

OVARYACTING!

A Methodist College Production

A devised children's theatre performance

Written and directed by Piumi Wijesundara



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RESOURCE PACK
Ovaryacting!

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Performed by
Ensemble of Methodist College Colombo

Supported by
Stages Theatre Group

Ovaryacting! is a devised ensemble performance that addresses the myths and taboos surrounding female menstruation, performed by a cast of young girls from Methodist College Colombo, Sri Lanka.

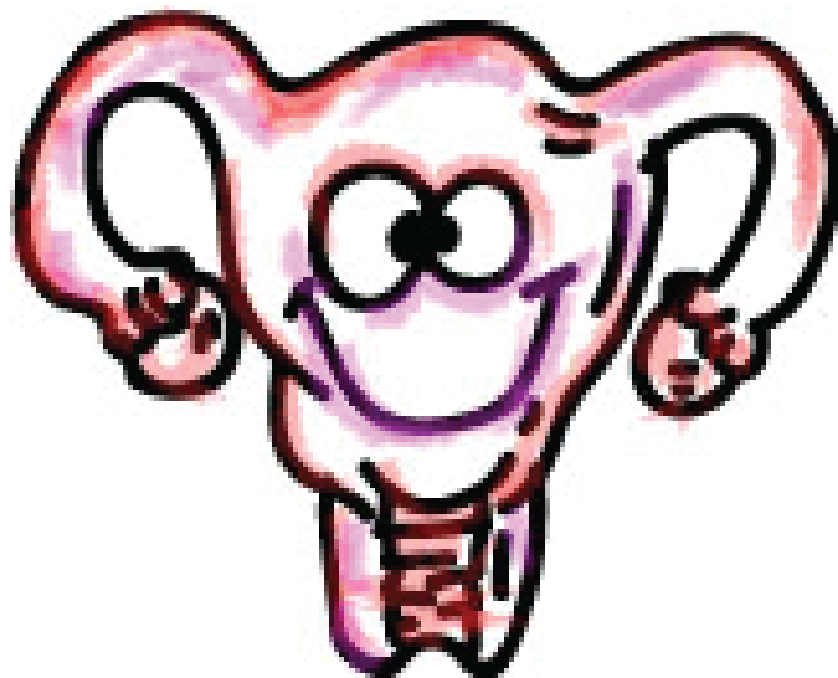
This resource pack serves two purposes. It is an analysis of the process of the play - put together by the director - for students (10-16 years) who may like to create their own original pieces of devised theatre, to address what they think are important issues.

The resource pack also tries to raise menstrual and reproductive health awareness among students on par with the play's theme.

As such this resource pack will cover the following areas:

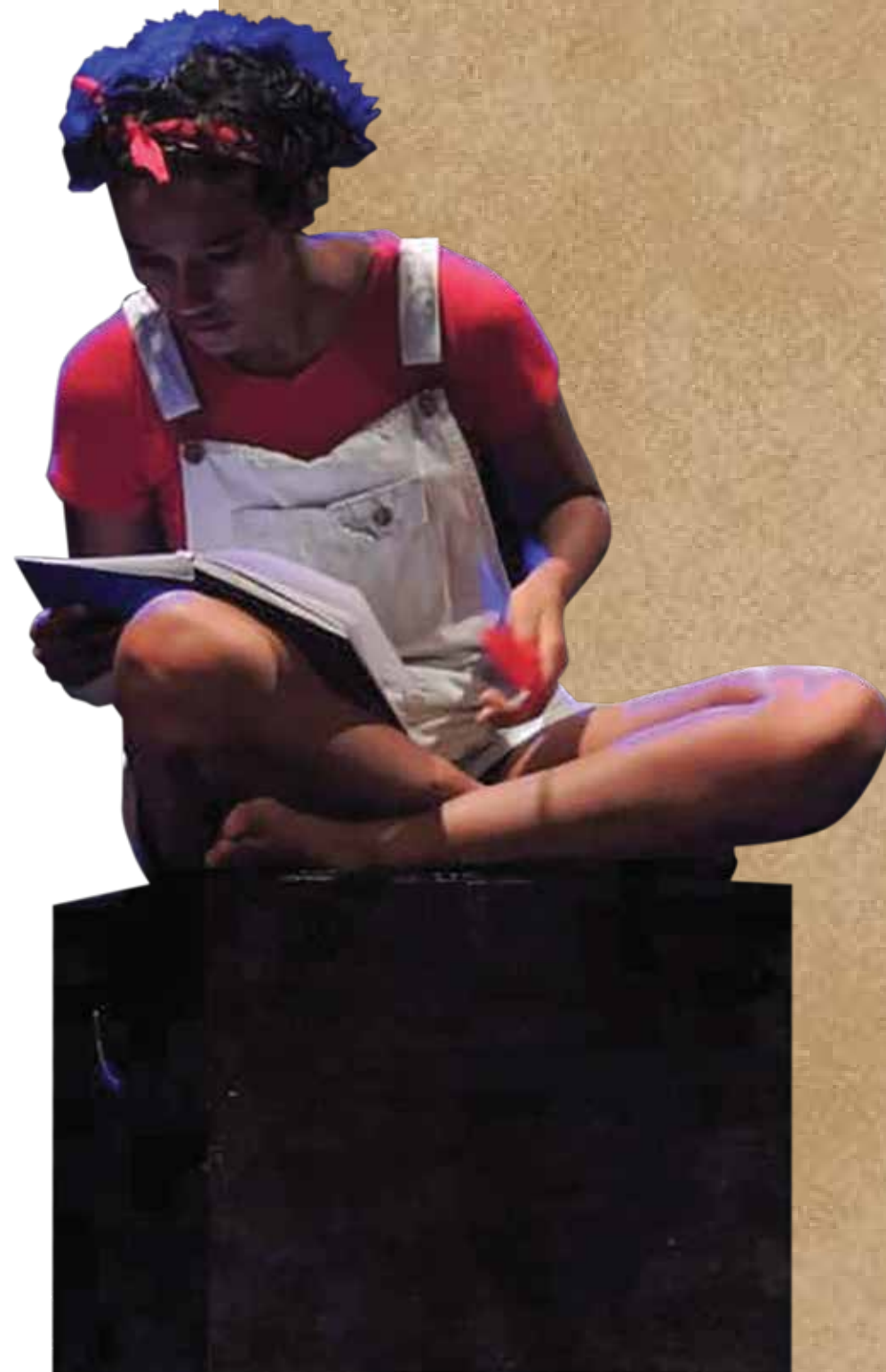
- Story
- Characters
- Production
- Educational Facts

It includes activities corresponding to the production that students can try out for themselves.



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LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Kids,

Once upon a time, I had the fortune of working with a wonderful bunch of young girls who wanted to tell a story. We didn't know what the story would be, but all of us knew how we wanted to tell it: through theatre.

We started talking about what we wanted to tell a story about. As a group of girls (myself included) we thought we'd do something about our 'girl troubles', or what made us girls tick. One red flag (literally) quickly came up.



**PERIODS. YES, HELLO. THAT'S ME.
YOU'LL SEE AND HEAR FROM ME
MORE OFTEN AS WE GO ALONG. AND
NO, I'M NOT THE PERIODS BETWEEN
WHICH YOU HEAR A BELL IN SCHOOL.
SHEESH**

Nope... not the kind that make us change classes in school. The other kind. The kind that makes us change pads. For those of you who still have no idea what I'm talking about, you'll know plenty and more as you reach the end of this study pack.

Shudder, right?

Actually. Wrong. No shudder.

This was exactly what we wanted to address. Why do we shudder at the thought of periods, or female menstruation? Why is something so biological, so natural, the cause of shame and embarrassment to most of us? Or, even more pertinently, why is something so common, hidden away as a secret from people? Why does everyone overreact as soon as they encounter ovaries acting? This... was our story. This was Ovaryacting!

I'm sure you've all told stories through drama at some point in your lives, whether it was at a school concert or even playing make believe with your siblings. What I found, by creating a drama with a bunch of vibrant kids such as yourselves is that we can all do much more than simply entertain through our performances. We can educate. We can raise awareness. We can, ourselves, grow a huge idea – together.

Another thing that I learnt by my collaborative creation of this play, was that sometimes we adults should take a back seat so that you kids can raise your voices. You all have such powerful voices, and theatre can be a great platform for you to raise your voices about issues that you feel are important.

In the chapters to follow, I will take you through my journey of creating the play Ovaryacting! with my wonderful ensemble of young artists. As I go through these chapters, however, I urge you all to start your own stories parallel to the retelling of our story. Try your hand at the theatre exercises introduced in each chapter either by yourself or with your friends. See what you can come up with. Also take a minute to hear what our friend the Period might have to say along the way. I'm quite certain that by the end of it, you would have your own play, fully conceptualized (with the added bonus of having learnt all you need to know about periods).

So enjoy the read (and the ride), and I'll meet you at the end of it. Perhaps by then you can tell me about the story that you would want to tell!

Much love,
Piumi (a.k.a. the 'director' *cough*)

DIRECTOR AND THE GIRLS OF OVARY ACTING!



ABOUT THE PLAY

Ovaryacting! is a devised ensemble play that addresses the myths and taboos on female menstruation.

YEP. THERE'S A MEN IN MENSTRUATION, BUT IT ACTUALLY HAPPENS TO WOMEN! THEY CALL ME AUNT FLO OR JUST 'THAT TIME OF THE MONTH'. HOW RUDE! I KNOW. BUT TO SIMPLY INTRODUCE MYSELF, I'M THAT FRIEND THAT COMES KNOCKING ON YOUR DOOR IF YOU'RE A GIRL WHEN YOU HIT PUBERTY! A SPLOTCH OF BLOOD ON YOUR PANTS, AND YOU'LL KNOW I'VE ARRIVED... ERM... SORRY ABOUT THE DRAMATIC ENTRANCE KIDS.



The production was devised with the cast of Methodist College Colombo (an all-girls school) to contend at DRAMACOMP 2019, the annual interschool drama competition organized by Royal College Colombo (a very big all boys school in Sri Lanka) staged at the Lionel Wendt Theatre. Of course it was a big decision for the girls to perform a play about periods at a drama competition organized by boys – and yet they all felt that this was a crying issue they needed to address. And so, everyone got to work...

Becoming an Ensemble

So Ovaryacting! didn't just appear with a knock on the door and a dash of red. No. We had to work very hard on the play. Even before we knew what it was going to be. As usual, in a devised play, we began by workshopping the play.

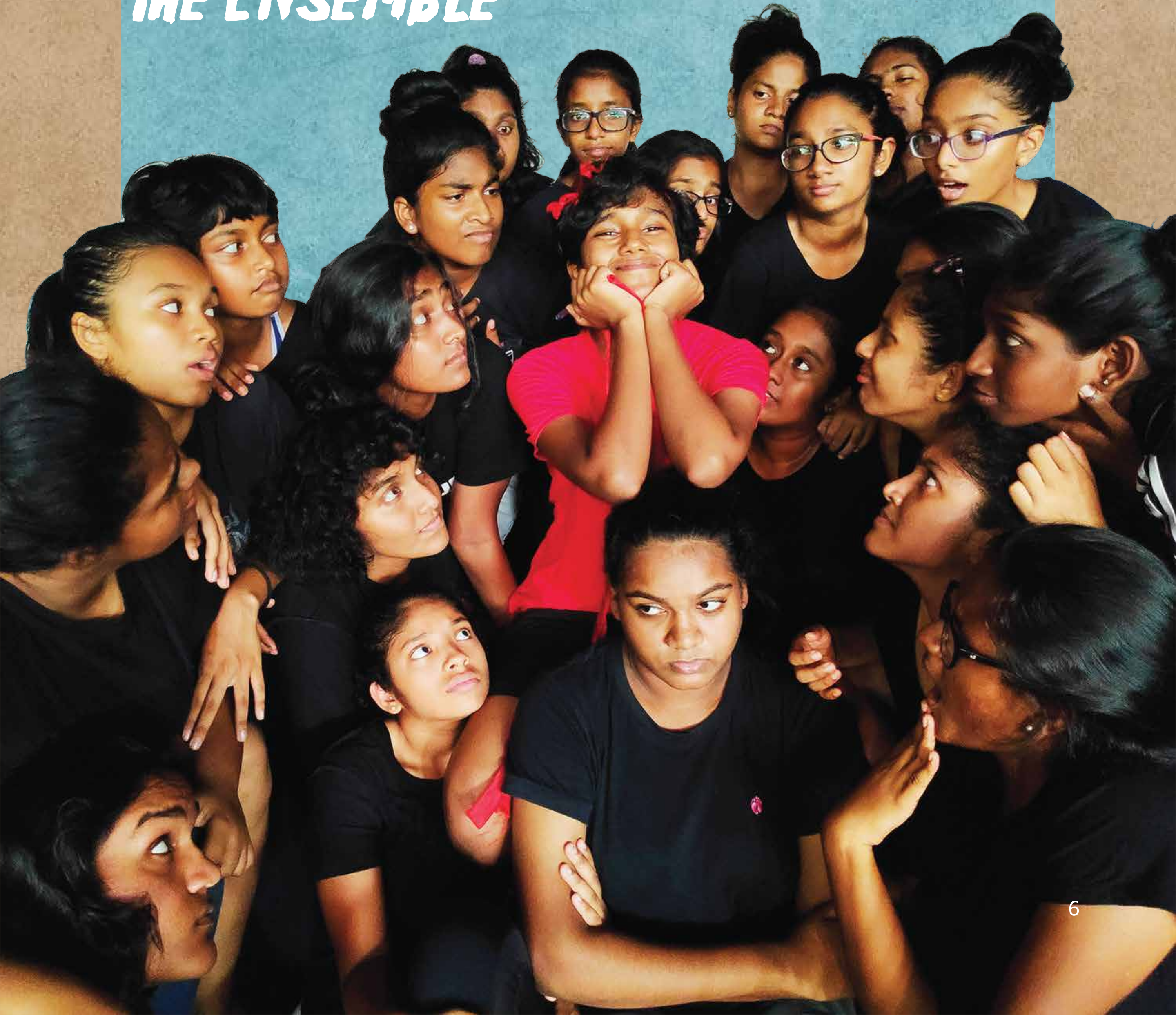
What is 'workshopping', you ask? If you're all thinking of something like a workshop where all sorts of thingamabobs are manufactured or repaired... you're not far off (well... not too far off).. In theatre, workshopping a play is quite a similar process. It's when a collective like directors, writers, actors, designers all engage in intense discussions and activities over a period of time on a particular theme to create an end product - a play. You'll learn more of this workshopping process as we go along.

Workshops for Ovaryacting! began in late February in 2019. Over the first few days the girls worked on creating a sense of **ensemble**. This is another word you'll encounter as we go on the journey of this play's creation. An ensemble is a group of dancers, musicians, actors or artists who perform together as ONE. You can think of it like a shoal of fish (Just keep swimming... swimming... swimming). Everyone has their own individual part to play, and yet they are all part of a much bigger whole.



Training a group of actors to work as an ensemble usually involves lots and lots of really exciting and interesting games which make each person forget themselves and focus on the group. Slowly, as the actors get better and better at these games, you realize that the 'group' is working well together. This is the beginning feeling of having an ensemble. It's far more than a collection of individual actors.

THE ENSEMBLE



Girl Talk

One thing that happened a lot during this time was discussion.



The discussions that happened, took place in widening circles. Firstly it was just the cast – and only at rehearsals. Initially the girls talked about their own personal experiences due to period stigma. Then, the girls decided that the conversations needed to be widened. They embarked on research and interviews to find more stories to relate on the issue. They interviewed their mothers, their sisters, their friends... then their teachers, and their brothers, fathers and even wider family – uncles, aunts, and even cousins.

You'd be surprised at how much of the story was created through the real stories told by real people!

Ovaryacting! was ultimately a culmination of all these girls' stories of coming to terms with living with their periods in a society that just was not used to talking openly about this issue.

I think we can safely say this play took many people, many families, on an interesting journey.

Devising Process

We had a theme. We had lots of different experiences and stories. But, we still didn't have a script.

What became most interesting for the cast to explore following discussions, was a young girls' struggle with understanding their own body upon the occurrence of their first period, and the bizarre ways in which family, friends, and wider society responded to the event.

The girls wanted to bust taboos surrounding female menstruation, while also educating the audiences on the biological and psychological impacts periods have on young girls such as themselves.

With this in mind, the ensemble started a process of writing, improvising, and creating together. This is called **devising**. Devising is when an ensemble collectively creates a play through various creative exercises.

The ensemble, together with me (the director), started to create from scratch or knit together existing stories to create one comprehensive story for the play. By devising moments from their own experiences the cast explored the reactions of family, friends, educational institutions, and wider society to the puzzle of the period.

The plot that ultimately emerged through this devising process, gave life to the period as a character and followed the tale of a young girl who first meets her period.

The period party had started, and it was here to stay!

Productions

Our play was first staged at the semi-finals of Royal Drama Comp 2019, and later at the finals of the same at the Lionel Wendt Theatre. Much to our excitement, it won 'Best Play' in the competition! We read this recognition and acceptance of the play as a sign, that we had an audience who wanted to listen to a story about periods. We were not the only ones who thought that this was worth talking about.

By popular demand, a public show was staged at Methodist College in August 2019, which was followed up by a panel discussion on menstrual and reproductive health awareness led by Dr. Sanath Lanerolle (Castle Street Hospital for Women), Manisha Dissanayake (Founder, ARCA), and none other than our very own cast member Acsah Kulasingham (who better to talk about period experience than a girl going through it herself, right?).

Following the public show, the play gained a lot of media attention. Some wonderfully supportive newspaper reviews, and a television interview later, we realized that we had succeeded in carrying our conversation on periods further – beyond the play.

The play that started in our little workshop grew... and grew... and grew. Not only did we have a great time together creating and putting it on stage, we were also able to inform and educate through what we staged, even beyond its staging.

It gave the young girls in the cast a whole different understanding of the power of theatre.

Acсаh in Ovaryacting!

FEELING STRONG



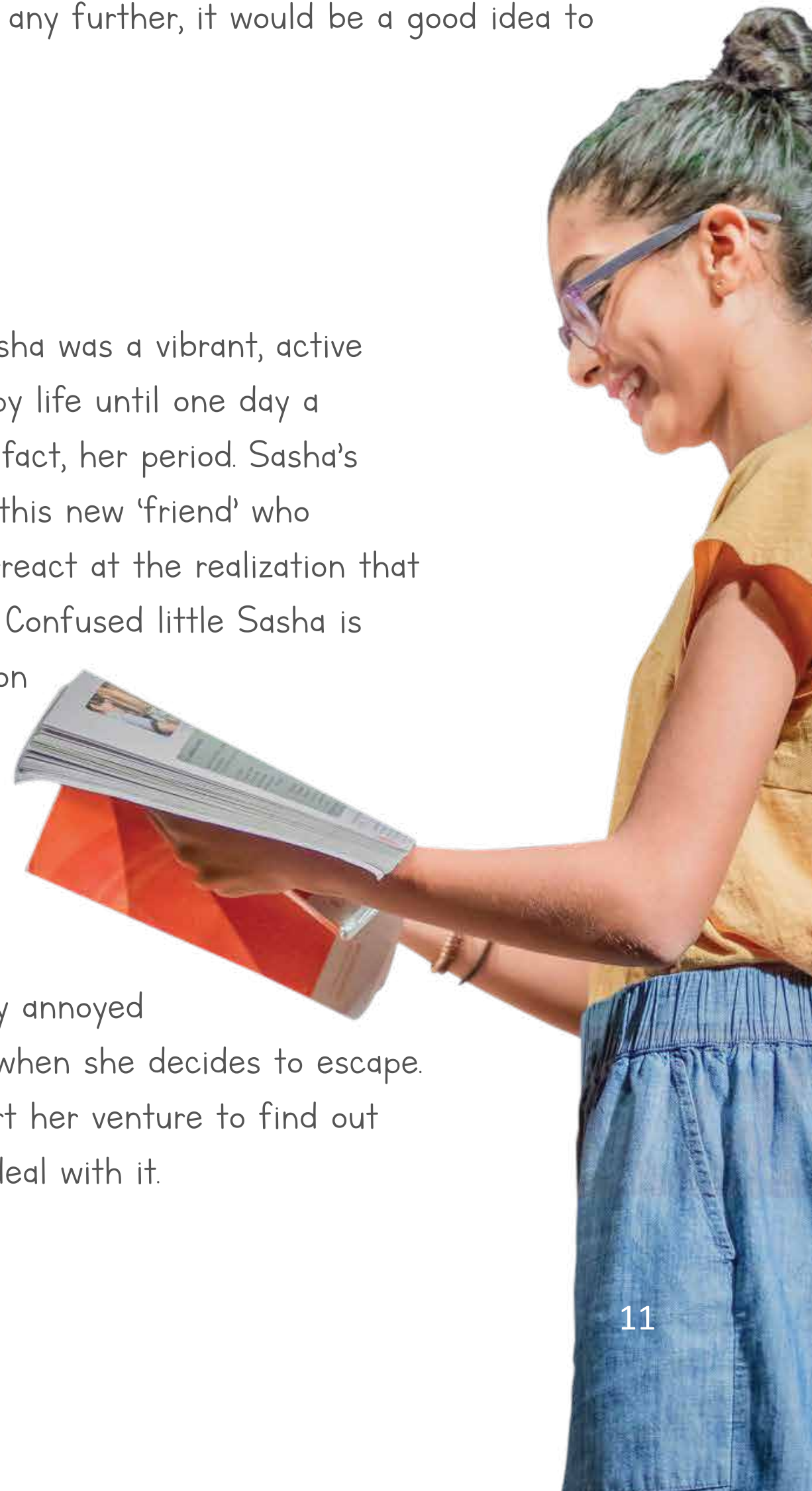
THE STORY

So by now, you know quite a bit about the play. But you don't actually know the play, do you? I mean, you don't know the story. So maybe, before we go any further, it would be a good idea to pause and listen to the story of the play...

The Story in a Nutshell

Once upon a time, there lived a little girl named Sasha. Sasha was a vibrant, active and headstrong little girl in her early teens, who led a happy life until one day a curious stranger enters her life. This curious creature, is in fact, her period. Sasha's body goes through a strange experience with the entry of this new 'friend' who refuses to leave her alone. Her family are the first to overreact at the realization that Sasha's friend the Period has now become part of her life. Confused little Sasha is locked up in her room by her grandmother and a bandwagon of aunties who offer her no explanation whatsoever. Her own mother, who Sasha has always turned to in times of trouble, also seems uncharacteristically flustered, and unable to help her.

Sasha is utterly flabbergasted, in discomfort, and extremely annoyed as she is locked in the same room with her Period. This is when she decides to escape. Along with her Period, Sasha escapes into the world to start her venture to find out who and what this new addition to her life is, and how to deal with it.



Her first pit stop is her school, where her health teacher too panics and silences poor Sasha as she tries to ask her about her period.

Sasha, with her Period still tailing alongside, then turns to a friend who is just as oblivious as she is. Her friend, however, leads Sasha to the gang of Akkas, or seniors in school, who are renowned for their so-called knowledge of the matter. The gang leader, or the Akka, although claiming to having experienced Sasha's curious circumstance, does little to contribute. After offering a convoluted blab for an explanation, the Akka advises Sasha to keep it mum; discipline her Period; and seek some 'things with wings' to solve her problem.

Once again, Sasha is on the road with her Period seeking answers. She encounters the shop with the so-called 'things' and is met with yet another peculiar reaction by the shopkeepers when she attempts to buy them. The shopkeepers respond to her in the most peculiar way. They seem utterly embarrassed by her questions. She does, however, manage to procure the 'things', which turn out to be sanitary pads, wrapped up carefully and diligently in layers and layers of newspaper by the shopkeepers.

As Sasha is out on her search, her mother too, devastated by the realization that when her little girl most needed her, she was unable to help her, ventures out looking for Sasha. They somehow keep missing each other by mere seconds. By now, Sasha has grown weary and tired, and she attempts to seek answers, from everyone she meets out on the streets. Everyone overreacts in one way or the other, leaving her with more confusion, and no answers.

She almost gives up, when her mother finally finds her. Both Sasha and her mother are relieved. Sasha's mother apologizes for not having explained things better to Sasha and finally gives her all the answers she needs. Her mother introduces her well and proper to her new friend the period, who will visit her once every month, for a prolonged period of her life. Her mother then explains, much to Sasha's comfort, that she is not alone, but that every woman at a point in her life is met

with their own period.

As Sasha's mother explains to her that periods are nothing to be ashamed of, and the most natural phenomenon in the world. Sasha finally learns to be friends with her Period. And by being more aware and empathetic of the Period, everyone around Sasha learns to be a better friend to Sasha.

Period.



THE JOURNEY

Now that we know what the play is – what it achieved and what its story was, maybe it's time to backtrack a bit and examine how exactly this play was created. It's time to look at the journey of creating the play. So what were some of the steps that led us to the period play?

Finding a Theme

Our first task together was picking a theme. Twenty-eight girls had decided to take up creating this play together. Given that I was a girl myself, I started asking myself some questions to pick a theme:

- What were our strengths as a group?
- What was a subject that all of us thought was worth talking about?

'Being a Girl'. Could that be the subject we talked about in our play? We were all a group of girls, and we had the shared experience of being girls. But the subject matter was still too big for us to handle in one play! We needed to narrow down and find something within this bigger picture to work with.

This is when we had our first **brainstorming** session. We put all our heads together to start listing and mapping out all the different kinds of experiences about being a girl. As we were throwing out our ideas, one shared experience kept coming up. 'Getting periods'. 'Being shamed about periods'. 'That time of the month'. 'Having to hide those things'. 'Once-a-month parties'.

**AND THAT'S HOW THEY
DECIDED TO BRING ME
INTO THE PICTURE.**



It was decided.

We would take the leap and talk about something that everyone else refused to talk about. Getting periods. This was our shared experience.

But why was it important? As we discussed as a group, we realized how all of us had to deal with periods. Something we also had to deal with, was how most people treated the subject of periods with shame and embarrassment. There were numerous times, that we had all as girls been made to feel ashamed of having our periods. There seemed to be countless times when we had been encouraged to 'hide' ourselves during periods. If all of us had this shared experience, why would no one else around us bring up how unfair this treatment was?

This was it. Through our discussion and brainstorming I was able to answer my first two questions.

- Our strength was that we were a group of girls.
- Periods were worth talking about, because if we didn't start talking about it... who would?

Sticky Note Activity

THEME HUNT

To get started on creating your own play, start listing some questions you would like to address.

To create a Mind Map, take a piece of paper and put down all the words and phrases you would associate with your topic.

Pick one of the questions, and start your own **mind map**.

What did you come up with? Do you see some words that can be grouped together? Try clustering some of the word associations to see if you can narrow down your theme some more.

It always helps to put your first ideas on paper and see them visually.

Research. Research. Research.

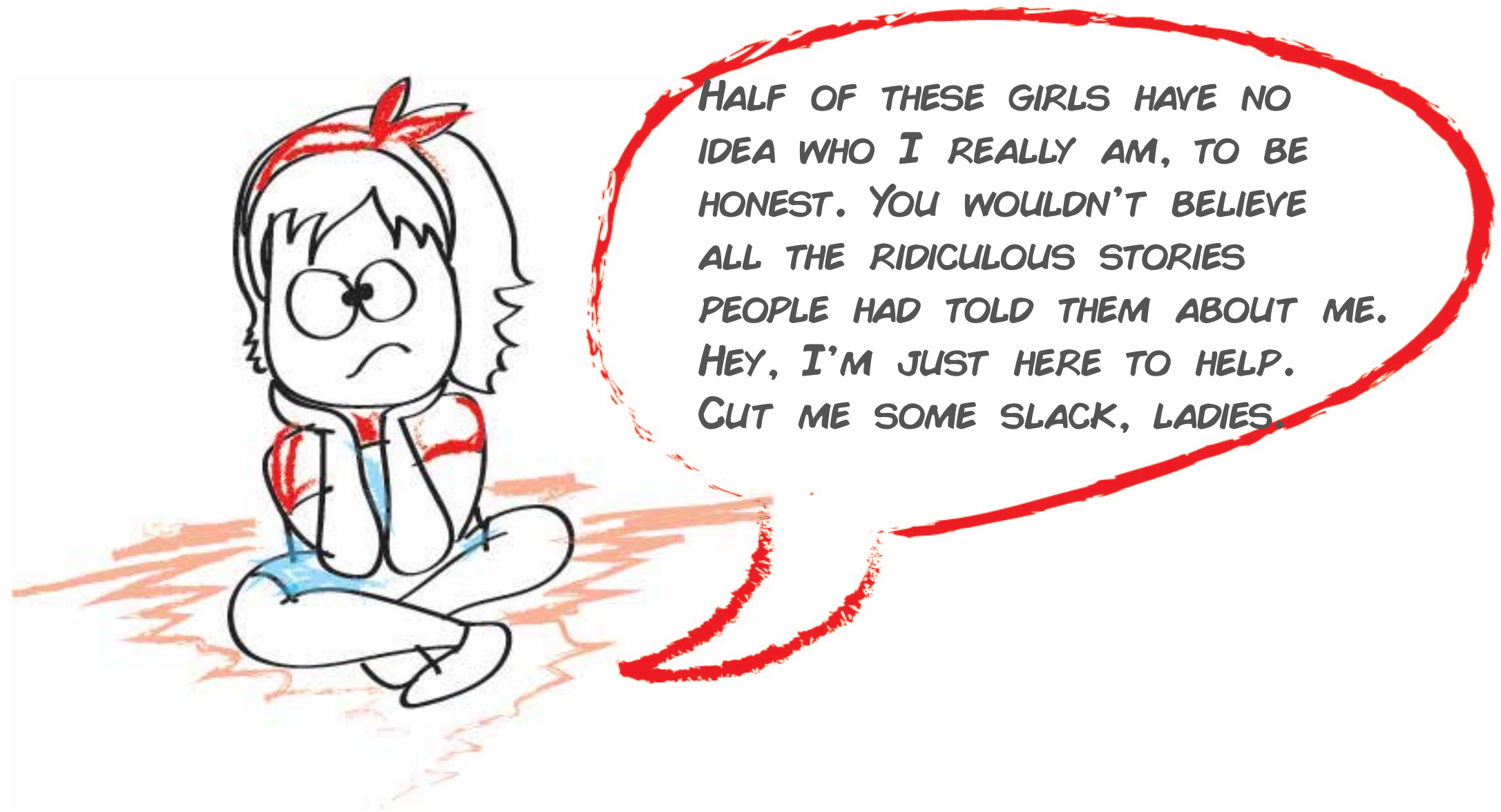
The girls had taken a bold decision to go with the theme of periods for our play. Now, we needed a story...

To build up our story we needed enough material. We had already started collecting some material in our first brainstorming session. This, however, wasn't enough. We needed to start investigating and digging deep into the subject that we found.

What we needed was to do some **research**.



Creating any story needs a little bit of research. Some digging up and additional investigation into a subject can help establish facts and give us new conclusions. Periods were already a rather foggy subject for most of the girls in our cast.



We had all been told so many different things about our periods. There were so many old-wives tales, myths and taboos around periods. Every girl had a very unique kind of experience with their periods. Even our bodies went through different kinds of experiences when we got our periods. Some girls in our group hadn't yet got their periods. For some, this was their very first brush even with the word! With all these very puzzling scenarios already in front of us we had plenty of questions that needed answering.

And so, we set out to find our answers.

We decided to do this in three different ways:

Sharing Experiences

we would all bring our own personal period stories to share with everyone. These could be our experiences, things we had been told, or just things we felt about periods.

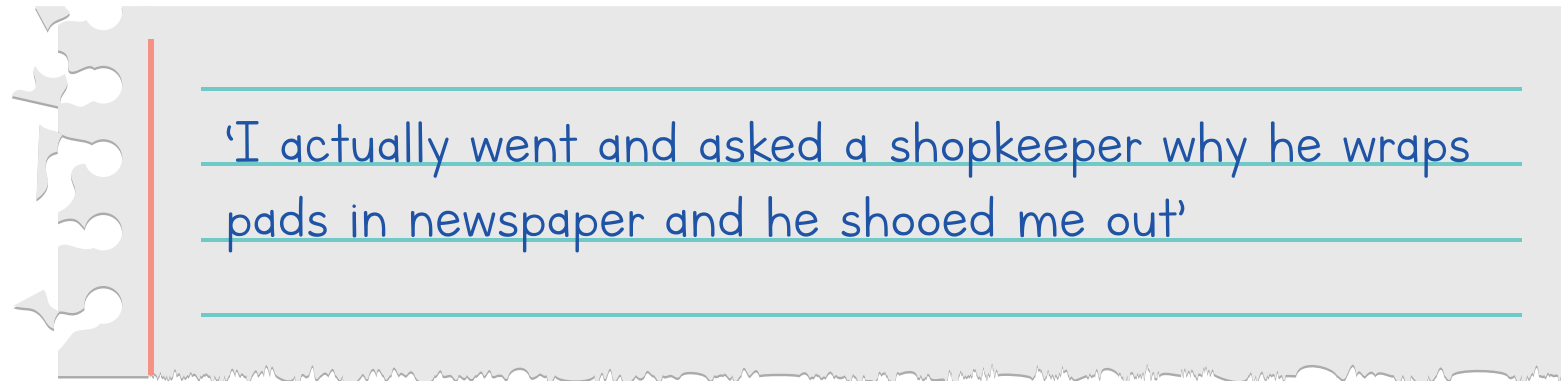
Asking Questions

we did not have the right answers, but we could ask the right questions! We would conduct some interviews with family, friends, and teachers about their experiences and knowledge on periods. I too contributed to this research by creating an Instagram questionnaire to which my friends responded with their answers. There are so many platforms we can start asking questions in!

Investigating Further

we could not base our story on just experience, interviews or hearsay. Especially not this story because it involved an actual biological function. We needed facts and figures to back up our story. And so last, but not least, was some further factual research on periods. For this we turned to health books, online sources, and answers provided by actual professionals.

The girls all parted ways to do their personal research through all three methods and when they came back, they had plenty to talk about.



Amandi, 13 yrs

To make this sharing efficient we got into three groups. The first group shared experiences. The second group shared findings from their interviews. The third group did presentations of their factual findings. All three methods not only answered many questions we had, but also brought in many, many stories; some stories were witty, some of them horrifying, some of them sad, but most of them quite eye-opening.

Sticky Note Activity

RESEARCH

If you've found a theme to work with, try to think of some people who could have more information, or opinions on your topic of choice. For example, if your theme is something to do with a sport, a professional opinion could come from a coach. And an everyday opinion could come from a friend who plays sports.

What are some of the questions you would like to ask them?

Make a list of the people you want to interview, and how you would do it (written, over-the-phone etc.)

Create a common questionnaire to ask your interviewees.

Collect and try to do a simple analysis of your interview results. Can the answers be categorized? Are there new ways to look at the topic through the answers? What can you use from your interviews?

Finding Our Story

We had a lot of findings from our research, but how do we find our story through this research? We decided to have some fun with everything we had found on the topic so far. The girls were divided into groups to try and start **improvising and devising**.

Wait... what and a what?

Alright, let me back up for a second. Since we were not going the traditional way and creating a play from an already available script, we had to come up with our own. A great way to start coming up with our own story is to start improvising. Remember a time when you didn't prepare a speech for school so came up with your own in seconds? Or a time when you were mimicking a friend to get on their nerves? You were probably improvising. Improvising is when we create, perform or produce something with what's available to us spontaneously without preparation. The process of devising involved doing such improvisations collectively, as a group. And so, this is what we turned to.

I split up the girls into groups. In their groups they were given two devising tasks, where they would use the information now available to them through their research:

- They had to come up with **a one-minute creative performance** depicting **a girl's first period** picking one of the research stories they had. It could be a representation of myths and taboos, or even a performance piece that worked to bust those myths through factual evidence.
- They had to use the interview material to **create a longer, fully fledged improvised performance piece** that addressed both **myths and facts about periods**.

While there were many interesting improvisations that happened during the course of this process, there were three that caught everyone's attention:

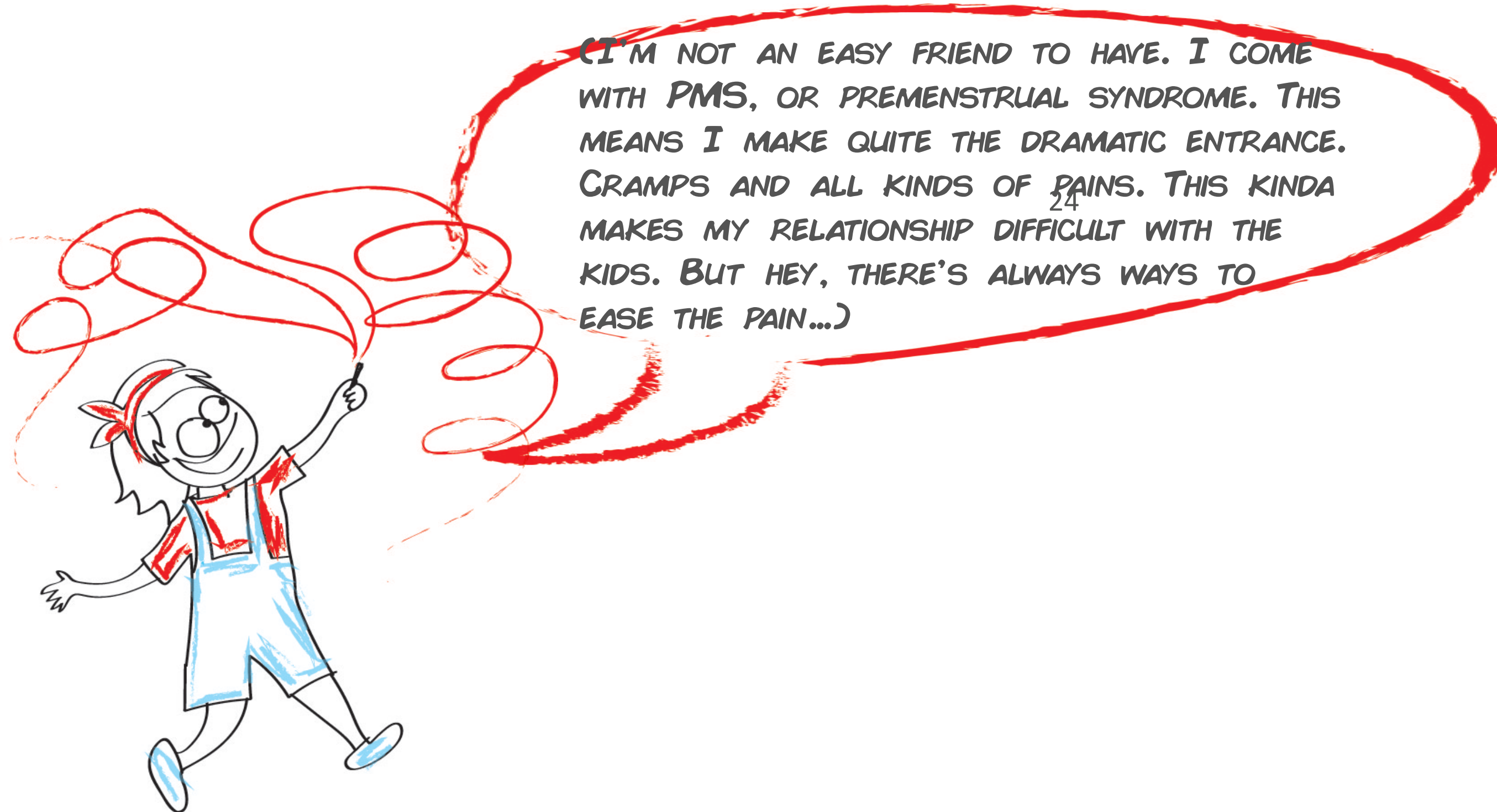
- **'The Volcano'** was a short scene created by one of the groups. This enacted a girl's physical and psychological reaction to getting her first period as the eruption of a dormant volcano. There were three things that were interesting about this performance: 1) The whole scene was narrated by a narrator who stood outside the scene and gave insight to what the girl on stage was going through; 2) The character of the girl was simply going about her day when she suddenly realizes something was wrong. Without saying anything out loud, however, the actor was able to depict her discomfort through **pantomime**. 3) The actors chose to give life to the period as a person, or rather, the lava that was bubbling underneath a volcano. Giving the period an actual **personality**, or personifying it, could bring more layers to our story.
- **'Pop Quiz'** was a five minute scene devised in the form of a television quiz show. This too, followed a young girl who gets her first period. Upon getting her first period, she finds herself in a quiz show. She is thrown different questions by society, and has multiple answers to choose from. However, none of the answers on the quiz appear to be the right answers for her. This improvisation in particular, brought into focus a lot of the myths versus facts about periods together cleverly.



- **'Journey'** was a five-minute scene which followed the story of a girl who gets her first period. In this scene too, the period was a person. After meeting her period for the first time, a girl journeys through her family, friends, teachers, acquaintances in order to try and find answers to who and what her 'period' is. She is given very few answers, until at the very end she is enlightened by her mother.



All three of these devised performances could be developed, in different styles, to create a fully-fledged play. The three pieces also brought into focus that: 1) getting their period for the first time; and 2) 'figuring things out' was a common denominator for all the girls. The girls had managed to find a **conflict**, or a struggle, for the characters in the story to try and overcome.



(I'M NOT AN EASY FRIEND TO HAVE. I COME WITH PMS, OR PREMENSTRUAL SYNDROME. THIS MEANS I MAKE QUITE THE DRAMATIC ENTRANCE. CRAMPS AND ALL KINDS OF PAINS. THIS KINDA MAKES MY RELATIONSHIP DIFFICULT WITH THE KIDS. BUT HEY, THERE'S ALWAYS WAYS TO EASE THE PAIN...)

The last story of 'The Journey' seemed to be able to creatively bring many of the elements together. It had elements of personifying the Period, and taking us through the journey of a girl who got her first period. The myths and myth busting could easily become part of this journey. The narrator from the first scene too could be easily introduced to this story.

And so it was decided. This would be our story. The story of a girl... scratch that... the story of every girl, when that special "friend" enters their life. This would be the tale of a young girl, in search of answers for her curious predicament of her first period. Why was everyone else around her over reacting, and why were her ovaries acting up? Who has the answers? What is the answer?

The audience would see if she finally found out, in our play: Ovaryacting!



Sticky Note Activity

FINDING STORIES

There are many different ways to create stories. Let's try out a few.

Creating your own images is a great way to start a story too. After all, a play is a series of images on stage. With your friends, or alone, try to see if you can create an image related to your theme using your body and surrounding.

Make sure to always give your little stories a beginning, middle, an end, and of course a key event/incident!

Try to find some pictures related to the theme of your choice. Study the picture, and see if you can find a story in it. Take turns narrating a story through the same picture with your friends. Look at how many stories you can come up with.

Objects can tell stories too. When creating Ovaryacting! we used the pad as an object to create stories. Pick your own prop. Pass it around and see if everyone can come up with their own story relating themselves to the object.

MEET THE CHARACTERS

World of the Characters



So far, we had the skeleton of a story. We also had a few characters that we had pinned down to make appearances in this story, such as the period and the girl. A story and characters, however, were clearly not enough to develop this story further and give it life onstage. Simply put, our characters needed a place to live, work, journey, discover or simply play! Think back to every one of your favorite books, cartoons, movies or TV shows. They all involve building a world, even if it looks a lot like our own.

The world we had to build was close to the world we lived in. This was the everyday world that every little girl would navigate through; it was her world. It would have a child's everyday pit stops and people: home and family; school, friends and teachers; larger society and everyday people were the places and people that would inhabit this world. Yet, for dramatic effect some facets of this everyday life would have to be exaggerated. In fact the world of the play, just like our everyday world, needed to abide by some rules. Some of the rules laid out in the world for it to make more sense were:

- **Most people in this world would be ashamed, and reluctant to address periods; and**
- **No one in this world (except the little girl) would be able to see the Period.**

These rules were important for some plot points and to create the drama in the story. In many ways, the world we built for our story became a character in itself: it had its own look, feel, and sound. The world we built, however, was not the central character of our story. While it may have taken centre stage at times, we had to ask ourselves whether each highlight helped to move the story along. The world was laid out to develop the characters.

Sticky Note Activity

WHAT IN THE WORLD?

Think about the world you want to create for your story. Is it real? This would mean more research. Is it a fictional world? If so you get to create your own world!

Draw a map for your world. What are some important locations in your world? Why are they important to the story?

Let's give your characters a place to live and play!

Read about other authors' worlds. Pick your favourite world and try to draw out what the world is like. Does the world have special locations/ rules/ people?

Outline your world's background. What kind of technology does your world have? What is the government like - or is there one? What is the culture like? Do its inhabitants have their own fashion?

Character Arc

We now had a basic story structure, and a world that the story took place in. It was time to start fleshing out the characters. The characters we create and develop for the story of Ovaryacting! also had to have their own individual storyline, or **character arc** within the story. Well, how did we find our characters, and how did we find their arcs? We brought it down to a simple recipe:

- The character exists within the world we created
- They want/need something
- There is an obstacle that gets in the way of what they want
- They either succeed or fail in getting what they want, but they learn something along the way.

It was important that all the characters, from the main character, to the smallest character in the play should have all these four ingredients. Maybe the things they all want or need are different, and not equally important, but to make them feel well rounded they still need a journey like this.

While devising a story, the girls and I had already come to the conclusion that the journey for our main character would be from confusion to realization about her period. **Perhaps this same arc, or journey could help in the development of other characters in her world too?** There could be many different characters, with many different journeys in relation to periods, such as: shame to understanding; disregard to empathy; or being oblivious to becoming more aware.

With an overarching journey – or a character arc – for all our characters in mind, the task became easier.

Yet, our own journey of character development had only just begun. So it began, our journey of **finding, embodying, and creating characters and their relationships**. The **protagonist**, or the main character, in our story would meet different characters at the different pit stops of her journey. These pit stops included her home, school, a grocery shop, and society. In each pit stop she would meet all kinds of characters. But who better to tell you about these characters, than the actors who played them?

MEET THE CAST

So in this next section, we will take a closer look at a few key characters in Ovaryacting! Who were they? What were they like? How were they created? How did the actors play these roles?

Let's find out...

PERIOD

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

Hi, I'm Keila and I played the part of... wait for it... the PERIOD!

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

So, my character was originally inspired by a few exercises that Piumi did with us. One of the exercises was writing an open letter. We could write this letter as addressing our period to others; or as the period addressing others. Also, when auditioning we were given the opportunity to interpret the character in our own ways. The Period I play is rather playful and childish. It is oblivious to the pain it is causing the girl, Sasha. I also don't talk in the play. We did have some girls who auditioned for the Period who were constantly conversing with Sasha. Some more aggressively than others. We also incorporated our cast members' experiences with their own periods. Taking inspirations from all these types of Periods, we finally created our version of the Period.



● How did you find your character?

At first, getting into character was quite difficult as I couldn't use any words to portray my emotions. So, I had to learn to exaggerate my bodily movements and facial expressions. I had to learn how to walk with a sporadic excitement. Tasha, who played Sasha, and I also had to learn how to embody each other's characters as there were some scenes where we mirror each other and become one. This proved to be difficult as Tahsha and I are completely different in the way we act and hold ourselves. So every day at rehearsals we had to spend some time working by ourselves, and warming up together as a pair before rehearsals. We would do mirroring and ball passing exercises together to ensure we were in sync at every rehearsal. In the end, even during school hours we ended up mirroring each other!

Playing a Period also had another side, because I didn't know what kind of reaction I would get. Piumi and everyone else in the cast helped me build my confidence to play this role. Of course, playing a non-human character, especially one we all know so well, was challenging. I couldn't walk or talk as a human per se. So I got a lot of help from some members in the cast who gave me feedback and helped me get further in the character. Eventually I was happy with the way I was able to portray the Period, the 'new friend', who appeared out of nowhere to finally build a healthy relationship with Sasha.

SASHA

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

Hi! I'm Tahsha and I played Sasha, the girl who got her period, in the play.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

My role was inspired by all the stories of the girls in our cast. In fact, it was inspired by every girl who ever got her periods. At the early stages of creating the play, I was a bit skeptical because I was under the impression that this isn't a topic that needs to be spoken about. I even wondered who would want to hear about a bunch of girls trying to tell you about how they feel, right? Little did I know that my character would not only educate audiences about what girls go through during puberty, but that she would also educate me and the entire cast as well.

- **How did you find your character?**

Playing Sasha wasn't like acting any other character. She didn't have many lines, but she had to work with her 'Period' from the moment she enters her life. There was a lot of physical acting and synchronization involved with my co-actor Keilah. We did many exercises to help us with this.

I think this play doesn't really have a 'main' character, although I played a big role. This was more of an ensemble play, and I felt like each character played a huge role. I feel like with my character I wanted to try and show people how ridiculous certain situations they put us in are, by making them laugh at themselves. My character wanted to help the world realize that menstruation wasn't something we girls need to be ashamed or embarrassed about. All we need is some support and understanding.



AMMA

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

My name is Khadeeja, and I played Sasha's mother.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

We created this mother after all our interviews, and our experiences with our own mothers when it comes to periods. In fact, even my mother inspired my character. Although we are a household of three girls in the family, my mother is still secretive with periods.

- **How did you find your character?**

I was a mother of three kids in the play: Sasha, her malli and nangi. I wasn't a very traditional mother. I didn't really agree with all the traditions that my own mother and aunts had believed in. I was more of the opinion that even though these traditions were followed for generations, there was no reason for us to follow them. I had to control everyone in the house, include outsiders who suddenly wanted to get involved in Sasha's world. My character was mainly caring, controlling and always busy.



MALLA



- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

I'm Amandi and I was the Malla, or the little brother.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

Well we actually interviewed our dads, brothers and cousins about periods. Most of them were surprised or startled. I even interviewed a shopkeeper man who shooed me away. I think Malla, like the father in the story, Sarath, was based on a lot of men who had no clue about periods.

- **How did you find your character?**

Well, malla is the little brother, and the baby in the family. He's pretty oblivious and clueless half the time about what's going on with his sister. He's based on a hyper-active little brother. A typical mischievous one who always panics. Malla is also very dependent on his mother to teach him and tell him about the things going on around him. At the end Malla is taught everything he has to know about periods, and how he should treat his akki when she has her periods.

I think I was chosen for this role because: a) I was hyper active already, and b) probably my hair! To BECOME my character I had to be more fluid, and a bit like a meerkat, always ready to turn my head at the sound of an event.

ACHCHI

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

Hello hello, I'm Ambisha and I play Achchi, the little girl's grandmother.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

- My character was inspired by my grandmother to a certain extent. She reacted almost the same way Sasha's grandmother did, when I got my first period. Basically, she overreacted.

- **How did you find your character?**

My character, although a 'mod' grandma who wore shorts, was still a stereotypical, traditional, olden-day grandmother. I was a typical Achchi, who couldn't really hear too well; needed assistance to get to places; and absolutely loved more attention from my family members. Building my character was very interesting and rather challenging because the grandmother wasn't just a person, but she was a metaphor for all the myths and 'old-wives' tales' about periods. I also had to work on my physicality, because I had to play a feeble, but eccentric old woman. I think even at the end, Achchi changes very little. She hasn't shed her opinions, but, at least, she's willing to let her daughter approach the subject of periods with her own daughter, in her own way.



THE 'AKKA'

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

I'm Lauren, and I play the role of The 'Akka' (Big Sister).

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

The idea behind my character was how after we get our periods we are called 'big girls'. The Akka (Big Sister) was a play on this idea. In schools, whenever someone became a 'big girl', they became the source of information for all other girls in class about the experience of having periods. The Akka and her entourage of Akka assistants were these 'big girls'.

As for The 'Akka', she was less based on anyone I knew in real life and more on comedic takes on the popular girl, or mafia boss. Kind of like Gretchen Weiners and Regina George from Mean Girls all rolled into one!



● How did you find your character?

The 'Akka' is supposed to be this intimidating, mysterious, seemingly all-knowing character. In reality she is absolutely clueless! She seeks a lot of validation from her Akka troupe, and without them, she wouldn't be much of anything at all.

I loved this character, but sometimes struggled to nail small details about her: how she treated the other 'akkas'; the one-off words she did, or didn't, know. Where this was most obvious was the delivery of her longest line, which was supposed to be 'the explanation', which was tweaked repeatedly, till the day the play was staged.

I had a lot of fond memories creating this character, and tried to make her my own. I even gave her a name! Arachilage Susan Bandaranaiyake, aka The 'Akka', was a strange yet strong character that I sometimes even miss.

ENSEMBLE ROLES

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

My name is Zuleika and I played an ensemble role. This means I played multiple roles, switching between my roles during scenes. In the family scene, I was part of a group of superstitious aunties. In the shop, I became an advert girl. And I finally became a member of society.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

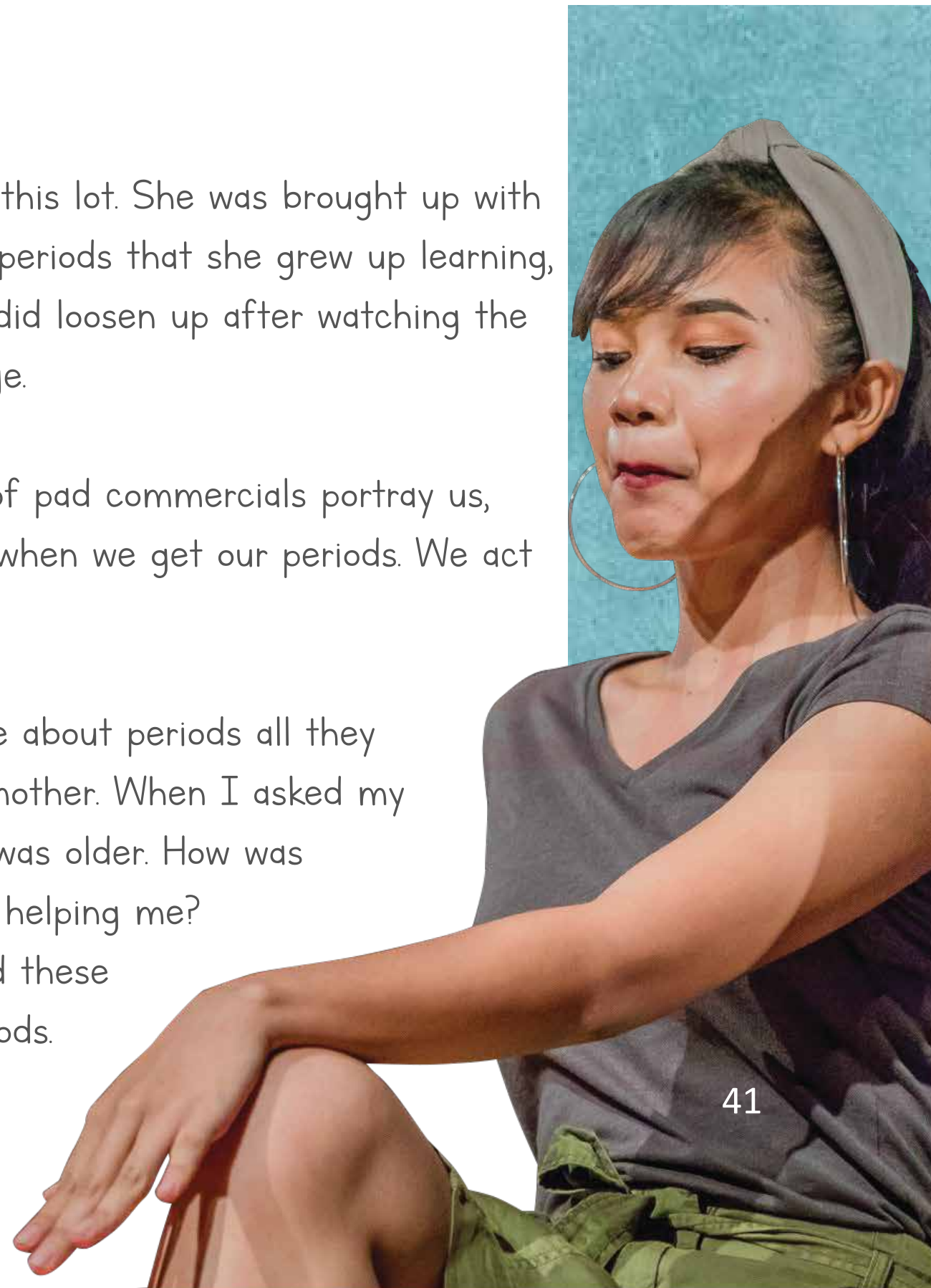
I think for most of the ensemble roles, what became the inspiration was outside society: The way they saw and treated a menstruating young girl.

- **How did you find your character?**

Superstitious Aunty: My own mom was surprisingly in this lot. She was brought up with these kinds of ideas. There were old Lankan tales on periods that she grew up learning, that she then passed on to me. Needless to say, she did loosen up after watching the play and realizing she was laughing at herself on stage.

Advert Girl: Need more be said? So, unlike how a lot of pad commercials portray us, girls don't really prance around and sigh contentedly when we get our periods. We act the same. Perhaps just more uncomfortable.

Society: Well, when I was younger and I asked people about periods all they did was shush me. Or they would tell me to ask my mother. When I asked my mother, all she said was I would understand when I was older. How was I supposed to understand miraculously if no one was helping me? I was pretty much in Sasha's position. We caricatured these roles in society. If no one else will tell you about periods. We will, through our story.



NARRATOR

- **Who are you, and who was your character?**

I'm Acsah, and although you didn't see me onstage, you probably heard my voice through the way. Yes! I'm the narrator.

- **What was the inspiration for your character?**

In the aspect of how I built the character and who inspired it... Well, the women around me in my home. All the women who have made me who I am, and helped me deal with periods and overcome its stigma. My mother, and grandmother and their roles as parents and women in my life. My mother and aunt read a lot of fairytales to me as a child. Even the men in my life, family and friends who have made me feel unashamed during my periods, but instead made me feel comfortable and confident in my body.

- **How did you find your character?**

The narrator has a clear stance from the beginning. She stands for period talk. My character was supposed to be in the third person that is in a way telling this story for a child. I spent a lot of time working on the voice of the narrator as that's all you hear. My character's tone of voice, emphasis, and cues became important to get right. So presumably I could even be the voice of a mother myself narrating this process to a child through Sasha's story. In the play, the narrator is a mature character with the understanding that children should be told about their periods instead of hiding the real process behind a show of rituals; cultural expectations; and stigma. So, I saw myself also as a motherly narrator who would ideally be open with their children, explaining to them that periods are a natural biological process and the reason we are all here.



Characterization...

Now that you've heard from the actors themselves, you've probably realized that creating a character is no easy task. The actors all tried to give their characters a backstory, or a history. They also tried to give their characters a journey so that they would not be two-dimensional. Simply put, they did not want their characters to be flat and simply feel like stereotypes or caricatures. By adding more complexities, such as: names, backgrounds, opinions, and their own personal stories within, the characters were brought to life, and made to feel more real and relatable. This becomes very important when you create a play. The characters in the story are who bring the story to life. They must feel real, and we must feel like we could know them, perhaps even be them.

As our ensemble also explained, finding ways to physicalize the character was also important. It was important to walk, talk, and carry themselves throughout the play in character to make them even more believable. The relationships each character had with each other too, was something that needed working on. Continually placing our characters in situations of smaller every day conflicts lets us do the important job of showing and not telling. It also lets us map the journey of our stories more, and also stretch time out before our characters come head to head with their main needs and the struggle to fulfill them.

Sticky Note Activity

NEW WORLD NEW YOU

Come up with a character who would journey through your world. Give your character a name and background story.

Hot-Seating is a fun way to further explore your character. Take some time by yourself to create some background for your character. Get your friends to ask you some questions about your character. You must now answer these questions in-character, as your character. Try not to break out of character. See if you discover, or create new, interesting things about your character.

Give your character a voice. Is your character loud/ quiet, fast-spoken/ slow? What can their voice say about their character?

Reactions and relationships. Try to walk around in your character and see how your character would respond to someone else in the room. The way your character reacts to other characters in the story can say a lot about them.

Get up on your feet, and try to experiment how this character would walk. Is your character young/ old, obese/ slim, lazy/ active? How can you show your character's nature simply through the way he walks?

TAKE ME FOR EXAMPLE, I'M SPORADIC, CHEEKY, AND A LITTLE BIT OF A TROUBLE MAKER. BUT THE LITTLE GIRL IS STILL IMPORTANT TO ME AND I'M ALMOST A PART OF HER, WHICH IS WHY YOU'LL ALWAYS SEE ME TAILING HER. THINGS THAT I DO CREATE REACTIONS IN HER. I MAY BE A LOT TO HANDLE, BUT MY JOB REQUIREMENTS ARE BIOLOGICAL. DON'T BLAME ME.





ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

We now had a strong center to our production. A lot of very important questions had been answered and things had started getting clearer in our process. The play we were creating had a definite shape.

- Ovaryacting! was a play that was narrated.
- It highlights a journey a young girl takes in order to understand an important rite of passage.
- The young girl, confused by what is happening to her body, runs away from home, in search of answers and then returns back home, where her mother explains to her all she needs to know about menstruation.

There it was, the story. The characters too had been fleshed out by this time. A script was finally drafted and rehearsing was well under way.

So we had the content and the structure of the play in place. Now we needed to complement it with another really important level... how did the play look and feel?

Design

Any good play needs unity of design. Design has a huge impact on an audience's experience of a play as it's the first thing they see when the stage is revealed to them. The design provides essential information such as setting, time and the type of production you're seeing. The production design usually covers the areas of:

- set and props
- lighting
- sound
- costume
- publicity



To make our play complete, we had to begin conceptualizing our production design. What were some of the things we already knew about the play that would help us with design decisions?

This was a story for both children and adults; a playful, comedic, story that tried to tackle a very serious and real issue.

Keeping this in mind, I ventured into the design aspect of the play, with the help of some friends.

Let me tell you what we finally came up with...

Production Design

Production design is the visual concept of the play. The mood of a theatre production can shift throughout the play. In *Ovaryacting!* for example, the moods shift from curiosity, to playfulness, to a sense of adventure and finally, realization. It's the designer's job to help support the creation of moods within a play. Many elements of theatre design can contribute to this. The best way to do this is usually through lighting. However, the set designer must design a set that takes and reflects light so that the lighting designer can use it to project the mood to the audience. Design also involves any kinds of visual metaphors about the play. These can be played out with props and costumes. The costume designer too is key to create mood. Costume designers create clothes that the characters would wear according to their situations. As stage design is an art, good visual composition is a necessity. This includes how large and small items are arranged on stage.

Composition can create a feeling of order or unease, stability or chaos. In addition, composition can be changed just by how the lighting designer lights and reveals the set. The coming sections will take a closer look at how all these elements combined to create the production design of our play.

Set Design

The set design for this story was quite minimalistic. We did not use very elaborate and large sets that portrayed all the changes of scenery. Instead, we used a few platforms, boxes, and stools that were shifted around to show the changes of setting.



Why did we take this decision?

The performance shifts to various settings as the girl moves out from the closeted pressure of her home out into the world and then back to her home which by this time has to feel like a place of security.

And so the set had to be easily convertible.

The play begins from the center of the stage – where a platform is placed. This is where the crisis starts and this is where the character returns to, in search of answers, right at the end. In this manner, the set allows for a cyclical journey of discovery from this center point – out into the world and then back to the center. Around the central platform on stage, boxes and benches are placed and brought in and out as needed by the cast.

Costumes

The costumes of the play were, in fact, the cast's very own everyday clothing! In the play, everyone, except the Period, had no 'costumes'. They were styled in the way any little girl would be, in a casual setting. The Period stood out in a red t-shirt, a pair of dungarees, with a red headscarf.



Why did we take this decision?

This was a play that set out to dispel the myths, the lies, the fabrications and the falsities around menstruation. It was also a play in which those who experience menstruation – young girls – take control of the issue into their own hands, effectively taking the control and authority away from adults. As such, there is a breaking down of myths and lies and a moving closer to the truth and an acceptance of the reality. In keeping with this, we decided with the actors that this play will not have costumes – the girls would perform in their regular clothes – so that the audience can see them for who they are. Just as the children wish society to see menstruation for what it is.

The only character who was costumed – was the character that was not a human being – the character of The Period. The Period was dressed in a red tee-shirt, a pair of white dungarees, red hairband and had a red ribbon in her hand.

***BLOOD. YES, THAT WAS THE BLOOD. NO
BIGGIE, WE'VE ALL SEEN A LITTLE BIT OF
BLOOD IN OUR LIVES NOW, HAVEN'T WE?***



Props

The play had many small character-specific prop items that appeared in scenes, such as: the little girl ensemble's activity props; mother's oven mitt; grandma's walking stick and spectacles; father's newspaper; Period's red ribbon; the scroll of rules; aunty's broom; the customer's shopping bag; the shopkeeper's newspapers; and the students' health science books. Some of these props, however, were highlighted more than others.

What were these props, and why were they important?

Props are used in this play in quite a significant way. Most of the props were also used in a symbolic manner. The first most striking prop is the use of the red ribbon by the character The Period. This red ribbon the actor plays with, is used as a connection between her and the girl who has had her first period. The grandmother's scroll of 'Rules' that Sasha must follow, once she had hit puberty, was also a prop worth noting. This was a long scroll of ridiculous myths and rules that Achchi dictates upon the event of Sasha's first period. This was symbolic of the myths, taboos, and customs that society associated with periods. Another significant prop is the sanitary napkin packet – which is wrapped up in sheets and sheets of newspaper by the shopkeeper, until it is enormous – symbolizing society's need to hide evidence of menstruation, but ironically magnifying it in this very effort.



Light design

There is a strong focus of lights in the middle of the stage – on the platform where the story begins and also where all the characters gather together to end the story. In between – as the girl ventures out – the lights expand and capture the action in different parts of the stage.

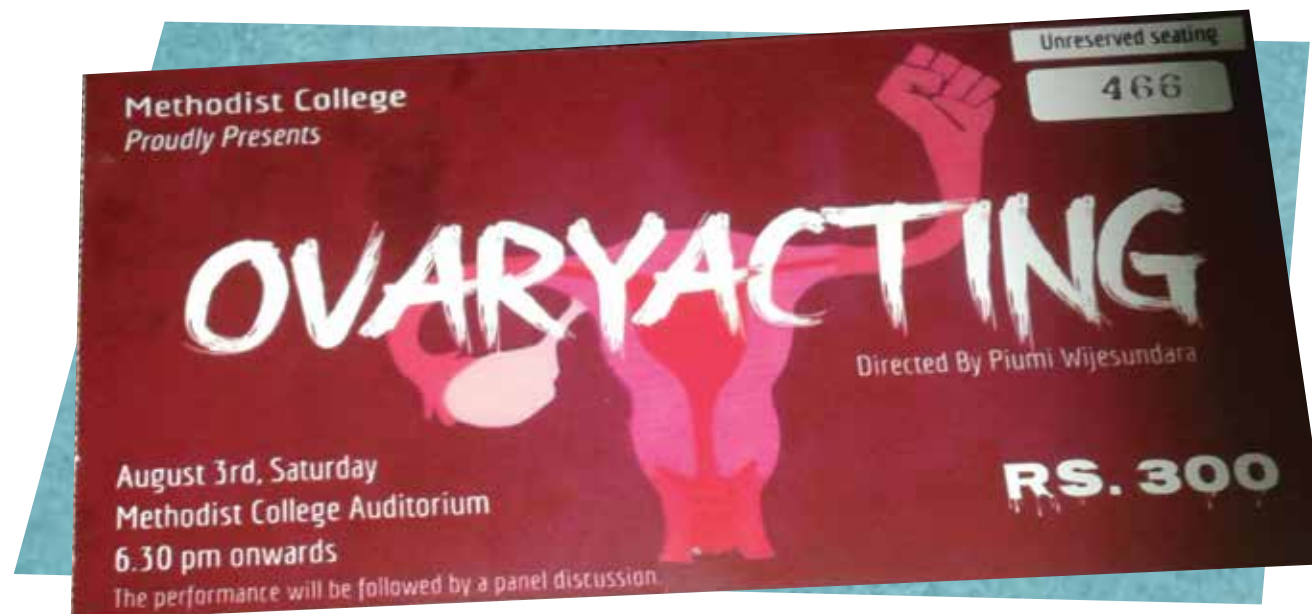


Why was the lighting designed this way?

The lighting enhances the idea that this is a coming of age story – which begins with a crisis in the middle and then returns to it. Sasha gets her first period, and escapes from home in search of answers. At the end of the play, we realize the answers become available to her in the comfort of her own home surrounded by the ones she loves. The lighting was therefore designed to highlight this journey.

Publicity Design

All publicity material was created by the girls themselves and included their artwork, and writing. The publicity material included: print posters; posters for social media circulation; and an informative souvenir that was made available at the show. The color scheme for the publicity material was hues of red. The design included both digital artwork as well as rehearsal photographs of the play.



Why did we take these decisions?

While all else seemed to be complete, it was also important how we designed the publicity campaign for the play. I know what you're all thinking, 'we need to campaign?' In fact, we do. It's important to know our audience from the beginning, and figure out how we can convince them to come see our play. After all, we do want to get the message across to the right people, don't we? This was a play about children, told by children who wanted to be heard by both children and adults in society. So, it was important that the publicity design, that is; the posters, invitations, programs, and tickets all carried the girls' voices. This is why the girls took over the entire publicity campaign. They did the artwork and wording for the publicity designs in a way that would make audiences curious enough to come watch what they were up to. The artwork and publicity design through its colors and content also highlighted the fact that the girls wanted to be quite vocal about periods.

Sound

The live voice-over narrative ran throughout the play. The scenes, choreography and transitions in the play were cued to the instrumental tracks of the musician Enya. One scene that was purely a choreographed sequence with no words, had Enya's song 'Wild Child'.

Why did we choose these sound tracks?

The most important sound in the play was the voice-over narrative of the narrator who carried the story forwards. We decided to go for a voice over narrative rather than a recording, as it would allow room in the play for any necessary improvisations. The actors too took many cues from the voiceover narration. Therefore by doing it live both the actors and the narrator were able to watch for each other. This was important to maintain the pacing and rhythm of the play.

In some scenes sound effects were used to establish the location, such as the ringing of the bell in school. However, given that the play included a lot of playful choreography that set the mise-en-scene I decided to look for music that would go with the play's tone. This is when I decided to use some instrumental versions of the music of popular artist, Enya. Her music had a fairytale-like, childish, choral, upbeat mood that would go well with our play. All the scenes that had the narrator's voice-over had instrumental tracks only. In the choreographed scene that had little narration and no words, I decided to use the song 'Wild Child'. This was a song, in which the lyrics too helped tell the story of the scene. Music is a great partner for creating mood in a play.

The production design was the gold dust that allowed our audience to escape into the world of our play: Sasha's world. The style and look of the play through the costume, sets, props, lighting and music choices is what would enable our audience to dive into an alternate reality.

Our production design was complete. We hoped it would keep the audience visually bound.

Sticky Note Activity

DESIGN DEPARTMENT

Pick some images, colors and music that you think would work well for your story and create your own design library.

Sketch out your characters and see if you can design some clothes that they would wear. How can their costumes reveal their characters? How can the colors reflect their characters? If you need some more references look at a color wheel that shows emotions (e.g.: blue for sadness/ calm, red for anger etc.).

Find some props, and objects that could be used to tell your story. How would you use these props? Would they be literal/ metaphoric?

Sound effects and music. Search for sound effects that can establish time/ location/ mood/ atmosphere. Try out creating your own sound effects with instruments, or simply using your voice. Think about what kind of songs, or music could help tell your story, or set the story's mood.

Draw a poster for your story. What font would you use for the title? What would be the best image to use to advertise your play? Why? What important and relevant information should be on the poster?

BEYOND THE PLAY

And so, what started as an idea blew up into a fully-fledged production that we staged to an audience.

The end, right?

Actually, it turned out this wasn't the end. It was actually, just the beginning! After our first staging at the Semi-finals of the Royal Interschool Drama Competitions, Ovaryacting! made it to the finals. At the finals, much to our excitement, it won 'Best Play'. While we initially had our doubts if people would want to listen to a bunch of girls talk about their periods, this was testament to the fact that periods were indeed a subject worth talking about. Not only did our audiences listen to what we had to say through our play, they took it a step further and kept the period talk going! There were also newspaper, and social media reviews that flowed in telling the girls that the play had contributed to raising menstrual awareness...



“If a play could be both thought provoking and entertaining, Ovaryacting was the best example of this. One moment the audience is roaring with laughter. The next moment your conscience speaks to you and reminds you that the laughter is at your own expense. They tackled the taboos of female menstruation in our society.”

Priyanwada Perera, Ceylon Today

“AN EMPOWERING AND EDUCATIONAL DEPICTION ABOUT MENSTRUATION...”

ARTRA Magazine

There were also requests to restage the show to a wider audience. And so we all decided we would have a public show, to an even bigger audience. This time, we also decided to invite some professionals to open up a discussion about menstrual awareness with our audience after the show.

Following the public show, and the panel discussion in which many audience members participated, we realized that our attempt had opened up a dialogue. The show had ended, but a conversation had started outside of it where teachers, parents, students all alike were discussing and learning more about periods. This is what some of our audience members had to say:

“I remember coming across something like a box wrapped up in newspaper a few years ago and I had some questions that even my mom was hesitant to answer. I finally got the answers here.”

Joshua Perera

“Loved that there were boys my son’s age in the audience and this stopped being a taboo theme. Talk about periods openly. Only you can make this topic safe and natural. Empower your daughters and sons. My son asked after reading the leaflet, ‘Amma do you also get periods?’ I said ‘we all bleed!’”

Suramya Perera

Even among their classmates in school, the girls noticed a difference in their treatment of periods. Periods were no longer a taboo word around each other. Had they perhaps even managed to influence the culture of their school?

“In class if we ever got periods we wouldn’t even ask for a pad out loud. We would signal with our hands and ask for ‘things’. But now in class some of our friends simply yell out and ask if there’s a pad they could borrow. They also don’t try to hide them in their pockets when they rush from across hallways to the toilets.”

Sahla Anees (Cast member)

We realized that our play had managed to make an impact on the cast, audience, school and society...

FASCINATING FACTS

In the beginning, we were all just a bunch of girls who wanted to tell our story of dealing with periods. What we weren't ready for, was how much we ourselves learnt in the process of creating our story. We were able to enlighten ourselves and our audiences about some fascinating facts about periods through our show, and the after-show discussion that followed.

And since you've come along on this journey with us by reading this, I thought I'd share some of these facts with you!



Why Girls Get Periods

Before we get to anything else, let's get to the bottom of this simple mystery. This might be a lesson that most teachers have squirmed to teach you, but really, it's quite simple! A period happens because of changes in hormones in the body. Hormones give messages to the body. These hormones cause the lining of the uterus (or womb) to build up. This gets the uterus ready for an egg (from the mom) and sperm (from the dad) to attach and grow into a baby. If the woman does not get pregnant, the lining breaks down and bleeds. This same process happens every month. That is why most girls and women get their periods around once a month. And hey, you know what else...? Most of the girls and women around you go through periods. Super Girl, periods. The Queen of England, periods (although, she has to be menopausal now- which means it's come to a stop). Women in space, periods. Women in a jungle, periods. Women doing science experiments, women writing prize-winning literature, your teacher, your mom, your aunt—they're all having periods. Being a part of that story makes you a female human being—and that's pretty cool.

Do Girls on their Periods Bring Bad Luck?

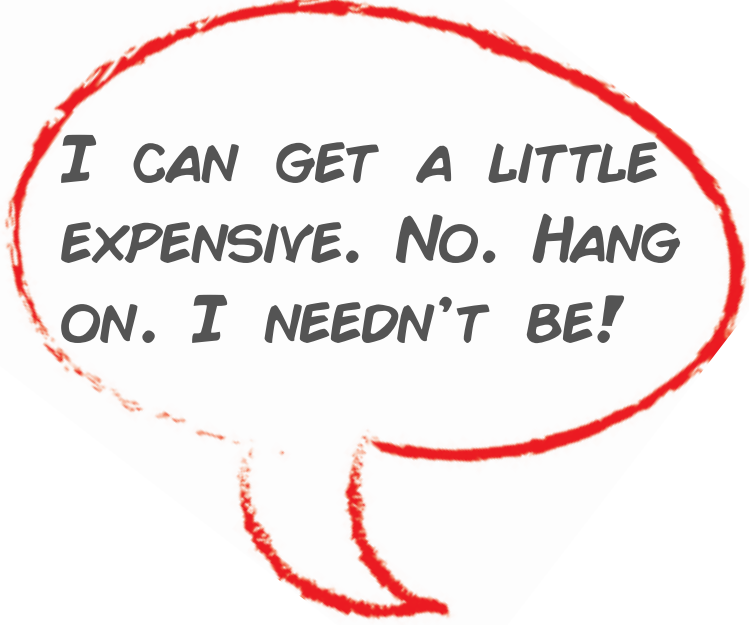
Oh HELL no. Actually, it would be bad luck if girls never got their periods... because no periods = no babies. No babies = End of human civilization as we know it. Well, that's no fun. Many cultures in the world sadly treat menstruation as a source of shame. They consider girls on their periods as bad luck, and some remote villages in India even claim atrocious things like 'girls on their periods will rot pickles and poison your food'. Not only do these kinds of myths make girls feel ashamed and embarrassed, some girls even forgo education because of this.

These myths are, by no means true and therefore must be dispelled. Periods are simply a part of growing up for a girl. Even if they've never had a period, even boys have done almost everything

else on the puberty list—gotten taller, put on weight, had pimples, grown new hair, had B.O., experienced being viewed differently or being embarrassed by the changes. So it's important that all of us; girls, boys, men and women, talk about periods in a way that normalizes it.

Period Poverty

Yes, we've all heard of poverty. But have you ever heard of 'period poverty'?



**I CAN GET A LITTLE
EXPENSIVE. NO. HANG
ON. I NEEDN'T BE!**

When Sasha approaches the shop keeper, he mentions the alarming price of a packet of sanitary napkins. He also mentions something called a 'luxury tax'. Did you know that some countries actually tax sanitary napkins, which are an essential item? Sanitary napkins are an essential hygiene item for girls and women, and yet some people can barely afford them. Simply put, period poverty is when girls and women cannot access such needs because they cannot afford to.

Periods are a natural process and a part of nearly every girl's life. But without access to toilets or sanitary products at school, many girls are missing out on their education—and putting their lives on hold, as they have little choice but to stay at home. Poverty and stigma has a huge impact on girls' education. There is a direct relationship between period poverty and girls' education. This is why we need to take this matter a lot more seriously, and help out in any way we can.

There's More Than One Product to Help!

There are a few ways to deal with period blood. You may need to experiment a bit to find which works best for you. Some girls use only one method and others switch between different methods. Most girls use a **pad** when they first get their period. Pads are made of cotton and come in lots of different sizes and shapes. They have sticky strips that attach to the underwear.

Many girls prefer to use **tampons** instead of pads, especially when playing sports or swimming. A tampon is a cotton plug that a girl puts into her vagina. Most tampons come with an applicator that guides the tampon into place. The tampon absorbs the blood. Don't leave a tampon in for more than 8 hours because this can increase your risk of a serious infection called toxic shock syndrome.

Some girls prefer a **menstrual cup**. To use a menstrual cup, a girl inserts it into her vagina. The cup holds the blood until she empties it.

It's always important to make sure you have guidance and advice on how to use whichever product you use. Also, don't forget hygienic disposal!

Period on the Periods

Do periods last forever? Well, we've got some good news... they don't. When girls grow older, and are around age 45-55 (yes, I know it's a long way away for you), they stop having periods (this is called menopause). Women also won't have a period while they are pregnant.

An Academy Award-Winning Period Film?

Did you know that in 2019, a film about periods won an Oscar, at the Academy Awards? *Period. End of Sentence* directed by Reyka Zehbatchi won the Oscar for best documentary short. *Period. End of Sentence*, is a 26-minute film that profiles women in an Indian village who band together to manufacture affordable menstrual pads with the help of India's '**Padman**'; Arunachalam Muruganantham, a social entrepreneur who created the machine for making affordable sanitary towels.

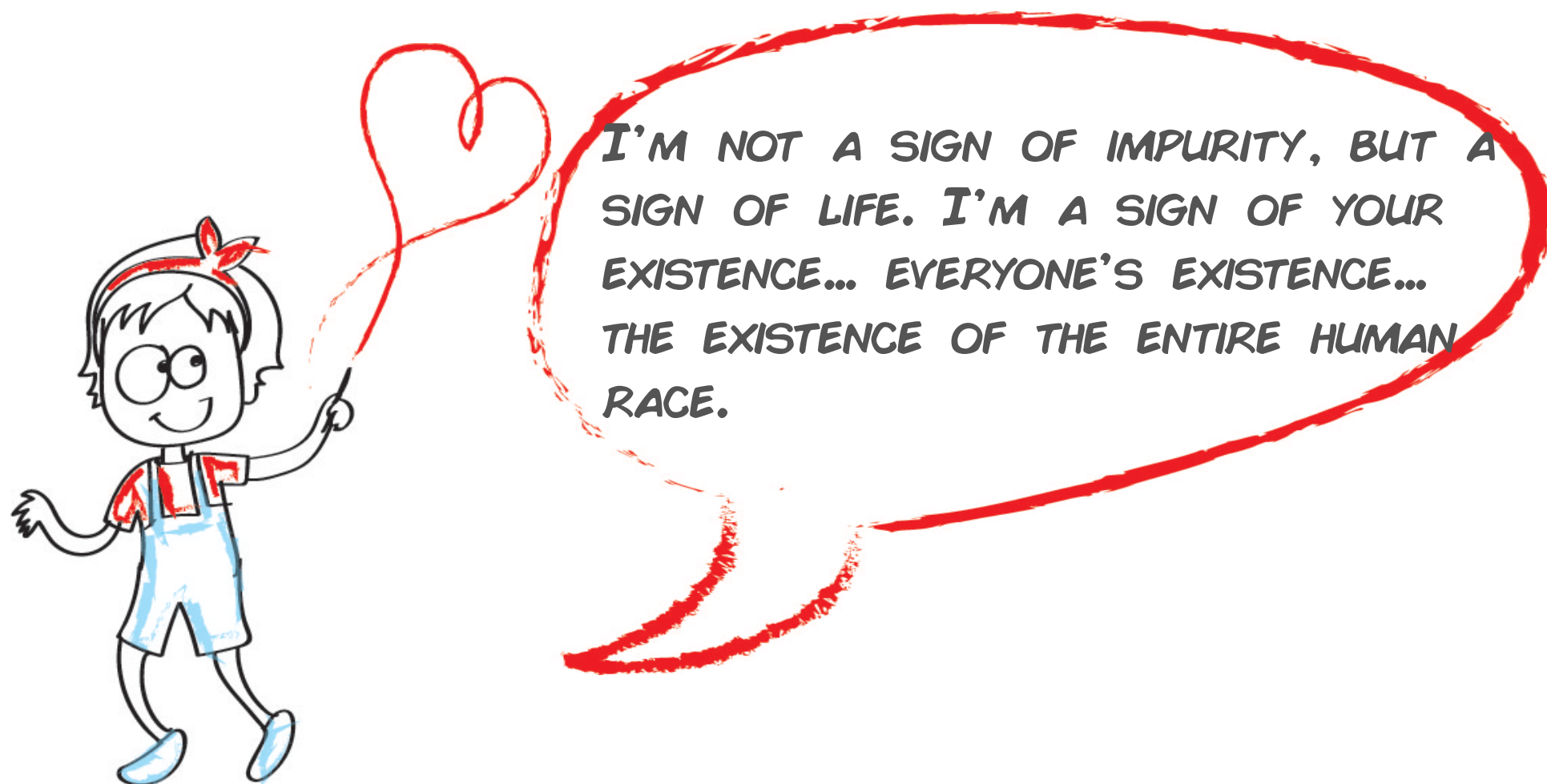
While accepting her award, the director of the film famously said "I'm not crying because I'm on my period, or anything. I can't believe a film about menstruation just won an Oscar!" **WELL, I CAN. I'M FABULOUS.** This film was, in fact, one of the first things we watched during our research phase when creating *Ovaryacting!* It also motivated everyone - if they could do it, why couldn't we?

What's Your Role?

This may feel like an information overload, and it might feel strange to start the conversation. But periods are a natural, healthy part of a girl's life. They shouldn't get in the way of exercising, having fun, and enjoying life. If you have questions about periods, ask your doctor, a parent, health teacher, school nurse, or older sister.

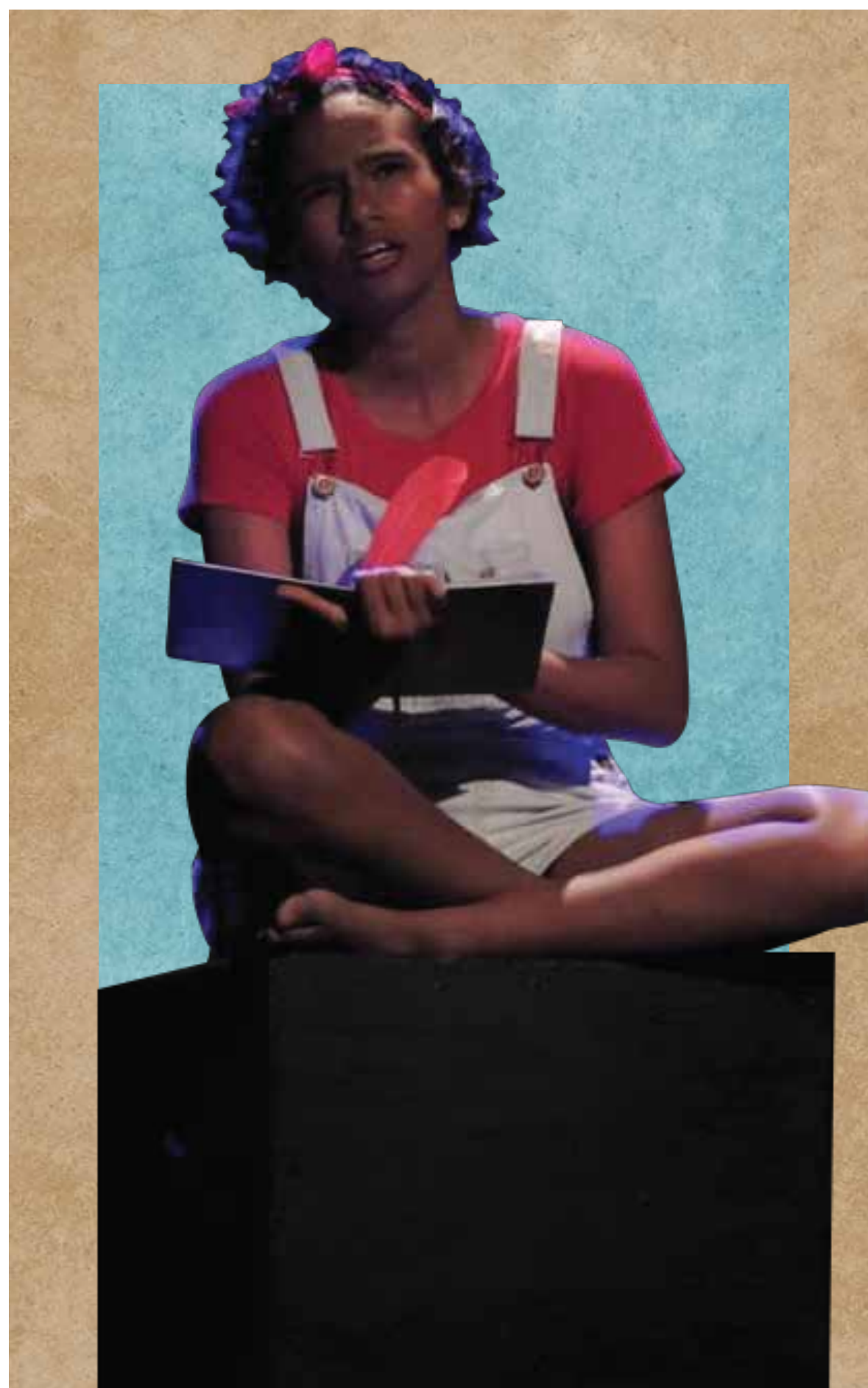
Everyone should be a part of normalizing period conversations (yes, boys, this means you too!). It could start simply by looking out for a friend or family member on their periods. You could ask them if there's anything you could do for them. It could even be learning a little bit more about periods yourselves, so that you can educate your friends and family.

Or... hey, maybe you could write your own play about it!



LETTERS FROM THE PERIOD

Now that our journey of learning about the creation of Ovaryacting! is nearing its end... I thought I'd pass the baton on to our friend The Period (who has already made a few appearances). Remember how the girls wrote some open letters at one point in their devising sessions? Well, I will share with you some of these letters: from The Period, to you...



Dear girl,

I know I might be scary at first, but trust me I'm here for your own good. You're one of the big kids now. Don't panic! It's just blood. When you were younger you fell and scraped your knees. And bled. See, it's just blood! Juuust a different location. I might stain your clothes now and again, so apologies in advance. You can wash it off. No biggie. It's just blood. Yeah I know, my visits won't be fun and rainbows. It'll suck... but we'll learn to get along. Use pads. Use them. Change them. Stay clean. Or we might both get into some uncalled for trouble. Don't be scared of me. I'm nothing to be ashamed of. I'm only trying to help. I'm normal. You're normal. You and I both have the future of mankind in our hands. Be brave, and keep kicking ass like you always do, just this time I'll be kicking ass with you.

All my love

Period.

Dear future partner,

You're probably at that age where not only am I eeya, but you also think all girls are eeya. But that's ok. Listen up son. I visit every month and you'll have a lot of work when I come over. But I want you to take care of my girl. I visited her for the first time when she was still a little girl. I tried sparing her the pain, and yet sometimes I couldn't help but annoy her. I became famous among her circle of friends, and whenever I was around they'd all go "aahhh araya awilla" and eye roll in utter disbelief. I have been nice to her, but I've been pretty annoying half the time. Chances are, you'll endure it all one way or the other. But take care of her. Don't shut her out. When she's complaining about me, do try and listen, she has no other way to vent it out. If she has mood swings, be patient she'll come around. After all, we all have mood swings with or without periods right? Buy her chocolates, ideally every month. Spoil her. Love her. And don't hate me either. Take care of her. I trust you putha. After all she was mine before she was yours.

Sincerely,

Period.

Dear Society,

Don't silence me. Don't silence her. Let her be. Let me be. Listen. Be kind. Be patient. Be understanding. Be empathetic. Be understanding. Be loving. Be educated. Be her strength. Be aware. Stay aware. Make aware. Make everyone aware. That I live in her. You all once lived in her. And she? She lives in all of you.

So dear, dear society.

Be kind. Be her friend. Be my friend.

Period.



AND THAT'S HOW WE
WILL ALL LIVE HAPPILY
EVER AFTER. PERIOD.

CREDITS

Thank you for coming with me on this journey and rite of passage. And as we close this chapter, there are a few people who deserve some credit... and that's everyone in our creative process:

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Narrator Acsah Kulasingham

Sasha Tahsha de Silva

Period Keilah D'Rosairo

Janaki (Sasha's Mother) Khadeejah Irishad

Sarath (Sasha's Father) Amanda Siriwardena

Malli (Sasha's Brother) Amandhi Marasinghe

Nangi (Sasha's Sister) Shanoli Ratnayake

Achchi (Sasha's Grandmother) Ambisha Varatharasan

Teacher Laila Suleiman

Classmates Aneeka Razeen
Leanne Melder
Maria Edirisinghe
Prashali Tharmendra
Sayumi Jayasuriya
Yumna Hussein

Classmate, Advert Jogger Dewanga Manchanayake

'The' Akka Lauren Bastians

Akka/ Aunty/ Ensemble Hashendri Wanigasooriya

Akka/ Aunty/Advert Jogger Sahlah Anees

Akka/Aunty/Advert Jogger Zuleika Buhar

Akka Sara Shibly

Mudalali Dhyani Hapuarachchi

Shop Assistant Adele De Silva

Customer Shainsa De Silva

Design team

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Writer Piumi Wijesundara

Choreography Jayampathi Guruge/ Piumi Wijesundara

Costumes Jayampathi Guruge/ Piumi Wijesundara

Set Piumi Wijesundara

Lights Jayampathi Guruge/ Kasun Ukwatte

Production team

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- Light operator Kasun Ukwatte
- Sounds Piumi Wijesundara
- Makeup Amanda and Marissa Van Eyck
- Backstage Crew Nimshee Fernando/ Shaariha Fazeel
- Publicity Sahla Anees/ Acsah Kulasingham/ Keila D'Rosiaro
- Poster Keila D'Rosairo/ Amandhi Marasinghe
- Cast care Amanda Van Eyck
- Photography Pramila Samarakoon
- Videos Pramila Samarakoon
- Production team Piumi Wijesundara/ Amanda Van Eyck/
Kasun Ukwatte/ Jayampathi Guruge/ Acsah
Kulasingham/ Sahla Anees/ Artists of
Stages Theatre Group
- Producer Ms Hiranya Fernando

Panelists

Dr. Sanath Lanerolle (Castle Street Hospital for Women)

Manisha Dissanayake (Founder, Arka Initiative)

Acsah Kulasignham (Methodist College)

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This resource pack was produced as part of the 'Artist Research, Archiving and Documentation Project' of Stages Theatre Group.

Through this project, practicing artists engaged in systematic and critical analysis of their own work, analysing a decade worth of theatre productions and processes of Stages Theatre Group. The decade spanned the immediate ten years after the end of the civil war in Sri Lanka (2009 to 2019).

Sixteen resource packs, such as this one, were created for publication in Sinhala, Tamil and English. Each resource pack, written and researched by artists, examines the surrounding socio-political context within which these productions were created and analyses the creative decisions taken within the process. Supporting video material was also created as part of this initiative. All material produced through this research project can be found at www.stages.lk

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DCS Monologues

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