



A Number

Enrichment Guide

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Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre is proud to call Manitoba home. Royal MTC is located in Winnipeg on Treaty 1, the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg, Inninewak, Anishinewak, Dakota Oyate, and Denesuline, and the National Homeland of the Red River Métis. We are thankful for the benefits sharing this land has afforded us, acknowledge the responsibilities of the Treaties, and embrace the opportunity to partner with Indigenous communities in spirit of reconciliation and collaboration.

The Role of the Audience

Theatre needs its audience! We are happy to have you here. Every staff person, actor, and crew member backstage plays an important part in your experience, and you also have a role in the experience of cast, crew and the people around you.

Arrive Early: Please make sure you give yourself enough time to find your seat before the performance starts. Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. We ask groups to arrive at least 20-30 minutes before the show.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **turn off** your cell phone/mp3 player/gaming system/camera/smart watch. Texting, surfing, and gaming during performances is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. Using cameras and recording devices during a performance is **never** allowed.

Talking During the Performance: Even when you whisper, you can be heard by performers and people around you. Unless it is a relaxed performance, disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait until after the performance to share your words with others.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. When there is an intermission, snacks and drinks may be available for purchase. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal MTC, but we respectfully ask you not to wear hats in the theatre or block the view of those behind you. Please do not wear strong scents like perfume or body spray. We thank all patrons for their cooperation.

Leaving During the Performance: If you leave the theatre, you will be readmitted at the discretion of Front of House staff. If readmitted, you may be placed in an empty seat at the back of the auditorium instead of your original seat.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave if that person is being inappropriate or disruptive including (but not limited to): talking, using devices that produce light or sound, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: A short question and answer period with the actors takes place after student matinees, first Tuesday evening shows, and some public matinees. While watching the show, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors about the production or life in the theatre. Our artists deserve to be treated with respect! It's okay to have a negative opinion, but this is your chance to ask questions and understand the performance or process, not to criticize. If you have a concern, see the house manager after the show and they will make sure your feedback gets to the appropriate Royal MTC staff.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, cry, gasp – responding to the performance is part of the nature of theatre! As you get involved in the story, try to balance your reactions with respecting the people around you. The curtain call is part of the performance too – it gives you a chance to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause, and for them to thank you for your attention. We all appreciate when you stay at your seat and join in the applause!

About the Playwright

Caryl Churchill is an English playwright with a long and celebrated career. Her first plays were produced in the late 1970s, and she has produced regularly since then, winning an Obie award for sustained achievement in 2002. Her most acclaimed plays include *Cloud 9* (1979), *Top Girls* (1982), and *A Number* (2002), all Obie Award winners (Britannica). Her aesthetic is at times sparse, always cutting, and most notably, breaks from traditional linear storytelling, and natural environments.

As someone who confronts power and tradition both thematically and structurally, it is not surprising that Churchill doesn't hide from controversy. In 2009, she wrote *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* which has been criticized by some as antisemitic and defended by others, including Jewish-American playwright Tony Kushner; in 2022 her lifetime European Drama award was rescinded due to criticism of this play "and her pro Palestinian campaigning." Earlier this year she was in the news again for pulling a production from a company sponsored by a bank with links to Israel. (Bakare). Churchill is known to address issues of gender identity, political alienation, and economic justice in her plays, combining these topics with groundbreaking techniques that challenged British theatre's traditional boundaries, and her works continue to provide the opportunity for theatres and audiences to explore deep themes in untraditional ways.

Content Overview

This section may contain spoilers.

Occasional strong language; references to suicide, alcohol, neglectful parenting, animal abuse.

Plot Summary

When Bernard learns he is a clone, his world is turned upside down. Exploring nature vs nurture, the legacy of past actions, and identity, Caryl Churchill is at her unsettling best with this thought-provoking psychological thriller.

Synopsis

This section contains spoilers

Scene one - B2, a 35-year-old man, has been informed at a recent hospital stay that he is from a batch of an undisclosed number of clones. B2 confronts his father, Salter. At first Salter assures his son that he is the original, but over the course of the scene switches his story to his son being conceived in vitro because of fertility problems, and then quickly that yes, he is in fact a clone who was made after his original son died in a car accident. B2 wonders why he didn't just have a different kid.

Scene two - Salter is confronted by B1, his 40-year-old-son, who he put into care at 4 years old. He confronts his dad about the abuse he endured as a child. He shares how he has had a string of dogs, about how he had bad dogs he had to beat and put down. He shares some partial stories about violence he has been a part of. He wants to know if his dad was

neglecting him knowingly or not, and he wants his dad to understand the consequences of his actions. B1 has found out about the clones as well, and given his childhood, is confused and angry about the how and why of it. The scene ends with a challenge - for Salter to look into his eyes - a question of if there is something uniquely recognizable in his original son and if Salter can face him after what he's done.

Scene 3 - B1 has met with B2 and told him about his father's previous parenting. B2 visits Salter to hear his side of things and say goodbye, as he is moving out of the country to get away from the clones, especially B1. Over the course of this conversation, Salter admits to the addiction and neglect, and keeps asking if B1 did any violence towards B2. Salter explains to B2 about how B1's mother killed herself, and he was not a good father. B2 tries to show understanding of addictions and mental health surrounding this time in Salter's life but gets stuck on the idea that he could be a terrible father, and then a loving father, and that he couldn't help his behaviour with the first child but apparently could change his behaviour later.

Scene 4 - B1 has found B2 overseas and murdered him. He comes back to visit Salter to let him know. Salter wants details, if he's going to kill the other clones, where B2 was living, how it happened. B1 doesn't want to tell him. Salter becomes aggravated and moves from one thought to the next: B1 should have killed him. Salter could have killed B1 in the first place instead of giving him up. Salter doesn't remember much from the two years between his wife's death and giving up B1, but he knows he sometimes listened to B1 calling for him in the night and sometimes left the house. He recalls that by the time Salter gave him up B1 was hiding under the bed and not talking. Salter notes two years must have seemed like a long time to a kid, and asks B1 if he remembers anything else from that time. Instead of answering, B1 starts describing following B2 on the train.

Scene 5 - B1 has killed himself. Salter is meeting with Michael, one of 20 clones. Salter asks questions, trying to decide how much similarity Michael has to his sons, and can't get an answer out of Michael that is satisfying. Michael has a wife and three kids. Salter tries to probe into Michael's feelings on finding out he is a clone, but Michael mostly finds it curious and joyful. He tries to comfort Salter with the idea that most humans are genetically 99% identical so it's not really a big deal. The play ends on Salter's thought that misses his sons.

Context and Concepts

Cloning in General – and Dolly in Specific

A Number was written in the years following the first successful cloning of an adult mammal. Dolly the sheep, born July 5, 1996, was introduced to the world in early 1997, setting off a wave of speculation about the cloning of humans and its greater ramifications. While the method of cloning used to create Dolly was highly inefficient and technical, news reports suggested we were on the verge of developing human clones, and governments rushed to respond to the threat. The New York Times Retro Report titled, "The story of Dolly the Cloned

Sheep”, contains archived footage of many popular concerns, including the idea of a “future Hitler” producing an army of themselves, and the suggestion that humans were playing God.

The work and its public discussion also opened up debate about the ethics around stem cell research, pioneered by American scientists of the time. This related research used stem cells harvested from aborted embryos. While the Bush Administration did succeed in shutting down this research in America at the time, Professor Shinya Yamanaka was able to develop a method for creating stem cells from adult cells, receiving a Nobel Prize in 2012 for his work. This has relieved some of the controversy surrounding stem cell research, and has allowed scientists to develop ways to grow healthy tissue for use in medical treatments.



When asked to consider human cloning, scientists will point to the high risk of unsuccessful tests, and the multiple ways the processes could go wrong both before and after birth. Dolly was one successful clone in hundreds of tests. Even if an exact clone of a human was desired, the clone’s experiences as they grew up would produce differences. In reality, Dolly was a by-product of experiments meant to duplicate parts of cells to produce material for medical research. The unreliability of the method used for her cloning has meant it in itself has not stuck around, though methods inspired by her are used to clone pets and livestock who exhibit exceptional traits. The legacy of Dolly’s experiment is one of great advancements in medical research and our understanding of genetics. Thanks, Dolly!

Dolly the Sheep Fast Facts

- Dolly was born July 5, 1996 and lived until February 14, 2003.
- While some suggested her adult genes had caused her early death (sheep usually live to 10) it became clear through later study that her contraction of illness was unrelated.
- Dolly had 6 biological offspring, and was the source for 9 more clones.
- Dolly was the first clone from adult cells, but there were previous clone lambs at the facility - Megan and Morag, cloned from embryo donor cells in 1995, and Taffy and Tweed, from fetal donor cells in 1996.
- Dolly was named after Dolly Parton, because her genetic material was taken from her genetic source’s breast tissue. This researcher would like to comment, “men” with an extreme eye roll.
- People magazine has reported that Dolly Parton doesn’t want to be cloned.
- *A Number* wasn’t the only clone-centric work released in 2002. *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* also came out that year, and was the first explanation of the reference to a long ago war in 1977’s *A New Hope*.
- You can still visit Dolly at the National Museum of Scotland, as her taxidermized body is on display, and is one of the most popular exhibits.

Nature vs Nurture

The play explores how far our genetics and their predisposition to behaviours controls our lives. This question is played out through the story of Salter's addiction and recovery, as well as through the lives and upbringings of his three sons.

In Salter's case, he shows capacity for different behaviours at different times in his life, both terrible and loving. His sons' confusion surrounding whether he could have changed his behaviours for his wife and first son make up the first three scenes of the play. Simultaneously, the ethics of whether or not Salter should have gotten a second chance as a father, on the one hand, and the ethics of what it means to the sons to be a) replaced, or b) a replacement, on the other, is a secondary exploration of the same theme. How much of their genetic makeup is responsible for the violence that takes place, and how much is based on their treatment as children. Salter becomes obsessed with this as the play goes on, and he comes to know more about how his neglect and abuse have played out despite his efforts to make up for it with a do-over.

While B2 had a positive upbringing, and was for all intents and purposes, living a good life before discovering he was a clone, he is destroyed both by the idea that he was created as a do-over and by the guilt that he idolized a father who had destroyed his previous son. B1, discovering he was discarded like his dog who bit the little girl, has trouble sympathizing with the dog, but knows he displays similar violent behaviour coming out of his abuse. He recognizes in himself an abuser during his short confessions of previous violent incidents.

As B1 integrates the idea that he was discarded for a second chance, he goes down two paths. The first is similar to Salter's concern - if he can hold on to the idea that he is "unlucky with dogs", all his dogs are inherently bad dogs, then the clones are made from him should all be bad people too. The second, that if they aren't bad people, then it is unbearably unfair that his dad was able to change but didn't for him. After this anger culminates with killing his replacement, he turns this notion on himself; if he'd yelled louder, would his dad have heard him, and changed for him? Maybe the clone son was better than him, and if so, maybe he could have been better so his dad didn't send him away.

The consequences of the discovery and exploration of these ideas are played out in the last scenes with Michael, who is not only a normal, well-adjusted guy with a job and a family, but completely unbothered that he is a clone. Salter admits to Michael that now that B1 and B2 are gone he no longer feels he has a chance to make things right, and that, in fact, B2 was his attempt to make things right with B1.

Related Resource Links: Interested in more writings and opinions on *A Number*? Check out this [philosophical analysis by Lillian Wilde](#) which covers various topics and themes, or this [blog series by Taylor Ryan](#) where they comment on different aspects of the show in chronological order and provide further readings.

Understandings of Addiction in 2002

Between the mid 80s and mid 2000s research into the causes of addictions was developing rapidly. A shift in thinking around addictions and drug or alcohol use was occurring - from the idea that folks were developing addictions because of inherent laziness and lack of self-control (personal deficiencies) to the idea that there were genetic factors, environmental factors and characteristics of brain chemistry that impacted a persons behaviour around drug and alcohol use. This is briefly touched on in Scene 3 as B2 struggles to understand his father's behaviour to B1.

Given Churchill's work's focus on feminism and power dynamics, it is also interesting to note is the development of Relational Therapy models at around the same time, which are models of therapy that analyze the patient in relation to their family, culture and the power structures that surrounded them both in their upbringing as well as in their current situation.

Genetic Clone vs Natural Multiples

Important in the dialogue and to the concepts played with is whether or not a genetic clone would be any different than an identical twin or triplet. It's important to note that they both contain identical genetic material, so raising twins who are separated from each other should be no different than raising genetic clones. The environment in both circumstances would influence the individuals development. A difference could be how being raised in a different time influenced the Childs outlook, experiences, or opportunities (ie, even 5 years later could mean the clone was raised with different technology, different global politics, wars, etc).

Postmodern Theatre

There are a few elements of postmodern theatre that Churchill utilizes in *A Number*. The play doesn't provide absolute truths or answers, instead it explores the multiple experiences that stem from the possibility of human cloning. Further to this, the characters themselves seem to hold multiple truths within them, that take dramatic shifts back and forth within scenes. Finally, it is important to note for the audience experiencing the play, there are almost no stage directions, and minimal and inconsistent punctuation in the script. This allows each production to develop its own rhythm, timing, and to highlight its own meanings within the delivery of the script.

Related Resource Links: Astrid North has created a [Postmodernism Explained Guide](#) if you want to understand more about the wider movement in a philosophical sense. There is also quite a [robust article on Wikipedia](#) as well that covers different fields.

Director's Notes

By Alex Poch Goldin

Dolly the sheep would have been 30 years old this year; the first cloned mammal died in 2003, but her spirit lives on. I don't mean that she may be cloned again, but the spirit of progress, technology, ethical compromise, and financial greed that shaped her continues to thrive. In many ways, Artificial Intelligence is the Dolly of today as we face its profound societal impacts.

I read *A Number* over twenty years ago and was deeply affected by the play, the language, the ideas, the structure and dilemmas explored between a father and his son(s).

Reading the play again in 2024, I was still awe-struck but for different reasons. Now as a dad, I viewed the play from the father's perspective. E.g.- If you were a lousy parent who damaged your kid, and you could start all over, would you do it? Try to get it right this time? Wash away the guilt, the disappointment and start again with a fresh human to imprint on? That is the question that Salter, the father in the play contends with. But to remake the past is to live with the consequences.

Caryl Churchill is brilliant and continues to confront us. She manages to skewer society, family and free will all in the same instant. She pits father against son(s) and stretches the filial bonds to absurd degrees.

Salter seeks escape, or possibly redemption, for his life choices. For the son(s)- Bernard's questioning of identity, history, family allegiance, and the unsettling implications of being one of a number of copies is chilling. The father denies and disassembles while his son(s) must poke through a shield of subterfuge, probing the disturbing nature of their beginnings to discover who they are. In an age of rapid technological advances, what could be more human?

Thank you for being here.

MTC's Production

On the surface, MTC's *A Number* looks like a representation of our world – but touches that speak to genetics and technology are woven throughout the designs. Check out the wallpaper; notice the colours of lighting reminiscent of fluorescing dyes and stains used in biology labs; spot the costume details that hint at the fact that a character is one of many copies...



Model of the set (designed by Kara Pankiw)

[MTC's website has biographies](#) of the full creative team and cast!

Explore More: Recommended Library Reading List

Explore More fractured identities and doppelgängers

Never Let Me Go / Kazuo Ishiguro. In this dystopian novel, Kazuo Ishiguro explores the lives of clones who are created for organ harvesting. This book dives into the moral implications of cloning, as well as the emotional and philosophical questions about identity, autonomy, and what it means to be human.

FICTION ISHIGURO

Brave New World / Aldous Huxley. Cloned citizens, engineered caste systems, and programmed happiness—Huxley's dystopia presents a world where identity and individuality are sacrificed for social stability. FICTION HUXLEY

The Double / José Saramago. This novel delves into the unsettling notion of encountering someone who looks exactly like you. The protagonist's doppelgänger enters his life, throwing his sense of self into chaos. Themes of identity, reality, and the psychological effects of meeting your twin are explored in this surreal, thought-provoking work. FICTION SARAMAGO

Explore More bioethics and the science of cloning

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks / Rebecca Skloot. Skloot's biography of Henrietta Lacks explores the ethics of using someone's biological material without consent. Henrietta's cells were harvested without her knowledge and contributed to groundbreaking scientific research. Her story is a powerful reflection of how science intersects with ethics and identity.

616.027709 LACKS 2010

The Ethics of Human Cloning / William Dudley. Explore the moral complexities of human cloning in this in-depth philosophical work. Dudley tackles the ethical questions raised by cloning technology—identity, autonomy, and the social implications of creating life for specific purposes. FICTION ANDREWS

Explore More performance and psychological thrillers

Orphan Black [DVD videorecording] This series focuses on the experiences of a woman who discovers she has multiple clones, delving into themes of identity, ethics, and the emotional consequences of being a genetic copy of another person. DVD FILM/TV ORP

Ex Machina [DVD videorecording] This film explores the boundaries between humanity and artificial intelligence, and it touches on the ethical implications of creating life for specific purposes. DVD FILM/TV EXM



There are 1.4 million books, movies, audiobooks, eBooks and more at the Winnipeg Public Library, and all you need to borrow them is your library card. There are 20 locations throughout the city and there's an online catalogue for requesting items for pick-up at your library of convenience. An e-Library has thousands of eBooks, eAudiobooks and more! All free with your card. Visit us at Winnipeg.ca/library

Imagery and Symbols

Dogs and their treatment arise several times throughout the play.

- B1 expresses that he has bad luck with dogs, but then describes the dogs and his treatment of the dogs. He is not good to dogs.
- Salter later tries to gain further understanding of Michael's similarity or difference to B1 by asking his feelings about dogs.
- Several of the behaviours B1 says he uses with the dogs are echoes of behaviours that are described to have been used by Salter towards B1 before he was given up

Tunnels

- When Salter tries to learn more about Michael, Michael's first response is to explain something he finds fascinating, specifically the history of folks living underground in tunnels below the city.
- Salter doesn't think this answers his question, but it is the only response that meets his criteria - a deep personal reaction, a fascination.
- This fascination is, in and of itself, analogous to the situation of the clones.
 - Multiple individuals, isolated away from where they belong with only a tiny point from which to view their origin (the chimney with the small patch of sky).
 - There are chambers made for the deceased, close but not seen, and it's possible that some chambers held people who were not dead before they were closed in.
 - Michael, living isolated from the chaos of his experiment, thinks things are normal, not knowing about the similar but separate experiences of his genetic siblings
 - B2 was also isolated, but ends up being one of the "chambers in the walls" - shaping how Salter reacts to the others, impacting them without being present in their lives. (Also, interesting that B1 follows him through a train tunnel before killing him)
 - B1, who was cast off in the experiment, left on his own with his trauma, twisted by his experiences, eventually killing his replacement and him self - mirrors the idea that some folks who were buried were not dead, and we know that because of the way their bodies were twisted.
 - Salter, the origin of the clones, the only one who lives in a pre clone reality - he is the patch of sky. They all get a little bit, of him (genetics, or partial representation) but not the whole story. They all get his genetics but not the full experience of a father.
- As a side quest, check out the sources in regards to the actual Tunnels systems under London!

War

- Another way Salter tries to learn more is by soliciting Michael's opinion of war, to which Michael responds that it is "one of those things where everyone always thinks they're right".
- Michael goes on to consider how no one in a war thinks they are the bad guys

- This highlights the ethical ambiguity of cloning - how depending on whose perspective you take, you will get a different perceptions of the morality
- It also highlights that Michael understands that from Salter's perspective he was a good guy doing the right thing by trying a do over, even though that do over had terrible consequences and did not do anything to make up to B1 for his neglect.

Enrichment Guide Creator Biography

tala gammon is normal human that does normal human things, including mothering, learning, and hoping. incredibly lucky to have a day job teaching performing arts at st. john's high in the beautiful north end of winnipeg, she moonlights as a fibre artist and playwright. after attending MTCs ChurchillFest with her buddy, they decided the world was too bleak to go it alone, eventually marrying said buddy and naming their first dog after Churchill.

Sources

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