



# TEENAGE DICK

by

**Mike Lew**

directed by

**Josh Hecht**

# DEEP DIVE

**ARTISTS  
REP 18/19**  
WE DO THEATRE

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*Teenage Dick*, actor: Ayanna Berkshire,  
photo by David Kinder

**ABOUT**

# ARTISTS REP

**ARTISTS  
REP** **WE DO  
THEATRE**

**Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists and audiences of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).**

Artists Rep has become a significant presence in American regional theatre with a legacy of world, national, and regional premieres of provocative new work with the highest standards of stagecraft. The organization is committed to local artists and features a company of Resident Artists, professionals of varied theatre disciplines, who are a driving force behind Artists Rep's creative output and identity.

# A LETTER TO EDUCATORS

Dear Educators,

We are looking forward to seeing you at Artists Repertory Theatre to experience our production of *Teenage Dick* by Mike Lew!

This study guide was created to enhance your students' theatre experience. There is material for your students to utilize before and after the performance. Our goal is to increase theatre exposure and understanding, as well as to encourage meaningful conversation and provoke thoughtful discussion about the play you attend. Within this guide there is information about the play's themes, setting, characters, pertinent articles, basic theatre etiquette and more! We hope this information will enhance your class's theatre experience!

Artists Rep provides many opportunities for young people to get involved! Students can shadow professional theatre artists in a variety of disciplines, observe tech rehearsals, and become a member of our Student Ambassador Program! Please feel free to contact us or give your students our contact information.

Enjoy the show!

Karen Rathje  
Education Director  
Artists Repertory Theatre  
krathje@artistsrep.org

# THE

# PLAYWRIGHT

Mike Lew's plays include *Teenage Dick* (Ma-Yi at the Public, Artists Rep, and Perseverance productions; Public Studio, O'Neill, OSF workshops), *Tiger Style!* (Olney, Huntington, La Jolla Playhouse, and Alliance productions; O'Neill and CTG workshops), *Bike America* (Ma-Yi and Alliance productions), *microcrisis* (Ma-Yi, InterAct, and Next Act productions), *Moustache Guys*, and the book to the musical *Bhangin' It* (Jerome Robbins Project Springboard and Rhinebeck Writers Retreat "Triple R" workshops). He is a Tony voter, Dramatists Guild Council member, and resident of New Dramatists. Honors include a Mellon National Playwrights Residency at Ma-Yi and La Jolla Playhouse Artist-in-Residence (both with Rehana Lew Mirza); Lark Venturous and NYFA fellowships; and the PEN Emerging Playwright, Lanford Wilson, Helen Merrill, Heideman, and Kendeda awards. He is co-director of Ma-Yi Writers Lab, the largest collective of Asian-American playwrights in the country. He is married to fellow playwright Rehana Lew Mirza, who he met in Ma-Yi Lab. Training: Juilliard (2013), Yale (2003). Check out his website at [mikelew.com](http://mikelew.com).



Mike Lew

# PLAY SYNOPSIS

**TIME:** NOW

**PLACE:** ROSELAND HIGH SCHOOL

Welcome to Roseland High School!

At Roseland High there is everything an angsty high school heart desires - awkward themed dances, confusing relationship statuses, and rampant stereotyping. Right now, they are about to begin something thrilling: class council elections. Who will be president? Eddie - the popular one who's bad at his job? Clarissa - the annoying goody-two-shoes? Or, a surprise third candidate?

We're rooting for Richard (see: title of play) as he makes his political foray. He's the underdog - a smart, sometimes jaded social outcast who has cerebral palsy (also known as CP.) He believes that everyone is out to get him and he wears his attitude to match. So, why does he want to be president? It's simple: power.

As the election unfolds, there are all the necessary tropes: romance, lies, scandal, death. You name it - it'll happen. Who will win the coveted seat of Class President? The voters will decide.



# ABOUT THE PLAY

*Teenage Dick* is Mike Lew's modern, comedic take on *Richard III*, Shakespeare's historical play about power and lust. King Richard III, who rose to the throne of England in 1483, suffered from scoliosis, a condition characterized by curvature of the spine, and he is generally depicted as the worst and most wicked of the English kings. *Teenage Dick* re-imagines King Richard III as a 16-year-old outsider in the depths of his discontent: his junior year in high school. Picked on because of his cerebral palsy (as well as his Shakespearean way of speaking), Richard is determined to have his revenge and make his name by becoming president of the senior class. But as he manipulates and crushes the obstacles to his success, Richard finds himself faced with the question: is it better to be loved or feared?

*Teenage Dick* shows there is a difference between being physically disabled and spiritually/morally impaired. Richard is both. It also shows that when a person is physically handicapped, there is a tendency to presume that person's ambitions and emotional desires are handicapped as well. Every character in *Teenage Dick* plays a role in hurting another person, but Richard is the only one who hurts them all. Lew's script touches on many themes that are relevant to today, such as our use of the needy to feel morally good about ourselves, while failing to see them as humans with emotional wants and needs. In a way, each of the characters in *Teenage Dick* has a need that is not satisfied, but Richard is not looking for empowerment; he wants power.

One of the most interesting impacts of *Teenage Dick* is that, even the audience, to whom Richard confides his evil plans, is ultimately surprised when he commits them.

# CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

**RICHARD GLOUCESTER** (m, 17) junior class secretary, slyly ambitious, has cerebral palsy.

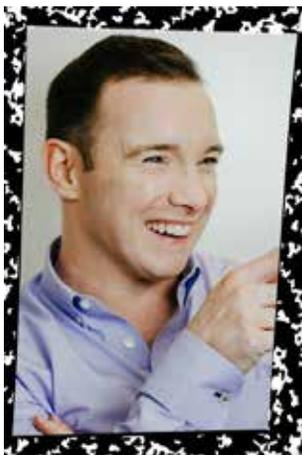
**BARBARA "BUCK" BUCKINGHAM** (f, 17) his best friend, earnest, wheelchair user.

**ELIZABETH YORK** (f, 30s-40s) wry, well-meaning English teacher, kind of naïve.

**EDDIE IVY** (m, 17) junior class president, football guy, kind of a jerk.

**CLARISSA DUKE** (f, 17) junior class vice president, Jesus-loving, overachiever.

**ANNE MARGARET** (f, 17) big-hearted yet dark, dancer, formerly the most popular girl in school.



Christopher Imbrosciano



Tess Raunig



Ayanna Berkshire



Nick Ferrucci



Alex Ramirez de Cruz



Kailey Rhodes

# RICHARD III SUMMARY

Shakespeare wrote many plays - at least thirty-seven. These plays can typically be organized into three categories: comedies, tragedies, & histories. For example, you probably have read *Hamlet* (tragedy), *Romeo and Juliet* (tragedy), or *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (comedy), but you likely have not read any of the ten, dense histories. The historical plays are based on actual past events, most often centered around various generations of the British royal family. *Richard III*, the work that *Teenage Dick* is based on, is one of Shakespeare's historical works.

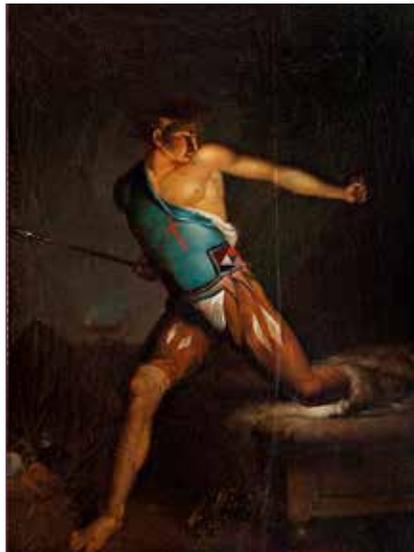
To be clear - Shakespeare was not a historian, he was a playwright. He did not get every detail right, sometimes due to faulty sources and other times due to political pressures, so the play *Richard III* is not entirely historically accurate. However, it is still useful for you to know about *Richard III* when watching its modern day adaptation *Teenage Dick*, so here is a summary of the play:

The main character in *Richard III* is... Richard III. Richard was the son of the king, but unfortunately for him, he was not the oldest son, meaning he was unlikely to ever become the king. The play describes him as "deformed" - most likely in reference to a significant curve in his spine, resembling a hunchback. Regardless, Richard's most notable quality was his insatiable ambition - he desperately wanted to be the king. As an adult, Richard's eldest brother, Edward, ascends to the throne, marries, and fathers sons, thereby pushing Richard even further down the line of succession. Richard was not pleased.

When Edward becomes ill, Richard sees an opportunity to put himself forward as the best replacement candidate. He hatches a series of devious plots, including having another of his brothers killed and imprisoning his nephews, Edward's young sons. When Edward succumbs to his illness, it seems like Richard is the only man for the job. Despite feigned protests, Richard becomes the King of England.

But, things aren't all happy and wonderful for the new King Richard. Some people are suspicious of his actions; some are loyal to other members of the extended royal family with claim to the throne. He has to keep scheming, ridding himself of his

enemies and usurping any reason the public has to dethrone him. As tensions rise and wars are waged, Richard faces another man of royal blood, Henry VII. They fight. Richard is slain. Henry VII marries the late King Edward's daughter, Elizabeth, and together the couple lays a dual claim to the throne. Henry VII becomes king.



Richard III terrified by nightmarish visions. Shakespeare, Act 5, Scene 9, painting by Nicolai Abildgaard. Nivaagaard Collection.

*Teenage Dick* takes the outline of this story, some of the characters, and most importantly, the themes, and places it in a high school setting. The powerful "king" is now the class president. Placed within this teenage democracy, our young Richard obtains votes through trickery and deceit. He uses his mind to achieve his goals, regardless of the consequence. But, unsurprisingly, things don't go as planned.

# A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF CEREBRAL PALSY

Cerebral Palsy, also known as CP, is a neurological disorder that affects a person's movement, coordination, and muscle tone. It is caused by damage to the motor cortex in the brain, either when a fetus is developing or soon after a baby is born. People with CP can have difficulties with walking, balance and posture, reflexes, the ability to hold objects, fine motor control, and oral motor function. However, the type and severity of the symptoms varies greatly between people with CP, meaning that each person with CP will experience an individual array of symptoms. Sometimes, CP is accompanied by other conditions with similar causes, including speech problems, reduced hearing or vision, epilepsy, autism, sleep disorders, and learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, there is no current cure to CP, but there are many treatments that can help the symptoms and associated conditions, such as speech and physical therapy, medication, and surgery. Although CP is a lifelong disorder, it is not degenerative and therefore, it will not get worse throughout a person's life. Many people with CP can live and work independently as adults due to treatment and therapies. People with CP have successfully worked as doctors, nurses, attorneys, actors, and many more occupations.

(FROM WAMU 88.5 American University)

# PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN PERFORMING ARTS

By Christopher Imbrosciano



There are 54 million people living with disabilities in the United States, and I'm one of them. We're one of the largest and fastest growing minority groups in America, but you wouldn't necessarily know that from what you see on the stage and screen.

I'm an actor, and a key question for me is how people with disabilities are portrayed in the performing arts. How many characters have disabilities? And did actors with disabilities get the chance to audition for the roles?

For example, were actors who use wheelchairs auditioned for the role of Artie in *Glee*, or were actors who are blind or deaf auditioned for the role of Helen Keller in *The Miracle Worker*? Too often, accommodations, sign-language interpreters or even just ramps to the stage are seen as difficult, and not worth the effort or expense. But think about it in terms of other minority groups. Would you cast a white actor to perform the role of a person of color?

And the roles themselves are often limited. It seems to me that there are certain "types" of people with disabilities in the media. Either we're dependent victims, the sweet "Tiny Tim" sort of character; or we're heroic, the plucky character who overcomes his disability like *Forrest Gump*; or we're villains, such as *Captain Hook*.

People with disabilities are people, which means they have a variety of experiences, and there should be a variety of representations in the arts and in media.

Walking into an audition is a nerve-wracking experience, especially if, like me, you happen to have cerebral palsy, which affects your walk. It's usually the first thing directors notice, and it's my job to convince them that my disability will not limit my performance.

As stressful as it can be, acting has been my saving grace when I was a child, undergoing multiple, painful surgeries, it was theater that provided an outlet for me, a positive, creative way to express myself. And now, as an adult, it's theater that's creating opportunities for me to earn a living, share my story, and help change society. In my work, I've learned that my disability can be an asset to me as a performer, rather than a liability.

Talking about disabilities honestly and openly can be intimidating; people don't want to say the wrong thing, so they often don't say anything at all. They just stick with what they feel comfortable with. But having a diversity of experiences makes us stronger, both as individuals and as a society. That's why it's so important to include everyone in the arts.

There's a saying in the disability and other minority communities: "Nothing about us without us." Everyone deserves the opportunity to share their stories and to represent themselves.

# INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT

**Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez** had the chance to sit down with playwright Mike Lew to discuss the origin story of *Teenage Dick*, disabled representation on stage, and what the rehearsal process can add to his playwriting process.

**DR:** *Teenage Dick* is a retelling of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. Why *Richard III*, and how did you go about modernizing it?

**ML:** The play was conceived as a commission from Gregg Mozgala who runs a theatre company called The Apothetae. We were longtime collaborators at Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York, and found that the advocacy work that Gregg does on behalf of the disabled community dovetails well with what I'm trying to do for the Asian-American community. The deeper we got into questions about representation and our personal responsibilities as artists, he hatched an idea to commission plays that would reexamine the disabled experience. So he's the one who came to me with the idea of adapting *Richard III* in a high school, and calling it *Teenage Dick*, and I just jumped at it. The idea of it was so compelling to me. I think that the high stakes of royal ascendancy smashed into the feeling of high stakes in American high schools worked well to make the situation in extremis sing from a modern context. We also were interested in looking at the archetype of Richard III and his inherent evilness and the way that Shakespeare ties that into his disability, and connecting that with how we treat people with disabilities today. So those contrasts, and the language of high school slang vs. Shakespearean dialogue sort of swirled into this new play.

**DR:** The way Richard in particular speaks feels both Shakespearean and like a high school student trying to use elevated language. Did you have an instinct for that going into it?

**ML:** I find it really funny that even if we as adults are really far away from high school, a lot of times those stigmas and traumas from that time can be tapped into almost immediately. Especially because I'm in residence off-and-on for the year at La Jolla Playhouse, which is where I grew up, I'm having these flashbacks to my high school self and the armor that you put up as an adult gets stripped away so easily. So I found it very easy to get back into the mindset of feeling like intellectually, I was an adult, but in terms of body and responsibilities, I was not. So I think that smashing together of language is coming from a personal place of having some intelligence but not the temperance to know how to use it, and playing at being more mature than I was and the consequences of that.

**DR:** So the *Teenage Dick* premiere was produced by Ma-Yi Theater at The Public in June. Tell us a little about the rehearsal process, and how that production did or did not change the show.

**ML:** The play had a long development process, I think I completed the first draft in 2013, and it had lots of development around the country with readings and workshops. So to get into the rehearsal process and actually know that I was working towards a production did accelerate a lot of things. I just find it really funny because in some ways, play development is a little more about how much you trust the artist and less about if the play is objectively ready for production or not. You can have a script that seems like it's perfect on paper but as soon as you put it in front of people, all of it

flies out of the window. But for me, it's a lot about adapting the play to the specific actors. It's had a couple of consistent cast members and several that were different, which is part of why I'm really looking forward to the Artists Rep rehearsal process to continue adapting the script to this particular set of performers and seeing what will stay consistent and what's going to be adapted. As far as specific changes that happened in this process, physicalizing everything was so new, so seeing how those dance scenes affected things physically, and seeing what the emotional ramifications of that were, was really useful.

**DR:** Can you talk either in general or specifically about what a second production does to a play, and how that relates to when you're finished with a play, or whether you're ready to move on from it?

**ML:** I think you're never really done with a play. That being said, I think at a certain point because of life circumstances shifting, you can't really write the play anymore. I've read old plays of mine and I appreciate them, but I don't think I could write them now, because I was a different person when I wrote them. It's not always the case, but to me I feel like in an ideal situation you would get two or three cracks at a play, because audiences in different cities are different, and actors are different, so I'm enormously grateful for and try to utilize rehearsal time in second and third productions. My previous play, *Tiger Style!*, for instance, premiered in Atlanta and then there was a production up at La Jolla, and my wife Rehana said she thought I needed to drop this scene in Act I. I was on the plane to Boston for the next production and implemented the change, and the Boston production from a script perspective was better because of it. So there were two companies doing it in different states with different scripts, but I just think that there's so much you don't know when you're writing a brand new play that these opportunities to continue playing are really precious.

**DR:** I want to circle back to Shakespeare for a second. Did you feel any pressure to be true to *Richard III*? Were there any rules you were following, or was it just a jumping off point?

**ML:** I definitely didn't feel beholden to Shakespeare himself, because that guy gets a lot of productions. It's funny because even though I studied Shakespeare somewhat in college, I don't necessarily love Shakespeare, so it's not like I was coming from a place of reverence. But that said, it was interesting to take apart the play structurally. We're trained to take it apart more thematically, or to approach it from a directing perspective in terms of how to make things work. But to think about how the play works structurally was an interesting exercise. I didn't necessarily feel like I needed to follow the beats exactly, but I wanted to take the high stakes that are achieved in the original and see if I could make it work in a high school context. I think it does in that you don't think of high school as life-or-death, but then there's a lot of bad shit that happens in high schools that's hard to reconcile with. Especially in media high school is portrayed as a sheltered time that feels inconsequential and everyone ends up okay. But, actually, a lot of people die in high schools these days! I also wanted to tease out the disability and gender politics of the play. Like, what do we do about the unsubstantial female roles in the original text, and what do we do about the assumptions made about the connections between Richard III's physicality and morality - and see how that fits in a modern context. I also noticed from a structural context that there's a lot of direct address in *Richard III* that devolves as the shit hits the fan, and I wanted to replicate that structurally. You're initially brought in as a co-conspirator, but as Richard III has less control there's less direct address and the scenes become more impressionistic, so I wanted to mirror that.

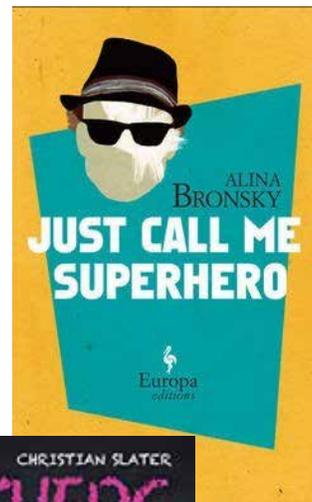
# GET INTO THE

# WORLD OF THE PLAY

This collection of books, movies, and music are inspired by the world of *Teenage Dick*.

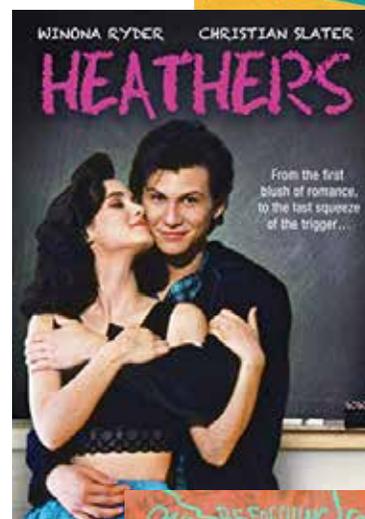
## BOOKS

- **JUST CALL ME SUPERHERO** BY ALINA BRONSKY
- **LAUGHING AT MY NIGHTMARE** BY SHANE BURCAW
- **THE HUNGER GAMES** BY SUZANNE COLLINS



## MOVIES

- **RICHARD III** (1995)
- **FERRIS BULLER'S DAY OFF** (1986)
- **HEATHERS** (1988)



## TV

- **HIGH SCHOOL USA** (2013)
- **DEAR WHITE PEOPLE** (2017)
- **SPEECHLESS** (2016)

## MUSIC

BLEACHERS, CHLOE X HALLE,  
TEGAN AND SARA, HALSEY, M83,  
ANDERSON.PAAK



# THEMES OF TEENAGE DICK

**Power Corrupts** - the allure of power and the feeling of invulnerability create dangerous situations

**The Influence of Language** - sheer force is not always the best strategy

**Anti-Heroes** - the main character is not always a good person

## ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

### PLOT

The sequence of events in a play revealed through the action and/or dialogue

### TOPE

The manner the play is written (e.x. casual, comic, serious, somber, etc.)

### THEME

The central topic the play investigates

### OBJECTIVE

The goal a character has within a play

### CONFLICT

The clash between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates tension

### STAGING

Patterns of movement in a play, including: entrances, exits, and movement on the stage

### THE FOURTH WALL

The conceptual barrier between actors onstage and the audience  
[When the actors directly interact with the audience, it is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall"]

### TECHNICAL ELEMENTS

Elements such as sets, costumes, lights, music, props, and makeup used to create a unified and meaningful design for a theatrical production

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## BEST CLASS EVER

### *(Writing & Discussion Exercise)*

Write out a list of your dream classroom rules. Now, take a close look at your list, with the thought “How will these rules affect the other people in the room?” Write a second list that has ideas that would be enjoyable, but not detrimental to any of your classmates. How is it different? What did you give up? Why is it important to consider the good of everyone?

## FIND THE LEADER

### *(Performance & Discussion Exercise)*

Sit in a big circle, then ask one person to leave the room. While they’re gone, choose the “leader.” Everyone in the group is tasked with copying what the leader does (arm movement, facial expression, etc.) without making it obvious who the leader is. Start following the leader before the person outside comes in. Then, bring the person back in. They must figure out who the leader is in three guesses. If they don’t, the group wins.

After a few rounds, discuss people’s strategies. What were the best types of movements for the leader to go undetected? How did the rest of the group best follow without giving the leader away? How did the person guessing figure out the leader? Is it possible to influence people without being noticed?

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the qualities of an effective leader?
- Why do people seek power? Why is power sometimes dangerous?
- Why did playwright Mike Lew set this adaption of Richard III in a high school? What are the similarities between the social dynamic in a high school and those in a royal court? (Think cliques, social status, etc.).

## POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you like about Richard? What do you dislike?
- How does Richard’s personality change throughout the show?
- What was Richard’s biggest mistake? What would you have done differently?
- Why do you think Richard betrayed Anne’s trust? Is Richard, in part, responsible for her fate?

# THEATER ETIQUETTE GUIDELINES

We are so excited you are here! The audience is one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the play is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make your theatre experience enjoyable for everyone.

## **BE PROMPT**

Arrive in plenty of time to settle, find your seats, and get situated. Please visit the restrooms before the show begins.

## **BE RESPECTFUL**

Your behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. The performers can see and hear you, just as the audience can see and hear you.

## **TURN OFF CELL PHONES**

You may think texting is private, but the light and motion can be seen by actors and audience members and texting is distracting to those around you. Please do not check your phones, text or take photos during the performance.

## **HAVE FUN AND PARTICIPATE**

Rather than remaining totally silent, please note the difference between appropriate and inappropriate responses.

## **APPROPRIATE**

- Laughter
- Applause
- Participation (when requested)

## **INAPPROPRIATE**

- Talking (including whispering)
- Groaning / Booing
- Using Cell Phones / Devices

## **STAY WITH US!**

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.



