

## **TALES FROM MY PARENTS' DIVORCE Toolkit**

Crafted from interviews between the cast and their own parents, *You Better Sit Down* is a heartbreaking and hilarious account of the parents' marriages and their subsequent divorces. These delicate parent-child conversations have yielded unique insights into falling in love, falling out of love, and rebuilding a life after the complex experience of dividing a family.

The show explores each couple's first meeting, the ups and downs of their marriage, their split, and the surprising perspectives on life after divorce. In these alternately funny, devastating and revelatory performances, the four actors are the conduits of their parents' stories and, inevitably though sometimes inadvertently, also of their own experiences of family division. This provocative show reveals the stories behind the statistics of one of the most prominent social phenomena of our time.

We encourage you to adapt this script to suit your community, rather than simply producing the show as written. If you do modify the script, we'd love to see what you've done. Please drop us a line at [liaison@thecivilians.org](mailto:liaison@thecivilians.org).

Cast size and set requirements are flexible and adaptable, depending on your resources and creative vision.

We've created this toolkit to give you insight into our process, and information on how you can ask your own questions, investigate, and create your own material to incorporate into your production.

### **YOU BETTER SIT DOWN: TALES FROM MY PARENTS' DIVORCE /**

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**Cast Breakdown:**

**Script & Licensing:** If you'd like to produce *You Better Sit Down*, you'll need to acquire the rights. The script hasn't been published yet. Please email [liaison@thecivilians.org](mailto:liaison@thecivilians.org).

**More Info:** Visit our website for more ([www.thecivilians.org/education/](http://www.thecivilians.org/education/))

## THE PROCESS /

The method we use was derived from an interview method originating with the Joint Stock Theater Company in London, taught to the company by Joint Stock Member, director Les Waters. The method has evolved a lot since the company first started working, but a lot of the practices at its heart have been consistent through the years and the different projects.

If you're starting from scratch, it's important to find a topic that is really intriguing to you: people are saying lots of different things about one issue, or reacting to a particular event in a lot of different ways, or behaving in a way that seems surprising to you. Ask them about it! Ask lots of people about it!

Originally, our artists would interview people, not write anything down, and then take notes about what they remembered from the interview later. This forced a close listening from the interview subject as they also took in personality and broader mannerisms. Interviewers had to catch on to the heart of what the interviewee was saying in order to recreate it later on. However, for more recent shows (beginning with *This Beautiful City*), artists began tape-recording the interviews as the subject matters involved enough controversy that an exact replication of a person's words (and the recorded backup to prove it) became necessary.

People are talking in lots of places – on blogs, TV, in the paper – be sure to follow the current conversations that are happening about whatever topic you're working with; there may be something you can use there (with any necessary permission, of course)!

Here are some tips for the interviewing process:

**Come up with a specific set of beginning questions for each interview:** When asking everyone you interview the exact same set of questions, you inherently develop a cohesiveness to all of your material. After this initial set of questions, the interview can and should wander far and wide, but you have immediate comparison material. For instance, with *This Beautiful City*, every interview began with, "What is an Evangelical?"

**Some questions to get you started:** Was there an object that you fought over? What does "home" mean to you?

**Be very clear and polite.** Tell your interviewee in advance what you're working on and what it is about them or their experience that has made you want to talk to them. Always thank them for their time and for sharing with you!

**Try and ask open ended questions.** Something that will lead to a story, rather than a yes or no answer. For example, "Do you remember the last trip you took together?" or "How did you tell us you were getting divorced?" The trick is to try and get them to speak freely.

**Let the answers lead the questions,** which is also to say, practice active listening! If someone says something you don't understand, ask them more about it. If something seems weird or wrong to you, try to get more information – sometimes if it seems wrong at first, it'll have some greater insight at the heart of it. If, when you ask them "Was there an object you fought over in the divorce?" they say "Oh yes, definitely: the bottle opener," try to avoid contradicting them,

even if you know for a fact that the wedding china was the main obsession in your house all through your teen years. Instead, ask them about the bottle opener, and why it meant so much to both of you, and see where it all goes.

**Resist the temptation to verbally react to what they're saying.** Let the interviewee go on and on if they want to. We've found the longer people talk, the more likely they are to reveal something new and unexpected.

**Be respectful.** What people are saying might be different or even opposed to things you might believe in, but don't fight with them! The goal is to gain a better understanding of those differences, and is not at all to convince them of something you know, you think, or you think you know.

**Don't feel like you have to get the whole story.** If there's stuff you feel like you've missed, you can always ask them again later; you may get a completely new story.

**And finally, don't forget to test your recorder.**