

Education Guide

THE

SCAR

TEST



The Scar Test

By Hannah Khalil
Directed by Claire Moyer
March 25 - April 4, 2021

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How to Use This Guide

This Education Guide is intended to help guide and inspire conversation, reflection and further research connected to Villanova Theatre’s production of *The Scar test*, by Hannah Kahlil. It contains a series of Prompts and Extensions organized around the work itself, Villanova Theatre’s production concept, and the broader themes of the Augustinian Cultural Seminar related to identity, culture, and community. They are designed to be used in any order, and can be approached as singular topics for reflection or in combination with one another to support a more nuanced conversation about identity, culture and inclusion.

Content Warning

Like all good art, *The Scar Test* asks audiences to engage with universal questions on a personal, sometimes challenging level. We hope that providing the following content advisory will equip our audiences with the tools they need to engage with the performance in a meaningful and fulfilling way.

At the same time, please do note that there is a difference between trauma and discomfort. Without the latter, we can narrow and limit our experiences in ways detrimental to ourselves as individuals and as members of this community. Please use your best judgment and exercise self-care as needed.

Content warning on following page.

The Scar Test by Hannah Khalil engages with the following: sexual assault/rape, racism, abuse, self-harm/suicide, death, kidnapping/abduction, references to blood, gunshots, bombings, sexism/misogyny, homophobia and transphobia.

About *The Scar Test*, by Hannah Khalil

“I haven't hurt anyone, killed, raped, murdered - I just ran away - came here to be safe. But I'm locked up. I just - I can't believe this is England.”

Based on interviews with current and former detainees, *The Scar Test* offers a powerful and unflinching snapshot of life inside England's migrant detention system. Having fled their respective homelands for the safety of the United Kingdom, a cohort of asylum seekers are instead imprisoned together at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Stuck in limbo, stripped of their privacy, and isolated a world away from the lives they used to know, the detainees struggle to survive in the prison-like complex while they fight for their right to stay in England.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: A wriggly dance. A Clubber tells the story of how she got a scar.

Scene 2: The Clubber reports for work as a Guard at Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre. Strong Woman, a detainee who does not speak English, arrives at the Centre and is processed.

Scene 3: The Nurse and an Interpreter try to learn more about Strong Woman.

Scene 4: Detainees wait to see the Doctor.

Scene 5: Hungry Lady and Constipated Lady connect over memories of home cooking.

Scene 6: A wriggly dance.

Scene 7: Hungry Lady is visited by a Scared Friender.

Scene 8: Tired Lady arrives at Yarl's Wood and a Guard explains her new reality as a detainee.

Scene 9: Unable to sleep, Tired Lady sees the Doctor.

Scene 10: Cool Person offers Tired Lady some advice for surviving in detention.

Scene 11: A wriggly dance.

Scene 12: An Solicitor works to assist Suspicious Woman and Tired Lady.

Scene 13: Cool Person is visited by a Friender.

Scene 14: Mealtime in the canteen does not go as planned.

Scene 15: A wriggly dance. Two Guards conduct a “spot check” of Tired Lady's room.

Scene 16: Tired Lady is visited by the Main Friender.

Scene 17: About Yarl's Wood Immigration Removal Centre.

Meet the Playwright

A writer of Palestinian-Irish heritage, Hannah Khalil was awarded the prestigious Heimbold Chairship for Villanova University, Philadelphia in 2021. Her stage plays include *A Museum in Baghdad* (Royal Shakespeare Company) which marked the first play by a woman of Arab heritage on a main stage at the RSC, *The Censor Or How to Put on A Political Play without Getting Fined or Arrested* (Central School of Speech and Drama, London), *Interference* (National Theatre of Scotland) and the critically acclaimed *Scenes from 68** Years - shortlisted for the James Tait Black Award: “confirms Khalil as a dramatist of compelling potential” (Arcola Theatre, London, 2016). *Scenes* has also been mounted in San Francisco and in Tunisia in a British Council supported production. Further work includes *The Scar Test* - “Political theatre at its best” (Soho Theatre, London) - and *Plan D* (Tristan Bates Theatre, Meyer Whitworth Award nominee).



In 2020, Hannah adapted four Greek myths as part of *Myths and Adventures from Ancient Greece* which were rendered as cardboard cut-out puppets online for Waterman Arts. She also adapted Ovid's *Penelope* as part of *15 Heroines* at the Jermyn Street Theatre. Her children's plays *Mrs Scrooge* and *Not the Gingerbread Man* were hosted by Fly High Stories online.

Hannah's radio plays include *The Unwelcome*, *Last of the Pearl Fishers* and *The Deportation Room* all for BBC Radio 4. She has also written multiple episodes of the UK Channel 4 drama *Hollyoaks*. Her first short film *The Record* took the Tommy Vine screenplay award and premiered at the Palestinian Film Festival in London in November 2019.

Hannah was the Bush Theatre London's writer on attachment in 2016/7 as part of Project 2036. She was also recipient of the Arab British Centre's Award for Culture in 2017. She is currently under commission to the Shakespeare's Globe, the Kiln in London and Golden Thread in San Francisco. She is a founder member and Artistic Associate of Manara Theatre, whose mission is to champion the work of Arab writers. Hannah is developing a new original TV drama with Netflix Arabic.

Topics for Discussion

Lost in Translation

“Where’s my interpreter?”

Interpreter: Hello

Nurse: Oh it’s you - now remember, I want you to tell me exactly what she’s saying... not your version.

Translate yes?

Interpreter: Of course - it’s my job..

In Scenes 2 and 3, Khalil further complicates the language barrier between Strong Lady and the centre Guards by introducing an Interpreter. As Strong Lady tells her story, the difference between her experience and what the Interpreter relays to the intake Nurse becomes increasingly apparent, to the point that Strong Lady challenges the Interpreter on her work.

Later, in Scene 12, the availability and reliability of phone translation services plays a potentially crucial role in Suspicious Woman’s fate:

Solicitor: Hello. Yes. Right, this detainee doesn’t speak English. OK. I need you to ask her to tell me her story so I can decide whether I can help her.

Great

He hands the phone to the woman. She looks suspiciously at it. He nods encouragingly. She takes the phone

Suspicious woman: Yes. Ok. Is he from the home office? Because if he is I want to complain about/ Are you sure? Ask him.

She hands the phone back

Solicitor: No. I’m not. Tell her I’m the duty solicitor and we only have a short amount of time. I need her to tell me her story if she wants my help
He hands the phone back to her. She listens.

Prompts

- There are multitude of occasions and contexts in which the services of an interpreter are necessary or advantageous.
 - How many can you think of? How does the role and responsibility of an interpreter shift across contexts?
 - How does the availability and quality of interpretation impact outcomes for individuals or groups on either end of that service?
 - Consider [8 Different Types of Translation Services](#) as a starting point.
- Khalil, as well as her characters, uses both *interpreter* and *translator* to refer to people and processes. Do you think this is incidental or deliberate? What implications does that have on the plot and themes of the play?
 - Based on their connotations alone, what do you imagine are the essential differences between the two terms in practice? What do they share?
 - Research the definitions and applications of *interpretation* and *translation*. How do the real and imagined nuances between the two terms impact characters' fates in *The Scar Test*?

Resources for Further Conversation

[What is Translation?](#)

[TEDx: Why Translating Literature is Sometimes Impossible](#)

[TedEd: How Interpreters Juggle Two Languages at Once](#)

Unpacking the Language of Migration

“...the government - where I’m from - I suppose - or the rebels...”

There are many reasons why a person or group of people might leave their country of origin to live somewhere else. Some make autonomous decisions for strictly personal or professional reasons, while others are fleeing from systemic or state-sponsored persecution. Broadly speaking, people and groups who fall into the latter category - including the characters in *The Scar Test* - leave their country of origin to seek protection in another. Consider the following definitions:

migrant: An individual who chooses to move to another country from their place of origin.

emigrate: To move *from* one’s country of origin or region to live in another.

Ex: “They emigrated *from* Narnia.”

immigrate: To move *to* another country or region to live.

Ex: “They immigrated *to* Narnia.”

refugee: An individual who is forced to flee their country of origin due to imminent danger. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), refugees are people who are “fleeing armed conflict or persecution” and “for whom denial of asylum has potentially deadly consequences.”

asylum: Legal protection granted by a nation to a person or people who have left their native country as refugees.

asylum seeker: A person who has left their country of origin as a refugee and is seeking, but has not yet been granted asylum in another.

deport: to expel a non-citizen from a country, typically on the grounds of undocumented status or from having committed a crime.

Comparing the United Kingdom and the United States

- In addition to [differing legal standards and processes](#) concerning migration and citizenship, the two nations also have vastly different immigrant populations, patterns and trends.
 - Compare Pew Research Center’s [Key Findings About U.S. Immigrants](#) with [UK Immigration Statistics](#) from the University of Oxford’s Migration Observatory. What similarities can you identify? What are the key differences? What historical, geographical and cultural factors might explain these differences?
- One commonality between the two countries is an often fiercely contentious debate over the who, why and how immigrants should be accorded the right to remain and integrate into their chosen societies.
 - Consider this [New York Times Op-Ed](#). Do you agree or disagree with the author? How do the connotations of the language used to describe migrants influence conversations about immigration in this country? In the nearly-15 years since this Op-Ed was published, have rhetoric or opinions around immigration changed?

- What similarities do you see between [public opinions about immigration in the UK](#) and the United States? What important differences can you identify?

Mythbusters, Immigration Edition

- Test your knowledge of immigration facts and trends with this 2014 [Immigration Quiz](#) from PBS. Did you score better or worse than you anticipated? How did taking this quiz confirm or challenge your understanding of immigration in the US?
- According to the [Pew Research Center](#) “the United States has more immigrants than any other country in the world.” The United States is also home to the world's largest population of resettled refugees. What [Current Data](#) on U.S. immigration surprises you? How does this information confirm or challenge existing narratives about immigration?
- Compare [Ten Myths About Immigration](#) from the Anti-Defamation League with [Myths and Facts of Immigration Policy](#) from the CATO Institute. What information surprised you? How did this information confirm or challenge your existing views on immigration?
 - Where do these myths come from? Who benefits from them?

Trauma in a Human Rights Context

The Scar Test

According to Khalil, the play's title comes from "a procedure used to determine whether detainees have undergone torture in their home countries." Legally, victims of torture cannot be detained at a facility like Yarl's Wood in the United Kingdom. However, the burden of proof rests solely with the asylum-seeker.

Tired Lady: I showed it to the doctor - he said
nothing

Cool Person: No. They're not allowed to - if they say
it's from something bad happening to you, well that's
good for your case isn't it. They ignore stuff like
that. Evidence. You've got to get a special doctor to
document it. Say how it happened... and they cost money

Tired Lady: How much?

Cool Person: Too much for 71p a day ever to cover, so
forget about it...

Under both UK and international law, victims of torture have the right to protection, as well as to "rapid access to assistance, rehabilitation and redress." Additionally, they cannot be returned to their country of origin when there is a risk of torture and cruel, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

However, preparing an application for refugee status is a complex and lengthy process, regardless of the country to which an individual has fled or the circumstances they are trying to escape. Consider this statement from Gaby Oré Aguilar, the Chairperson of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for the Victims of Torture:

"Not only have they suffered from torture, they face the additional difficulties of being in an unfamiliar place, away from home. They may not speak the language, they often face xenophobia and discrimination and they may lack legal documents and security of status."

At the same time, the text the Solicitor reads in the scene that precedes the exchange above, *Best Practice Guide to Asylum and Human Rights Appeals*, is a [real document](#) that Khalil quotes verbatim.

Prompts

- How does the above information about the play's title impact your understanding of scenes in which visible scars are referenced?

- In particular, compare the Clubber/Guard, Strong Lady and Tired Lady's stories. To what extent do their individual circumstances afford or deny them agency within the world of the play? Within the real-world contexts established by [*Best Practice Guide to Asylum and Human Rights Appeals?*](#)
- What about forms of torture that do not leave physically identifiable scars? Consider scenes in both the Doctor and Solicitor's surgeries, as well as the Doctor's waiting room as a starting point.

Resources for Further Conversation

[An Overview of U.S. Refugee Law and Policy](#). American Immigration Council. 2020

From the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#):

- [Summary report on the outcome of the Human Rights Council panel discussion on the role of prevention in the promotion and protection of human rights](#). 2014
- [Torture Victims in the Context of Migration: Identification, Redress and Rehabilitation, Report on the Third Annual Expert Workshop](#). The United Nations Voluntary Fund for Victims of Torture. 2017
- [Principles and Guidelines, supported by practical guidance, on the human rights protections of migrants in vulnerable situations](#). The United Nations Global Migration Group Working Group on Migration, Human Rights, and Gender. 2018

Additional Resources

[Villanova Theatre
Production Dramaturgy Website](#)

On Campus

[Clinic for Asylum, Refugee and Emigrant Services \(CARES\)](#): (610) 519-5894

- Linea Española: (866) 655-4419

[Villanova Interdisciplinary Immigration Studies Training for Advocates \(VIISTA\)](#)

[University Counseling Center](#): (610) 519-4050

[Center for Access, Success and Achievement \(CASA\)](#): casa@villanova.edu

[Sexual Assault Resource Center \(SARC\)](#): SARC@villanova.edu

- @itsonusnova

Villanova Public Safety: 610-519-4444

Campus Ministry: 610-519-4080

Residence Life: Your R.A. / 610-519-4154

Other

[Nationalities Services Center](#): 215-893-8400, help@nscphila.org

Nationalities Service Center is Philadelphia's leading immigrant and refugee service organization empowering immigrants to thrive in our communities and pursue a just future. They offer comprehensive services for immigrants and refugees including legal services, language learning and community integration support, and health/wellness and employment resources.

[Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition](#): admin@paimmigrant.org

The Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition (PICC) is a diverse coalition of over 60 member organizations and hundreds of individual supporters that brings together organizations and individuals representing different ethnicities, immigration statuses, faiths, and other backgrounds, to work collectively on immigrant rights in Pennsylvania.

[Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network](#): 800-656-HOPE (4673)

RAINN is the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization. RAINN created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline in partnership with more than 1,000 local sexual assault service providers across the country.

[National Suicide Prevention Hotline \(27/7\)](#): 800-273-8255

The Lifeline provides 24/7, free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals.