



# WINTER BREAK

BY

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DRAMATISTS  
PLAY SERVICE  
INC.



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WINTER BREAK was given its world premiere by Oakton High School Theatre Arts Department in December 2020 and was streamed on ShowTix4U.com. It was student-directed by Abby Cortez, Camila Martinez, and Steven Labovitch, filmed and edited by Steven Labovitch, and produced by Vanessa Lock Gelinias and Tiffany Powell. The cast was as follows:

BRETT .....	Sana Friedman
CHARLIE .....	Mattin Peikari
PI .....	Vicky Coleman
KRYS .....	Mussa Abu-Ghannam
KAI .....	Anna Kruse
CAM .....	Molly Manhoff
RICKY .....	Julia Stein
AJ .....	Abba Kodiaga
JULES .....	Rachel Rizzo
TY .....	Elli Kirkland
QUINN .....	Cameron Levin
CODY .....	Sandro Morales
SAM .....	Isaac Swanson
DYLAN .....	Maddie Foltz
FINN .....	Lindsey Cliff
ANDY .....	Jackson Smith
COREY .....	Joshua Lemons
FRANKIE .....	Arvind Suresh
JESSE .....	Jonathan Geerdes

WINTER BREAK was given a reading as part of the Plays in the House Teen Edition series (James Wesley and Seth Rudetsky, Executive Producers; Anika Larsen, Artistic Producer) in July 2020. The cast included Klarke Armstrong, Sachi Dieker, Lex Garcia, Charlotte Gimlin, Avery Michael Johnson, Imahni King, and Lucy Martin.

WINTER BREAK was developed at the Educational Theatre Association's 2020 International Thespian Festival.

## SPECIAL THANKS

For recommending me to and connecting me with the Educational Theatre Association: Katherine Tucker.

For their dramaturgical insight while I was writing the play: Beth Bickers, Renée Calarco, Vanessa Lock Gelinias, Dani Stoller.

For allowing me to hear the play out loud for the first time and for their talent, their craft, and their insight, all of which impacted my rewrites going forward, this extraordinary group of actors: Josh Adams, Temidayo Amay, John Austin, Usman Ali Ishaq, Jade Jones, Vincent Kempinski, Billie Krishawn, Dorcas Leung, Vaughn Ryan Midder, Ethan Miller, Maria Rizzo, Awa Sal Secka, Clay Singer, Jordan Slattery, Harrison Smith, Dani Stoller, Ryan Jamaal Swain, Chad Vann, Caroline Wolfson.

And to Julia Murney for passing the play on to Seth Rudetsky, Anika Larsen, James Wesley, and Juli Rudetsky Wesley at Plays in the House Teen Edition.

## CHARACTERS

BRETT—Sophomore. Very smart. Socially awkward. The kind of introvert who, in trying to disappear, is even more visible and suffers at the hands of and by the taunts from others for it. A loner by choice.

CHARLIE—Freshman. An introverted extrovert. Socially awkward but working on it. Is eager to make friends and to connect with others but it doesn't always work out. A loner, not by choice.

PI—Senior. Bold. Hates the status quo. Numerous piercings and henna patterns that will switch to tattoos once away from the parents, which is a move that can't happen soon enough. Never has to worry about what something costs.

KRYS—Sophomore. Plays a lot of sports, hoping one of them will bring a scholarship. Knows a lot of people but sometimes wonders how many of them are actually friends. Always has to worry about what something costs.

KAI—Freshman. A *Star Wars* superfan. Cam's best friend.

CAM—Freshman. A hard-core retro gamer. A philosopher without knowing it. Kai's friend. Struggling. Questioning. Wanting.

RICKY\*—Freshman. Popular. From the outside appears to have a perfect life but things are much different behind closed doors. Music is an escape.

AJ\*—Sophomore. A great singer. An activist. Trustworthy.

JULES—Junior. Jewish. Struggling with loss. Has a complicated relationship with food.

TY—Junior. A great friend.

QUINN—Junior. A great friend but will call you out when needed.

CODY—Senior. Uncomplicated: food, sleep, sports, and friends equal happiness.

\* See casting note on p. 7.

SAM—Junior. Has known Dylan and Finn since they were all children. Finds the unknown thrilling.

DYLAN—Junior. Has known Sam and Finn since they were all children. Finds the unknown terrifying.

FINN—Junior. Has known Sam and Dylan since they were all children. Finds the unknown questionable.

ANDY—Junior. Top of the class. An athlete, a leader, but in Corey's shadow. Ready for change.

COREY—Senior. A great high school athlete. Very popular. High school has been pretty great. High school will end soon.

FRANKIE—Senior. An excellent student. An excellent friend. Very ready to graduate. And even more ready to change the world.

JESSE—Senior. An excellent friend. Dealing with loss. Needs a break from school. Itching to see the world.

## **TIME**

December

## **PLACE**

A town in the United States of America where Winters are cold.

## SOME THOUGHTS

### Casting

All roles are gender neutral so cast the play however it suits your casting pool, casting needs, or casting desires. I would also *strongly* encourage multicultural casting as much as possible.

### Casting for Scene 4

I wrote the play so that any role can be cast any way in terms of gender and race. Now, of course, the scenes will carry different resonances depending on the casting. That was intentional. Scene 4, however, needs more discussion. The scene is about many things, but within it, Ricky learns something about racism and appropriation. There are two scene options available for production. In both options I wrote the scene imagining Ricky as white or as a non-Black person of color. In Option One AJ should be played by a Black actor. In Option Two AJ should be played by an actor who is either white or a non-Black person of color.

### Acting

I tried to write a play that avoids portraying teenagers as caricatures or as stereotypes and that would allow young actors to just be truthful. I purposefully avoided giving every detail of the characters' lives but also threw in hints along the way to encourage a company to mine these characters for all the complexities inherent in being a teenager. Don't be afraid to take your time; there are moments of real air in the play. Pauses are valid.

### Staging

The play can be staged very simply, with virtually nothing onstage or with more extravagant set pieces; do whatever serves your production best. The most important thing to me is that the play moves fluidly. There shouldn't be blackouts between scenes. I wrote it to have the end of one scene and the beginning of the next overlap so that the show keeps moving.

## **The Prologue**

This sequence should be approached like a musical number. While the staging vocabulary should come from a place of everyday movement, the sequence should be very “choreographed,” and once the school bell goes off, it should definitely be scored—something rhythmic and energized. It should feel very cinematic, the switches between hallways and classrooms, fluid. The stage directions in the Prologue are important but a roadmap. Feel free to fill in even more detailed moments that reveal character and relationships to surround the scripted moments in the stage directions.

## **Stage Directions**

Usually I don't write a lot of stage directions. But, the stage directions in this play are important; they help define the characters in terms of their physical habits and behavior beyond what is in the spoken text.

I wrote this play for you. Make it yours. And have fun!



# WINTER BREAK

## Prologue

*A high school. Final day of classes before Winter Break.*

*A hallway. Quiet.*

*Pi sits against a locker applying a henna pattern. A school bell. Pi deflates. "Why does the rest of the world have to exist?"*

*Students stream down the hall from both directions, entering and exiting.*

*Pi heads down the hall passing Corey and Andy holding hands, Andy wearing Corey's varsity jacket. They kiss and go in opposite directions.*

*Brett unlocks a locker. Charlie goes to a locker two down from Brett and fiddles with the lock while taking peeks at Brett. Brett closes the locker and notices Charlie. Charlie smiles. Brett looks around to see who Charlie is smiling at, then leaves. Charlie exits in the opposite direction.*

*A classroom. At desks are Juniors Finn, Sam, Andy, as well as Ty and Quinn with an empty desk between the two of them. Dylan stands reading a paper aloud though we can't hear it. Finn stands, goes to exit, stops as if the teacher said something, then points up. The school bell rings, and Finn leaves.*

*Freshmen Charlie, Cam, Kai, and Ricky replace the Juniors at the desks. Kai draws with a set of colored pencils, then looks up as if called on by the teacher, reluctantly stands and holds up the drawing so the unseen teacher can see it. It is an extraordinary piece of Star Wars fan art.*

*School bell.*

*The hallway. AJ and Ricky run into each other. Ricky has something to say but can't, then tries again, but can't, then leaves, AJ thinking, "What was that?"*

*Cam walks down the hallway working a Rubik's Cube. Dylan walks the opposite way going through a backpack. The two collide—things go flying. Cam notices but keeps moving. One of Dylan's books is kicked by Krys and flies out of sight. Krys tries to help gather Dylan's things, but Dylan has a system, and this isn't part of it. Sam appears holding the book and hands it to Dylan. They walk off together. Krys feels a little defeated and exits the opposite way.*

*Frankie walks down the hallway texting. Jesse enters from the opposite direction. Frankie hits send and Jesse reads the text that just arrived from Frankie. As the two pass each other, they do some ritual greeting then move on.*

*School bell.*

*A classroom. At the desks are Sophomores Brett, Krys, and AJ. Brett feverishly works out some sort of problem on a piece of paper. AJ and Krys look to Brett because the unseen teacher has clearly called on Brett, but Brett clearly didn't hear it. Krys suppresses a laugh. Finally, AJ taps Brett on the shoulder. Brett looks up wondering what's going on. Brett looks to the teacher, then very reluctantly stands. Brett reaches to hand the piece of paper to the unseen teacher but tears it to shreds instead.*

*School bell.*

*Seniors Pi, Corey, Cody, Frankie, and Jesse replace the Sophomores at the desks. Pi works on the henna pattern. Cody examines a just-discovered mole. Frankie and Jesse pay attention to the teacher. Corey sleeps.*

*All the students appear, and we get a sense of the entire school.*

*A final bell rings. Music stops. Everything stops.*

*All the students exhale—it is finally Winter Break.*

JESSE. (*Tapping AirPods.*) Turn it up!

*A contemporary hit plays.\* The students each dance to it, each in their own world. Think A Charlie Brown Christmas. Brett's dancing slows down to stillness. Then Brett looks up to the sky. Students begin peeling off until only Brett is left alone onstage.*

## Scene 1

*A sidewalk. Brett stands staring up at the sky, wearing a coat, a scarf, a hat, and khakis with the cuffs rolled up, and loafers with no socks on. Charlie, fully bundled in a parka, knit hat, mittens, and boots, walks up and looks at Brett's face while Brett continues staring up at the sky. Charlie looks up at the sky to see what Brett may be looking for and can't figure out what it could be and then looks down at Brett's feet.*

CHARLIE. You're not wearing socks.

BRETT. No, no I'm not.

CHARLIE. It's freezing.

BRETT. Is it though? Is it really?

CHARLIE. I can see my breath. Look. *(A big exhale.)*

*Brett sees Charlie's breath.*

BRETT. That can happen at forty-five degrees. That's not freezing.

*Brett looks back up at the sky.*

CHARLIE. But it can't be forty-five degrees right now, it can't.

BRETT. No, it's colder than that.

CHARLIE. See? See? Cold, right there, you said it. It's cold.

BRETT. Cold yes. But not freezing. You said freezing.

*Charlie takes off each mitten, steps in, bends down, and touches one of Brett's ankles. Brett responds as if touched by something scalding hot or freezing cold.*

What, what, what, what, what?!

\* See Note on Songs/Recordings at the back of this volume.

CHARLIE. I'm sorry, I was just—

BRETT. Just what?

CHARLIE. I just wanted to see if your feet were cold, your feet must be cold.

BRETT. I didn't say they weren't. I just said, it wasn't freezing. Can you please stop looking at my feet?

CHARLIE. But no socks? I mean, what is that?

BRETT. It's an experiment.

CHARLIE. On Winter Break?

BRETT. It's not for school. Why does it have to be for school?

CHARLIE. Experiment? That's like science. That's school.

BRETT. No. Science is bigger than school. It's bigger than you. It's bigger than me. I mean we'll die. Some day. Science doesn't die. It just is.

*Brett looks back up to the sky.*

CHARLIE. So, you wanna be a scientist? That's cool.

BRETT. This isn't science. It's curiosity. There's a big difference.

CHARLIE. (*Looks up to the sky.*) Can I ask what it's about?

BRETT. What what's about?

CHARLIE. Your curiosity, I guess?

BRETT. (*Thinks on it, then.*) Not yet. I'm not ready yet.

*Charlie looks at Brett.*

CHARLIE. Okay.

*Brett looks back up to the sky. Charlie gets an idea and leaves. Brett turns toward where Charlie had been standing to say something, but Charlie's gone. Brett turns and looks in every direction. Nothing. Brett looks up at the sky again. Brett spits up into the sky and then has to move quickly to not get hit by it as it falls. Brett stares at where the spit wad landed. Suddenly Brett is freezing and starts shaking like a leaf. The shaking from the cold devolves into crying.*

*Charlie returns, holding two pillows and wearing two extra scarves. Charlie sees Brett crying and freezes midstep, tries*

*to decide whether to leave or not, then:*

(*Big smile.*) Hey.

*Brett tries to shake off the crying.*

(*Holding out the pillows.*) I thought these might help.

BRETT. Help?

CHARLIE. Yeah. Your curiosity made *me* curious so— (*Dropping the pillows on the sidewalk.*) We should sit. It'll be more comfortable if we sit.

*Charlie sits down on one of the pillows. Then Brett sits on the other pillow. They both look back up to the sky.*

Oh!

*Charlie takes off the two extra scarves.*

For your feet.

BRETT. My feet?

CHARLIE. Wrap 'em up. With these.

*Charlie hands over the scarves.*

BRETT. Oh.

*Brett takes the scarves and wraps both ankles and cracks a mini smile.*

CHARLIE. See?

BRETT. I do. I do see. Thank you.

CHARLIE. You're welcome.

*The two of them stare back up at the sky.*

BRETT. Have you ever made a fort?

CHARLIE. I tried once when I was little, but I only got to build one wall and—that was it—no more snow.

BRETT. Wouldn't that've been amazing though? If there had been? To have a place. In the winter. When you need a break. To just be—alone. Whenever you wanted. In a bubble. Made of snow.

*Charlie stands up furious.*

CHARLIE. (*Angry/hurt.*) You know what?! Just keep the stupid pillow. (*Starts walking off, then stops.*) And the scarves. (*Walks some more and stops.*) But you better give 'em back.

# WINTER BREAK

by Joe Calarco

19 n/s

On the first night of Winter Break, nineteen teenagers, some who know each other, some who don't, wrestle with friendships, breakups, loss, graduating, and finding their place in the world. Alternately hilarious and touching, WINTER BREAK is the 2020 Educational Theatre Association commission.

**Also by Joe Calarco**  
SHAKESPEARE'S R&J  
WALTER CRONKITE IS DEAD.

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