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The Book Club Play by Karen Zacarias

Plot Synopsis

What happens in book club, stays in book club. Or does it? A quick and bright comedy, *The Book Club Play* is a story about a tight-knit group of intellectual young professionals who are committed to connecting and unwinding over a shared love of books. But when Ana, the self-proclaimed founder of Book Club, invites a documentary camera into the room, things start to unravel. Each new book brings a new revelation about their lives and their group dynamics. With the pressure of the all-seeing camera in the room, mistakes are made, and secrets are revealed. Through laughter and desperation, the group falls apart to come back together.

Casting Breakdown

A diverse, multi-racial cast is the goal.

The given dramatis personae exists on a gender binary; however, I have listed possible pronouns rather than a woman/man designation to be more inclusive of the LGBT+ community.

Ana Smith (she/her), any ethnicity except Black, 30s.

Ana is an uptight journalist. She is fiercely protective of and passionate about *her* book club. A lover of the classics and high literature. She hides her insecurities behind perfectionism and hospitality.

Robert Novum Smith Jr. (he/him), any ethnicity except Black, 30s.

Rob is a charming underachiever. He is only at book club because it's his wife's book club. He would be most comfortable with reading and discussing short comic books. Rob is genuine, but clearly not as smart as the rest of the group. Must be comfortable with a stage kiss with both a man and a woman.

William Lee Nothnagel (he/him), any ethnicity except Black, 30s.

Will is a stylish, well-read historian. He is very passionate about book club. A historian drawn to period dramas. He is respectable with a tendency to geek out over the books. Must be comfortable with a stage kiss with a man.

Jennifer McClintok (she/her), any ethnicity except Black, 30s.

Jen is a grounded but awkward ex-law student. She is beautiful but lacks self-confidence. A consumer of romance novels written by women. Her past haunts her, but she is trying to look forward. Must be comfortable with a stage kiss with a man.

Lilly Louise Jackson (she/they), Black, 20s.

Lilly is a witty young writer. She enjoys book club, but doesn't always fit in. A reader of popular nonfiction and the opinion section of the New York Times. Lilly is talented, trendy, and high achieving. She is quick on her feet and unafraid to make people uncomfortable.

Alex (he/they), any ethnicity, 20s.

Alex is a bold young professor. He is the newest member of book club but is not afraid to share his opinions. Would say his favorite book is *War and Peace*, but he actually would just like to read *Gone Girl*. Disheartened by love and academia, he finds life in popular literature.

Pundits (she/they/he), any ethnicity, 20s-50s.

Pundits are dynamic and spirited guests who share their unique relationship to books throughout the play. Pundits bring light, energy, and heart to the play. This role can be played by 1-5 people, depending on the casting pool. Must be able to create distinct characters physically and vocally.

Why this play now?

The Book Club Play is a story about the secret hopes and dreams that people hold deep inside. As the play progresses, we get to see each character discover something deep within themselves, whether it be their desires for family or their own sexuality. These are deeply held, universal facets of the human experience. *The Book Club Play* also investigates group dynamics and the glue that holds people together. Despite conflict, awkwardness, secrets, and social faux-pas, the group continues to meet, continually saying that they need book club. In this transitional time coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us are trying to re-evaluate what matters most to us and what our goals really are. What secrets are we keeping from our loved ones and ourselves? What keeps a group connected? I believe this play explores these questions beautifully. I am interested in exploring contemporary comedies by women of color, and Karen Zacarias is a brilliant, well-known Latinx playwright. Although the characters deal with deep secrets and melancholy spirits, the play moves with energy and a lightness. Rather than dwell in hopelessness, the characters are driven by hope. *The Book Club Play* is a chance show people of color discussing their hopes, passions, and fears outside of the context of oppression. This play would work well on the Second Stage, as it is a 7-9 person cast. If possible in the black box space, it would be great to stage the play in the round or in thrust. By doing this, it will allow the audience to feel a sense of being a fly-on-the-wall and take the place of the documentary camera.

Technical and Design Needs**Scenic/Props:**

- Basic living room set, including a coffee table, sofa and chairs. Maybe a bookshelf.
- The camera is imagined, so it is not necessary to have a camera prop piece.

Costume:

- Contemporary street clothes

Lighting:

- Spotlights or highlighting effects would be great for the actors speaking directly to the camera.
- Projections for title screens are called for in the script.

Sound:

- No specific requirements.

Dramaturgy/Lobby:

- A lobby display in the lobby of the theatre where before the show audience members would write their favorite book on a sticky note and post it on the wall. After the show they could receive a slightly different prompt of what book has impacted their life the most.
- Inspiration <https://www.pinterest.com/kerstinvaughn/book-club-play/>