



SEX EDUCATION BY THEATRE

Teacher's Guide

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
The Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR)



“It definitely changed the stuff that I would do. In different situations, like, in the skits that we did, I placed myself in those situations, right? I constantly asked myself what would I do if I was, you know, so and so, if I was this person? And that really, it put me in a position to change decisions if they were to ever occur in real life.”

Youth Participant

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ABOUT SEXT

***SEXT: Sex Education by Theatre* is a hilarious, entertaining, and powerful compilation of skits, songs, poems, raps, and dances created *by* students *for* students as a way to examine topics that youth themselves have identified as relevant to their lives.**

SEXT explores the diversity of human relationships, choices, and behaviours, using humour to engage students and capture funny moments that are all part of being human. Celebrating diverse cultures and identities, SEXT helps youth navigate the myths, uncertainties, and anxieties that accompany early experiences with physical and emotional relationships.

SEXT's key mission is to empower young people with the information and skills they need to make the right choices for themselves. Operating from a community-based, youth empowerment approach, SEXT tackles current issues head-on in a non-judgmental environment that promotes **education, discussion, creativity, and personal discovery**. SEXT strives to increase youth capacity to recognize and avoid unhealthy situations, to know their options should they find themselves in a precarious situation, to feel empowered to set boundaries, and to confidently explore their own identity on their own terms.

Some of the topics presented throughout the performance may elicit strong reactions, so it is beneficial for educators to provide students with opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs, perspectives, and biases. When youth can recognize that we all possess unique perspectives, personal histories, and identities, they are more likely to respect one another and value and support equity and inclusion for every member of society. Acknowledging differences can lead to a caring, safe, inclusive space for all.

This guide provides educators with background information about the play, a scene by scene summary of the show, expectations around theatre etiquette, and a variety of pre- and post-performance discussion questions and activities for deeper engagement and creative extension.

WHY THEATRE?

SExT's main goal is to empower youth. Beginning as research by doctoral candidate Shira Taylor, SExT has evolved into an entertaining and engaging performance piece that has received critical acclaim (4 stars & Critic's Pick – NOW Magazine; Exceptional Ensemble – The Torontoist). SExT's approach recognizes the social, political, religious, cultural, and human context of relationships and behaviours. SExT moves beyond the biology of sex to arm youth with the information, understanding, and skills to reflect on and challenge their realities on issues related to human development and sexual health.

Theatre is uniquely qualified to engage youth on an intellectual, creative, and emotional level, making the subject matter immediate, accessible, and lastingly impactful. SExT aims to equip educators with tools to engage with students on these subjects using evidence-based and arts-infused methods that celebrate diverse cultures and identities. Topics covered include: puberty, safer sex, abstinence, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, contraception, testing, stigma, teen pregnancy, mental health and wellness, family dynamics, sexting, cyberbullying, LGBTQ+ issues and identities, informed decision making, body image, stereotypes, prejudices, identity, racism, sexism, heterosexism, abusive and healthy relationships behaviours, limit-setting, consent, sexual assault, critical thinking skills, and celebrating diversity.

ABOUT CANFAR

The Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research (CANFAR) was founded in 1987 and exists to end HIV in Canada by funding innovative research, dynamic partnerships and national awareness programs. Over its 30-year history, CANFAR has invested more than \$21 million and awarded more than 400 grants to HIV and AIDS research projects across Canada. CANFAR is committed to reaching the most at-risk Canadian youth through its National Youth Awareness Programs, which focus on educating young people across the country about HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and stigma reduction.

MEET THE CAST



Meet Charmaine Chang!

SEXT has given me so many things. Another family, an outlet for my creativity, and it has really helped me gain confidence on stage. It's an unorthodox way to convey important issues with the people that they affect, and it's one that can make a difference. For me, this is something I can be proud of, and I'm glad to be part of it.



Meet Aleef Khan!

SEXT helped me realize that it is not your fault if you are suffering from mental health issues. Blaming yourself does not help. If you are going through an emotional or mental health issue, speak to a counselor, someone you trust, or a therapist. It takes an immense amount of courage to open up about your problems to someone, and you feel much better once you have talked about it with someone. There are people all around you who want to support you.



Meet Emma Wheaton!

This show means so much to me because it has given me a place to express myself and to explore my thoughts and ideas, as well as learn a ton about myself and other people. I love to entertain and this show gives me purpose and allows me to help people and have fun at the same time. SEXT is a great source of exhilaration and learning in my life, and I know I am much better for participating in it. I don't know where I would be without it.



Meet Lauren Chang!

I love that we tackle touchy topics like sex ed and hard topics like mental health in such an easy and accessible way. I love that we're starting conversations, and it's never a one-way street. We learn so much from each other and even the audience while performing.



Meet Sara Ahmed!

Starting off as an audience member watching this show and now being a part of the cast is so great because I feel like I've had the best of both worlds! I was moved by SEt the moment I saw it and I love that I can not only act as a peer educator to teach youth, but I get to be apart of the learning process as well.



Meet Mary Getachew!

This show means all the hurt I've been through wasn't in vain - it means that I get to inform and educate people so that they can make the choices I didn't know were possible when I was younger.



Meet Michelle Nyamekye!

SEt has given me a platform to speak, as my authentic self, about issues that matter to me.



Meet Thuriga Balasubramaniam!

This show means a lot to me, purely for the fact that it has helped me develop into the person I am today. This show has made me confident in myself, in my actions and in the way that I carry myself as an individual. I've gained a family from this show that I would not trade for the world. And to see us go and perform and make a difference in someone's life is just such a humbling experience and I would love to be able to reach as many people as we can.



Meet Isfandiyar Virani!

SEXT has inspired me and others to engage and talk about many important issues we have in our society which society doesn't want to talk about, such as mental health, race and gender issues. I also love that SEXT is a platform which is powered by strong Canadian values of being diverse and respectful to all cultures. I've learned a lot from SEXT and this show is helping me to grow as an intellectually mature person.



Meet Hamza!

SEXT has helped me grow as a person, a performer, and a peer educator. It has helped me step outside of my comfort zone and into unknown territories. I have also learnt more about sex ed and healthy well-being than I ever could from a textbook, school or even Google. It has taught me that even things that can be extremely difficult to speak about normally, can become very easy to express, when delivered in the right manner and context.



Meet Talib!

SEXT to me is being able to be comfortable with who you are and knowing that there are people who will be there for you when you need them.



Meet Saad!

To me, SEXT means freedom to express myself, to enlighten the world and future adults, spreading knowledge, and having fun while doing it.

PERFORMANCE SYNOPSIS

Scene Breakdown	
Let it Flow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An empowering parody of “Let it Go” from Disney’s Frozen. This scene celebrates changes in the body during puberty.
Inner Thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Short scenes comparing what people say out loud versus what they are truly thinking. These scenes cover a variety of topics including sexting, cyber-bullying, insecurities, body image, harassment, homophobia, transphobia, and LGBTQ+ identities.
Captain Condom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A comedic scene set in the bedroom of a teenage couple about to have sex for the first time. This scene covers HIV, communication, healthy relationship behaviours, STI signs and symptoms, STI stigma, safer sex, and contraception.
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A scene exploring different paths to healing and encouraging youth to develop healthy coping mechanisms and resilience.
Clinic Myths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set in a local sexual health clinic, “Clinic Myths” debunks common myths surrounding STI/HIV testing and addresses stigma through the journey of a young man’s visit.
The Fertilization Games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A comedic parody of Collin’s The Hunger Games about conception.
Preggers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A teenage girl tries to come to terms with the fact that she is pregnant and reaches out to the closest people in her life. This scene covers pregnancy options, community resources, cultural and family dynamics, and healthy relationship behaviours.
Tunnel Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An original song by cast member Mary Getachew and Elena Juatco about leaving an abusive relationship. This scene deals with verbal and physical intimate partner violence, the cycle of abuse, and recovery.
International Identities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A celebration of diversity and identity where cast members share traditional dances and dress from their own cultural identities. This scene explores the balance of respecting one’s cultural heritage and finding one’s place in Canadian society.)

Abolishing Stereotypes/Labels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A spoken word and movement piece about acknowledging and overcoming stereotypes. This scene examines many forms of prejudice including, racism, Islamophobia, sexism, and heterosexism, while celebrating identity and empowerment.
Netflix & Chill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A humorous scene using the popular meme “Netflix and Chill” as a metaphor to explain consent in various contexts with the help of diverse couples. This scene deals with debunking common myths about sexual assault.
Cyberbullying Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A mock court case dealing with an incident of “revenge porn”. This scene examines victim-blaming, supporting survivors of cyberbullying, and challenges young people to think before they act
Bodak Consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An empowering parody to Cardi B’s hit song, <i>Bodak Yellow</i>, celebrating young people making informed choices on their own terms. This scene demonstrates limit-setting, resisting peer pressure, the power of being an active bystander, and youth activism.



A TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH

The performance will show potentially sensitive content that may elicit a variety of responses from student audiences. **It is normal for students to have strong reactions to watching a show like SEXT.** It is also expected for youth to make comments to each other throughout the performance.

All reactions are valid, especially to sensitive issues such as abuse and mental health, and unless students are being intentionally rude or disruptive, it is best to just let them be as the cast is trained to expect a range of audience reactions (such as laughter at seemingly inappropriate times). **We also recommend having a school counselor present as support for the students who may wish to debrief the performance and their reactions to it.**



TIPS ON THEATRE ETIQUETTE

- ✓ Turn off your cell phone and don't text during the show (phones are distracting for you, others in the audience, and the cast!) – *Selfies with the cast members AFTER the show are welcome, though!* 😊
- ✓ Use the washroom before the show starts 🚽
- ✓ Don't talk loudly during the show 🗣️ – *laughs, woots, and even small whispers are welcome, though!*
- ✓ No photos with flash please 📷
- ✓ Respect and share the space with the people around you ❤️
- ✓ Avoid unwrapping plastic wrapped items which may disturb people around you (like candy bars/chips) 🗑️
- ✓ Try not to fall asleep! 😴 (Snoring could be annoying to people around you and makes the cast sad!) 😞
- ✓ You're allowed to laugh! Even if no one else does! 😂
- ✓ You're also allowed to cry! Even if no one else does! 😭👐
- ✓ If you find yourself upset by something in the show and need to take a break, try taking some **deep breaths** in your belly and distract yourself by listing **5 things** happening on stage in your head (see page 11 – Self-Care and Coping Skills). 💬

CREATING SAFETY IN THE CLASSROOM

Community Agreement

Before discussing some of the topics covered in SExT, we recommend creating a **Community Agreement** (ground rules) to guide classroom interactions. Ask students to brainstorm what they **need** to feel safe enough to fully participate, and what they can **contribute** to creating a safe space. Examples may include:

- *'The Vegas Rule': What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom; but we also have a Duty to Report (e.g. if we know someone is in danger of hurting themselves or others)*
- *Don't be judgmental*
- *Respond to an idea not the person*
- *Be respectful*
- *Listen mindfully*
- *Ask for what you need*

The agreement should be kept in plain sight for all, to remind everyone to stay accountable to these common rules.

Check-In/Check-Out

It is helpful to start and end all discussions with a check-in and check-out activity, to encourage students to **reflect** and become **aware** of their own feelings. Examples of check-in/out questions are:

- *How are you feeling in one word?*
- *If you were a colour, what colour would you be today?*
- *What's your internal weather forecast?*
- *What is one thing you learned today and/or will take away?*

Safe Word

A safe word is a useful tool to use when engaging in activities around sensitive topics. The group can choose a 'safe word' (e.g. pineapple) that can be used if someone feels **uncomfortable**.

When a safe word is used:

Do's

- Do pause the activity.
- Do address the situation by identifying:
 1. **what** led to the remark/reaction;
 2. **why** the situation or context made the person feel unsafe; and
 3. **how** to prevent this kind of situation in the future.
- Do encourage accountability. If a person made a problematic remark, ask them to apologize to the person and the group. If a larger situation occurred, encourage everyone to take responsibility for holding or preventing a safe space.

Don'ts

- Don't react strongly to the reaction or use of the safe word.
- Don't shame the person or people who made problematic remark(s).
- Don't remain on the subject too long. Once the group understands why the safe word was used and how to prevent this situation from occurring in the future, continue with the activity.

Teaching Self-Care/ Coping Skills

Simple strategies to **calm the body and mind** can help keep students calm and present for optimal learning. These strategies include:

- **Train breathing:** belly breathing – in for 4s; hold for 4s; out for 4s; hold for 4s
- **Progressive relaxation:** one body part at a time
- **Grounding exercises:** name 5 things you **see**, 4 things you **hear**, 3 things you **feel**, 2 things you **smell/taste**, and 1 thing **true about yourself** in this moment
- **Name it and Tame it:** ask students to reflect on how they are feeling
- **Shake off** nervous energy through jumping, push-ups, dance parties
- **Normalize emotions** as part of being human

PRE-PERFORMANCE

The following questions and activities seek to prepare students for the performance by piquing their interest and providing opportunities for them to **examine** their own beliefs, values, and identity, while encouraging **respect** for others' perspectives.

Sample Pre-Performance Questions

- 1 How does your identity (cultural background, religion, and family) influence your beliefs, values, and attitudes about relationships?
- 2 What are some stereotypes that people in our community have about gender/ race/ religion?
- 3 What are some good ways to respond to someone you disagree with?
- 4 List the 5 most important characteristics of a healthy relationship. Why do you believe they are the most important?
- 5 What kind of things do couples fight about in our community?
- 6 Is jealousy healthy? What are some ways it is and/or isn't?
- 7 What stops people from seeking help for their mental health?
- 8 What is peer pressure? What happens if you go against what your friends may think?
- 9 What is stigma? How does stigma impact people's sexual and mental health?
- 10 What do you know about HIV and STIs? How do you know those things?
- 11 What does consent mean to you? How do you know when someone is giving their consent?
- 12 What is bias? What are some ways biases can impact the way a person thinks/ acts?
- 13 What makes you most proud about your community?
- 14 The play you are going to see was written by the youth in the cast about issues in their community. If you were to make a play, to help people in this community, what would it be about?
- 15 How would you feel if you were about to perform for all the students in your school? How can we show appreciation for the performers without disrupting their concentration?

Sample Pre-Performance Activities

- **Brainstorming activity**
 - Write “Sexual Health,” “Mental Health” and/or “Healthy Relationship” on the board and have youth silently add whatever comes to mind. Once everyone is satisfied, discuss some of the emergent ideas.
- **Student Questions**
 - Have students brainstorm questions they may have about the content covered in the performance (e.g. consent, healthy relationships, stereotypes, STIs, mental illness, peer pressure, gender identity). Following the performance, students can utilize these questions for discussion.
- **Think/Pair/Share**
 - Post various lines from the play around the room. Using a Think/Pair/Share strategy, have students work in pairs to select a quote and individually reflect about the meaning of the quote and what the scene might be about in the performance. Have students share their ideas with their partner, and then the whole class.

Quotes from the Performance:

“I wish I was you.”

“Only yes means yes.”

“I trusted him.”

“Who made you so blind that you couldn't see all the struggling people around you? Simply because mental illness isn't as easy to spot as something like the flu.”

“What if it gets passed around? I don't want everyone to see my junk.”

“Why won't you let me go? Why don't I just go? Because right now you're all that I know.”

“My identity is complex, my culture is confusing.”

“When you assume before you know me, you silence me.”

“We define who we are, we determine that.”

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Self-Care Planning:

Have students answer the following questions:

- How do you usually cope with stress? What are healthier things you can do?
- What are things you enjoy that support your well-being? (e.g. talking, hanging out with friends, writing, screaming, praying, listening to music, thinking of a happy place)
- What can you commit to doing every day to care for yourself and prioritize your mental health?
- What can you do during times of stress? (e.g. physical, mental, spiritual)

POST-PERFORMANCE

The following questions and activities provide students with opportunities to **examine** their experiences with the performance, **reflect** on their own beliefs, perspectives and biases, and **understand** and **appreciate** diverse experiences and points of view. The goal is to support students in making connections to their own lives and inspire them to put their own experiences into art.

Sample Post-Performance Questions

- 1 How did this performance make you feel?
- 2 Do you think theatre is a good way to teach sex ed? Why or why not?
- 3 What were some of the messages that stuck with you from the play?
What made you laugh? Cry? Feel angry?
- 4 What three scenes engaged you most/had the most impact on you, and why? What connections can you make between these scenes and your own experiences?
- 5 Which scenes played out the way you thought they might? What scene would you have hoped had an alternate ending? How you would rewrite the scene, and why?
- 6 Did the play make you think about stereotypes differently? If so, how? If not, why?
- 7 In what way were the actors and the issues they talked about similar to you? In what ways were they different?
- 8 How are the topics explored in the performance conveyed in the media? How does the media reinforce or break down stereotypes?
- 9 How were the actors brave? What words, thoughts and/or beliefs did they have to take risks? Would you have done the same thing or would you have chosen a different action?
- 10 How do we bring our thoughts and actions closer together? Why is it important to be able to say/communicate how and what we feel?
- 11 Has your point of view about a certain topic shifted after viewing this performance? How?
- 12 Think about “Tunnel Vision”. What are some healthy ways Ali could have communicated how he felt to his girlfriend without hurting her both physically and by calling her names?

- 13 What can we do to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness and make it easier for people to get help?
- 14 What are the biggest issues facing youth in your community? If there was a problem in your community, would you try to fix it? How?
- 15 The actors used their culture (music, dance) to convey a message. How could you use traditional arts or tools from your culture to deliver an important message?

Sample Post-Performance Activities

Start with **Breathing exercises** as outlined in Self-Care section (see p. 11).

- **Alternate Endings:** Have students select scenes from the performance to re-create and explore various alternate endings.
- **Stereotypes:** Recall the “Label” scene in which each cast member has a line that conveys a stereotype. Have students come up with their own stereotypes using the template of: *“Just because I’m (blank) doesn’t mean I’m (blank)”*. Follow up with a discussion about the impact of stereotypes and how might they address their own bias or take action to when they hear a stereotype.
- Recall the **Think/Pair/Share** activity (page 13) that students completed before viewing the performance to **reflect** about how their thinking may have changed or their understanding deepened about the meaning of the lines from the play after viewing the whole scene.
- Use the lines from the play to engage students in a **rapid writing activity** in which they adopt the persona of the character who spoke the lines to reflect on the situation in which they find themselves.
- **Hot Seat activity:** Have students break off into groups, choose characters and improvise a short scene on one of the topics covered in the show. After presenting the scene, ask the students to stay “in character” to be questioned by the rest of the group about their character’s background, behaviour, and motivation. This activity compels students to think deeply about characters’ actions and motivations. Encourage students to play characters that differ from themselves, as this activity promotes understanding and empathy by providing a great opportunity for students to put themselves in another’s shoes.
- If you were to **make your own scene** about an issue important to you, what issue would it be? What art form would best represent it (song? scene? dance? poem? rap?)? How can you use your culture to enhance the message and performance? Create the scene and present it!
- **Community Resource/ Safety Plan:** Have each student think about: *What can I do to be safer now? What if... things get worse? Where can I go? Who can I talk to?*



“It made me view sexual education in general in a whole different light. Because I feel like, before this, I always thought sex education was just you know, whatever like, that factual stuff, the stuff that I wasn’t really interested in, and stuff that didn’t really concern me. But I realize how much it has to do with each and every one of us and how important it is in each and every one of our lives.”

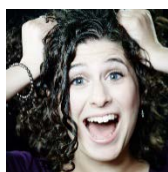
Youth Participant

RESOURCES

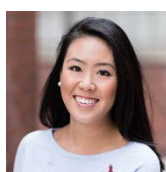
Recommended websites and resources to learn more about HIV and get local support for sexual and mental health needs:

- **CANFAR's Free Educator Guides:** www.CANFAR.com/classroom
- **BOOM (for young guys who like guys):** www.CANFAR.com/BOOM
- **HIV411.ca** – finds the closest testing & sexual health services to you
- **Planned Parenthood (STI & HIV testing):** ppt.on.ca – 416-961-0113 or 36B Prince Arthur Ave.
- **Hassle Free Clinic (testing):** hasslefreeclinic.org – 416-922-0566 – 66 Gerrard St. East
- **Kid's Help Phone:** kidshelpphone.ca – 1-800-668-6868
- **Trans Lifeline:** translifeline.org – 1-877-330-6366
- **Distress Centre:** torontodistresscentre.com – 416-408-4357
- **Gerstein Centre (24-hour crisis line & mobile unit):** gersteincentre.org – 416-929-5200
- **Toronto Rape Crisis Centre:** trccmwar.ca – 416-597-8808
- **Assaulted Women's Helpline:** awhl.org – 416-863-0511





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