

Salamander Street

THE OLIVE BOY

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

For sixth forms, colleges and university drama/theatre courses

These questions are designed to support the study of Ollie Maddigan's **The Olive Boy** as a play about teenage grief, identity, masculinity, memory and performance. They work well for classroom discussion, seminar use, written reflection and rehearsal-room exploration.

Key areas for study

- Teenage grief and the ways it can be hidden, displaced or performed
- Solo performance, storytelling and direct address
- Humour alongside pain, shame and vulnerability
- Ideas of masculinity, friendship, sex and status
- Memory, therapy and the act of speaking honestly
- Theatrical devices including voiceover, projection and role-switching

Initial response and understanding

1. What are your first impressions of **The Olive Boy** as a theatrical experience? Which moments stay with you most strongly, and why?
2. How does the play present The Olive Boy before it reveals the depth of his grief? What masks does he put on in front of an audience and his peers?
3. What do we learn about his life in his old home, his new school and his relationship with each parent?
4. Why do you think the play begins in such a comic, provocative and performative register before moving into more painful emotional territory?
5. How does your view of The Olive Boy change over the course of the play?

Teenage grief and mental health

6. In what ways does The Olive Boy avoid grief rather than confront it? Which behaviours suggest denial, distraction or emotional self-protection?
7. How does the play show grief as something physical as well as emotional?
8. What is the significance of the gold memory book? Why is The Olive Boy unable to write in it for so long?
9. How does the therapy framing help the audience understand what The Olive Boy cannot yet say directly to other people?
10. What does the ending suggest about grief: recovery, acceptance, survival or something more complicated?

Character and relationships

11. How would you describe The Olive Boy's relationship with his mother? Which memories reveal tenderness, dependence or idealisation?
12. What is the dramatic importance of Peter in the play? What does his final line reveal about his own grief?
13. How is The Olive Boy's father presented at first, and how does the play complicate that picture?
14. Discuss the confrontation between The Olive Boy and his father. What truths emerge in that scene, even through anger?
15. How does Science Girl function within the play? Is she a romantic possibility, a fantasy, a mirror or a catalyst for The Olive Boy's collapse?
16. What is the dramatic and emotional importance of Geeky Girl? Why does their final interaction matter?

Language, humour and voice

17. How does Maddigan use crude humour, exaggeration and bravado to reveal The Olive Boy's insecurity?
18. What is the effect of the play's shifts between comic storytelling and sudden emotional honesty?
19. How does The Olive Boy's language change when he moves from performance to confession?
20. To what extent is The Olive Boy a reliable narrator? Where do we sense fantasy, self-mythologising or selective memory?
21. How does the play capture the intensity and instability of teenage thought patterns?

Form, structure and theatrical method

22. What are the advantages of telling this story as a solo show rather than as a naturalistic multi-character play?
23. How does direct address shape the audience's relationship with The Olive Boy? Do we become confidants, witnesses, judges or something else?
24. What is the function of The Voice in the play? How does the therapist structure the dramatic journey?
25. How do projections and home-video material alter the tone of the play and deepen its emotional impact?
26. How does the play use repeated images, objects and phrases to create structure and meaning?

Symbols and themes

27. Why are olives such an effective central image? How does their meaning shift across the play?
28. What does the green door symbolise at different points in the story?
29. How does the play explore the gap between how teenage boys are expected to behave and what they may actually feel?
30. What does the play suggest about loneliness, belonging and the need to be seen?
31. How are love and grief linked in The Olive Boy's final letter to his mother?

Performance and rehearsal

32. For an actor playing The Olive Boy, where are the key emotional gear-changes in the script?
33. How can a performer show the difference between The Olive Boy's swaggering public persona and his more truthful inner self?

34. What vocal and physical choices could help distinguish the many offstage characters The Olive Boy presents?
35. How should a production handle the balance between pace, comedy and silence?
36. What rehearsal approaches might help a company stage the therapy scenes, party scenes and final letter without losing emotional clarity?

Written work and wider discussion

37. Discuss how The Olive Boy uses theatrical form to explore grief in a way that prose or film might not.
38. To what extent is the play a coming-of-age story?
39. How does the play invite audiences to reconsider first impressions of difficult or abrasive young people?
40. Compare the roles of memory and performance in the play. Is The Olive Boy remembering, performing or rebuilding himself?
41. What do you think the play has to say to young audiences, teachers, counsellors and drama students today?

Optional practical activities

- Hot-seat The Olive Boy at three different points in the play: early bravado, post-party collapse, and after the final therapy session.
- Stage the same speech twice: once as performance for the audience, once as private thought. Discuss what changes.
- Create a design moodboard for projection, sound and lighting that supports the movement from comic energy to emotional openness.
- Write a short response from the father, Peter or Geeky Girl after the events of the play.
- Explore the final letter as a stand-alone monologue on grief, memory and survival.

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