

***"The Who & The What" by Ayad Akhtar:***

**Discussion:**

Ask your students the following questions before reading the play, or handing out study sheets (attached):

1. What is Islam? What is the difference between Islam and Muslim?
2. Who wrote the Quran?
3. How old is the Quran?
4. Where does the Islamic religion come from?
5. How did Islam start?
6. How many Muslims are there worldwide? In Europe?

Find out what they know more about. Why might that be? Where have they found out their information? Internet? TV? Magazines? Other?

**Study Questions:**

**Act 1:**

Scene 1

1. What does Mähwish do? How old do you think she is?
2. What does Zarina do? What is her relationship to Mähwish
3. Who does Mähwish want to marry? What is unique about what she is doing with Haroon before she marries him? Why is she doing it
4. Why does Mähwish want Zarina to marry? What does she suggest she do to find a man?
5. What is Zarina doing in the library vs. what the Librarian says she is doing?
6. Who is Zarina maybe still longing for? What has happened to him now?

Scene 2

7. When did Eli become a convert to Islam and why? What is his current job?
8. What does Afzal Jatt do for a living? What is the name of his company?
9. What has Afzal done to be able to meet Eli today?
10. Name 3 things you find out in this scene about Eli.
11. Has he met Zarina before? Where?

### Scene 3

12. What does Zarina find out her father has been doing? How long has he been doing it for? How many different numbers of men does Afzal say he has seen?
13. Why is Afzal on-line dating for Zarina?
14. What does Zarina say to her father about love?
15. What does Afzal tell Zarina about the marriage to her mother?
16. Where is Zarina's mother? What happened to her?
17. What does Afzal tell her about his own sex life?
18. What does Afzal ultimately want Zarina to do?

### Scene 4

19. Who were Eli's parents? Where did he grow up? Who were his role models?
20. Zarina mentions Freud? Explain what she says.
21. What music does Eli like?
22. Zarina talks about the revelation of the veil. What do we discover?
23. What is Zarina really writing about? What is her book called? Explain her choice of title.
24. Is her book dangerous to publish or not? Why?
25. Why do you think Zarina has had writer's block?

### Scene 5

26. Afzal is looking at old pictures of wife. What stories does he tell Mahwish?
27. Did Mahwish have a nice evening out with Haroon? What was she forced to watch?
28. Has Zarina had a nice evening out with Eli? What has it enabled her do to?
29. Describe what you think is happening at the end of act 1 and why the two poles?

## Act 2

### Scene 1

1. What has happened to Eli and Zarina now? Whose apartment are they in?

2. What is Zarina angry about initially? Then what is revealed that she is really angry about?
3. What does Eli say he thinks about Zarina and the book? How does it make him feel? What is he worried about

#### Scene 2

4. Why has Afzal brought Eli to the flat? What has he really got him there for?
5. Does Afzal think Eli is being a good husband or not? Is he manly?
6. What does Afzal tell Eli to do once he has discovered Zarina has finished her book?
7. How do you feel about the things Afzal says?
8. What does Eli discover at the end of the scene how does it make him feel?

#### Scene 3

9. What does Afzal discover in the bag? What does he do with it?
10. What does Mahwish reveal to Zarina? Do you think she is happy in her marriage?
11. What does Zarina say she should do and why?
12. When Eli enters why do you think Zarina says he should take the money?
13. What is Eli upset about? How does Zarina keep "Putting her foot in it" from the top of Eli's entrance?
14. What does Eli discover is in his bag and not in his bag?

#### Scene 4

15. What is Mahwish doing at the top of the scene? How do they react to the book?
16. Describe what happens during the scene.
17. What does Zarina accuse her father of doing and why?
18. Do you think Zarina is right to get the book published or do you think she should not do so to spare her family?
19. What does Afzal say will happen to the family if the book gets published.
20. What happens in the end?

#### Scene 5

21. How many years have now passed since the last scene?
22. What does Afzal do every day?
23. What do we discover has happened to each character?
24. How does Afzal react to the news he is given?
25. Explaining the punchline at the end and why is it relevant to the whole play?

## Discussion points:

- Discuss what is the difference between Islam and Christianity?
- Compare all the characters at the beginning of the play, to how they are at the end. Why do you think they make those changes?
- What is the play trying to say?
- Should Zarina have published the book? Give reasons for your answer.
- Are all the characters in this play good people or bad people? Go through each character one by one and discuss who you think they are and what you think about what they are doing.
- The play is filled with irony. What is irony and where is it in the play?

## Activities:

- Imagine you are Zarina or Mahwish. Write a page from your diary about what being Muslim is like at school when everyone around you is mostly Christian.
- Describe a day in the life of Eli, Afzal or Haroon.
- Explain how Zarina sees the veil as having arisen in Islam. What do you think about what she says?
- A class discussion: Are you afraid of Islam or don't care? Support your answers.
- What in your view are the negative aspects of Islam? What are the positive?
- In teams of two:
  - Imagine one of you is Mahwish the other Haroon. Invent the conversation they had when Haroon took Mahwish to the cinema. Act it out.
  - Imagine you are on a peaceful rally supporting the Muslim community in Vienna. What is happening at the rally? Describe the situation to your class.
- Roleplay 1:
  - A newsreader
  - A reporter
  - Zarina/Eli/Mahwish/Afzal

Imagine you are a newsreader, relating the publishing of Zarina's book. Go live to one of the characters above and with the on location reporter

interview them. Ask the reporter to tell you what has happened, with on the scene interviews and action.

- Roleplay 2
  - Choose a piece of dialogue from the play and act it before your class. If enough students are available the entire play can be covered.
  
- Roleplay 3
  - A Syrian refugee who is Muslim and a Catholic Austrian sit opposite each other. What do they have to say to each other? Start the scene with the words "I believe..."

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