do you think about Max's and Jayson's friendship? Are they good friends? Why or why not?
- \* What do you think is the main message of *The Little Mighty Superhero*? What did you learn from this play?
- \* Lola used to tell Max that "Sometimes the impossible can come true if you believe in it." What do you think she means? Is this true for you too? How? Give examples.
- \* When Max wakes up the morning after the journey, he finds that Jayson is gone, but he is still smiling. Why is this? What did Lola say about what happens to people when they leave us? They stay in our memories... What did she mean by this?
- \* At the end of the play, Max removes his headlight and puts it away. He doesn't need it anymore. Why? What do you think this means? How is this related to Jayson leaving?



# RESOURCES

## Helping young students dealing with grief

If a child in your class appears distressed during the topic of loss, please speak to the school counsellor.

→ Helping Children Deal with Grief by the Child Mind Institute

→ Kids Grief

## Helping young students dealing with fear/anxiety

If a child in your class appears distressed during the topic of fear/anxiety, please speak to the school counsellor.

Help Children Manage Fears by The Child Mind Institute