

Mandala was performed as an in-school workshop at Atlantic High School in Port Orange, Florida, in November of 2012 under the direction of Mickey Griffiths. The play premiered on May 4, 2013, at Elmira College in Elmira, New York, under the direction of Margaret Reed, with the following cast:

KATHERINE: Sarah Adriance

FIONA: Ali Hutchinson

ANNA: Madelaine Whalen

THERESA: J. C. Trichanh

© 2013 by John J. Kelly. Reprinted with permission from the author. All rights reserved. For performance rights, contact John J. Kelly (jkelly@elmira.edu). No changes may be made to the text of the play without the author's prior written permission.

CHARACTERS

KATHERINE: *about 16, a girl.*

THERESA: *about 17, a girl of Asian heritage.*

ANNA: *about 17, a girl of Native American heritage.*

FIONA: *about 17, a girl.*

TIME

The present.

BETTING

A room in the YWCA.

NOTE: A mandala is a Tibetan sand painting, similar to the sand paintings of the Navajo people. The Tibetan work is elaborate, with the exact balance of the work symbolizing balance in existence. The actual mandala called for in the script can be simpler, with large regions within the circumference of the work filled quite simply prior to the performance. A search of the web will provide many examples of both Tibetan mandalas and Navajo sand paintings.

A small room in a local YWCA. A large folding table stands upstage, against the wall. A pizza delivery box with remnants of a pizza sit on the table, as does some soft drinks and cups. In the center of the room stands a cube with a square board on top. An almost finished mandala sits on the board. A number of small children's chairs are available, some surrounding the cube. At curtain rise the girls are working on the mandala.

KATHERINE: *Stops working.* Is this okay? What do you think?

THERESA: It's fine.

ANNA: It looks great. But that's not the point.

KATHERINE: It is to me.

ANNA: It's the sharing, the experience . . .

KATHERINE: They died! The least we can do is get it perfect.

THERESA: *Still working.* And what is "perfect"?

She stops working.

What will make it perfect?

KATHERINE: I don't know. I just know I want it that way.

Crosses to table.

ANNA: *Crossing to her.* I'm sorry. I didn't mean . . .

KATHERINE: Why are you even here? Maura and Sue were our friends. You barely knew them.

ANNA: I knew them.

KATHERINE: Not like we did. Not like us!

ANNA: No.

KATHERINE: So why are doing this?

THERESA: Why shouldn't she?

KATHERINE: What?

THERESA: Why shouldn't she? The mandala is for everyone. It's communal.

ANNA: *After a pause, softly.* It's what we do.

THERESA: Why don't we get back to it?

FIONA: *Entering.* Finally! I tried calling your cell, Terri—yours too, Kath. They just kept going to voice mail. I finally had to call your mom. She told me you were here.

THERESA: We've been here all weekend, working. Ever since . . .

FIONA: Why didn't you call me? Do you know what it's been like?

THERESA: Yes, we do.

She crosses to and hugs FIONA.

KATHERINE: *Joining the hug.* And we did try to call you—several times—but your phone was always busy.

FIONA: I still can't believe it. Three days ago we went to the mall with them. Now, all of a sudden, they're gone.

She notices ANNA.

ANNA: Hi, I'm Anna.

FIONA: Fiona.

KATHERINE: *To Fiona.* Anna's from Riverside. She worked with Maura at Caroline's on weekends.

To ANNA:

Fiona goes to Southport with us.

FIONA: Hi.

To the others.

I had to talk to someone, you know? I tried my mom, but she didn't know what to say, and my dad just wanted to fix everything. To make it better.

THERESA: It's hard on them, too.

FIONA: I guess.

THERESA: Listen, we're sorry. We should have tried to call you again. We meant to, but once we got started, we sort of got involved.

FIONA: *Crossing to the mandala.* So, what is it?

KATHERINE: *As all cross downstage.* It's a mandala.

FIONA: A mandala?

THERESA: A symbol . . . a physical—I don't know, representation—of our thoughts and feelings. It's a way of remembering. Honoring. And it's something to do. We couldn't just sit around and do nothing.

FIONA: *Nods yes, then asks:* Asian?

THERESA: Tibetan. Ancient. Part of Buddhist and Hindu rituals, but it's probably much older. It means "circle" in Sanskrit.

ANNA: It's a part of my culture as well. Native American. We've been using sand paintings since the beginning.

FIONA: Really? How come I've never heard of them?

ANNA: Lots of people know about them. Lots don't.

THERESA: The circle symbolizes wholeness. It's a reminder of our relation to the infinite. The Aztec calendar is thought to come from it, the labyrinth and the Indian medicine wheel as well.

ANNA: The dream-catcher. The Navajo believe it to symbolize the impermanence of life.

KATHERINE: That certainly applies.

FIONA: So . . . can I join you?

THERESA: It wouldn't seem right if you didn't.

All but KATHERINE get back to work.

KATHERINE: Maybe I should leave you to it? You all were friends,

I just . . .

ANNA: You were just a newer friend—a different friend, in a different way. But you care—cared—and you should be a part.

They all work on the mandala.

FIONA: *After a while.* I just can't believe it. Dead. Because of some stupid accident.

KATHERINE: We all knew about it. Maura just wouldn't stop. She'd text anytime, anywhere. At the movies, during meals . . .

ANNA: At work.

KATHERINE: She almost got us killed driving home from the mall last week.

THERESA: And this week it got her—and Sue—killed. On a stupid trip to buy ice cream.

They all stop, unsure what to do next.

FIONA: So . . . what do we do? What are the rules?

THERESA: Just do what you feel.

FIONA: But I don't want to ruin it.

KATHERINE: I know what you mean. It's sort of religious and, well, I was so worried I'd do something wrong.

ANNA: But there is no wrong—or right, for that matter.

THERESA: A mandala can be many things. It can be about life . . . moments . . . feelings even. It symbolizes everything we are thinking or feeling, but without specific symbols. The symbols are ours, as we feel them, as we see them. What seems right to you is right.

FIONA: But there are four of us. Won't our symbols conflict?

THERESA: Everything in life is in the mandala. Don't worry about it.

FIONA: But how can we all do what's right? Right for whom?

ANNA: When it's right you'll know. We'll all know.

FIONA: *Unsure.* Okay.

They all get to work. After a bit:

KATHERINE: I don't know about you, but I'm hungry. Starved, actually.

Crossing to the pizza.

Anyone else care for some delicious cold pizza?

She eats.

THERESA/ANNA: No. No thanks.

FIONA: I'm not hungry, but I could go for something to drink.

Gets up.

KATHERINE: One cheap, store brand Diet Coke coming up.

She pours a cup.

FIONA: Thanks.

She drinks.

KATHERINE: Wasn't there something, somebody, in psych that used mandalas too? One of the big names?

ANNA: Probably.

KATHERINE: Guess I should have paid more attention in class . . . something about order, psychic order. Getting things back as they should be.

FIONA: You think that's going to happen?

KATHERINE: I don't know. Maybe. Right now I only know I keep seeing Sue, smiling at me. That smile she smiled that first day of kindergarten . . . when she soloed on that silly clarinet . . . when she was ready for her first real date with Tommy Wanamaker.

ANNA: Maura was always running—in high gear—like she was going to miss something if she just walked through life. I don't think I ever saw her doing anything slowly, easily. She rushed through school to get to work. She rushed through work to get home. She rushed getting ready to go out.

FIONA: And her rushing to answer her text got them both killed. Idiot.

KATHERINE: *After a pause.* I guess psychic order is out. Should we just get back to work?

FIONA: Fine.

They all get back to work.

ANNA: I think I've only got a little more to do.

THERESA: We need to clean up the edging as well. If the center of the mandala is supposed to symbolize the essence of our thoughts

and feelings, the circumference symbolizes our grasping for that essence, that order you were talking about.

FIONA: And then what? What happens when we're finished?

THERESA: Tradition has it that we take all the sand, collect it, and place it in some moving river where it can be returned to the universe, become part of the whole.

ANNA: It's one final symbolic blessing. Kind of the circle of life.

FIONA: I like that. So let's get it finished.

THERESA: For Maura and Sue.

FIONA: For Maura and Sue?

THERESA: Sure. Why?

FIONA: I'm not doing anything for Maura. It's because of her that Sue is dead.

KATHERINE: But Maura died too.

FIONA: But that was her doing. Sue didn't deserve to die.

THERESA: Nobody deserves to die.

FIONA: Sue died because of her. Her and her stupid . . .

ANNA: *Comforting her.* Yeah . . . we know. Maura. But she deserves this too.

FIONA: Why? Why does she deserve this? What good is this lousy thing anyway?

THERESA: The Chinese would say it would help "become one with the Tao."

FIONA: We're not in China, Terri.

ANNA: Okay. So what do you want to do?

FIONA: Do?

ANNA: Yeah, do. We've been working on this for days. It's our—I don't know, gift?

To both Sue and Maura.

FIONA: But it's Maura's fault.

KATHERINE: So what?

FIONA: *Violently raking once through the mandala with her hand.* So I won't have anything to do with anything for Maura. It's her fault

Sue is dead.

FIONA *moves away.* *Everyone is frozen, unsure what has happened, unsure what to do.*

FIONA: *Finally turning back.* I'm sorry.

ANNA: *Angrily.* Are you?

FIONA: Yes. I'm sorry. Sorry that I ruined your work. Sorry that Sue is dead, that I'll never see her again. Sorry that I don't know how to deal with this. With you. Sorry I don't understand my feelings.

KATHERINE: None of knows how to deal with this. We're doing the best we can.

THERESA: It's our way of dealing . . . of coping.

FIONA: I'm sorry. And I'm sorry that Maura is dead.

THERESA: Look . . .

ANNA: *Stopping* THERESA. You're right. It was Maura's fault. Maura's responsibility. And all of us feel an indescribable anger towards her. Her insistent, ridiculous fixation caused their deaths. How can we be anything but mad at her?

FIONA: I'm . . .

ANNA: But she died too. Maura, our good friend, is gone. We've all lost her. She'll never have the life she should have had. She'll never again bring smiles to all our faces. Never marry. Never have children, a husband.

FIONA: Sue and I were going to room together at college. We had it all planned. "Going to State."

Overcome, momentarily no one speaks.

KATHERINE: *Looking at the mandala.* So what do we do with this?

FIONA: I'm so sorry.

ANNA: It's okay.

She comforts FIONA who is now crying.

KATHERINE: I guess we can fix it.

Starts to fix the mandala.

It'll just . . .

THERESA: *Stopping her.* No.

KATHERINE: No? But it's . . .

THERESA: It is what it is. What it should be. A symbol of all of our thoughts and feelings. All . . .

FIONA: I don't understand.

THERESA: The circle of the mandala symbolizes wholeness. The mandala as it now stands symbolizes the wholeness of all our lives, thoughts, and feelings for Sue, and Maura, and ourselves. It's finished. Do you think anything can be added to make it "better?"

To KATHERINE:

You wanted it to be perfect. Is it?

KATHERINE: As perfect as we are. As we can be.

THERESA: Then it's time to collect the sands.

She goes to table, gets a bowl, gives it to ANNA.

ANNA: To share them with the whole that is the universe.

Gives the bowl to FIONA.

FIONA: But I just ruined it.

ANNA: No, you completed it. You added what none of us had been able to express.

THERESA: C'mon, let's get going.

They begin collecting sand.

FIONA: You're sure?

KATHERINE: If the center of the mandala is the essence of life, and the circumference the grasping for that essence, we did exactly what we set out to do. Shared Sue, shared Maura, shared of ourselves. And it certainly symbolized the impermanence of life, like you said Anna.

ANNA: So now the only thing to do is to finish it—to return the sands to the running water as a blessing.

THERESA: For Sue, for Maura, for us all.

ANNA: Fiona, was there a place, near the water, where Sue liked to go?

FIONA: The park, just beyond the boat ramp. We used to go there to think, to plan.

ANNA: How about returning the sands there?

FIONA: She'd like that, thanks.

THERESA: Fine with me.

KATHERINE: Is there any special way to do it?

THERESA: Haven't you figured it out by now? You do it as you feel you should. That's all that really matters. Now c'mon, let's go!

They all begin to exit with the sand.

END OF PLAY