GENERAL

away michael gow study guide

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Introduction

In the world of contemporary Australian drama, few playwrights have made as enduring an impact as **Michael Gow**. His works are celebrated for their lyrical language, complex characters, and the way they probe the depths of human experience. Among his most celebrated pieces is *Away*, a play that has resonated with audiences worldwide for its haunting exploration of trauma, memory, and the fragile bonds that hold us together. Whether you are a theatre student, a seasoned actor, or simply a lover of compelling storytelling, a well-crafted **away michael gow study guide** can illuminate the nuances of this masterpiece and deepen your appreciation of Gow's artistry.

In this comprehensive guide, we will dissect the play's structure, themes, characters, and language. We'll also provide practical study tools—such as discussion questions, analysis prompts, and performance insights—to help you engage with the text on a deeper level. By the end of this article, you'll have a richer understanding of *Away* and a robust framework for studying Michael Gow's work in a way that is both academically rigorous and emotionally resonant.

Why Study Michael Gow's Away?

Michael Gow emerged on the Australian theatre scene in the late 1980s, quickly earning acclaim for his poetic dialogue and emotionally charged narratives. *Away* is often cited as his breakthrough play, a work that set the stage for his subsequent successes such as *The Secret River* and *Goodnight Sweetheart*. The play's exploration of the lingering effects of war and the fragility of human connection makes it a timeless study subject for those interested in:

- Understanding post-war trauma in literature.
- Analyzing character development in contemporary drama.
- Examining the role of memory and narrative in shaping identity.
- Exploring the interplay between language and emotion.

Because of its layered storytelling and richly textured dialogue, *Away* offers an ideal platform for a **away michael gow study guide** that can be applied to both academic coursework and personal enrichment.

Overview of Michael Gow's Career

Michael Gow's journey as a playwright began with his early works that reflected the social and cultural tensions of Australia in the 1980s. His breakthrough came with the play *Shakespeare's Dog* (1990), which won the New South Wales Premier's Literary Award. However, it was *Away*(1992) that cemented his reputation as a leading voice in Australian theatre.

Gow's writing style is marked by:

- Intimate, lyrical dialogue that often blurs the line between prose and poetry.
- Complex, multi-dimensional characters who grapple with internal and external conflicts.
- Themes that span the personal to the universal—war, identity, family, and the search for meaning.
- A willingness to experiment with form, such as non-linear narratives and fragmented timelines.

Beyond his plays, Gow has contributed to screenwriting, radio drama, and literary criticism. His influence extends beyond Australia, with productions staged in the United States, the United Kingdom, and beyond.

Plot Summary of Away

Away follows the lives of a group of soldiers and civilians who find themselves in a small, isolated town after the end of a war. The story unfolds over a single night, weaving together memories, secrets, and the haunting presence of the past. The central narrative thread follows a young soldier, **David**, who is haunted by the trauma of combat and the loss of his brother. As the night progresses, David interacts with several other characters—each carrying their own scars—leading to a series of revelations that force the group to confront their shared history.

Key scenes include:

1. The opening scene where David's flashbacks are intercut with the present-day setting.
2. The tense confrontation between David and a war veteran, Thomas, that exposes the deeper layers of the characters' trauma.
3. The quiet, reflective moment by the river where the characters share personal stories, creating a fragile sense of community.
4. The climactic resolution that leaves the audience to ponder the possibility of healing and reconciliation.

Key Themes in Away

Trauma and Memory

One of the most compelling aspects of *Away*is its exploration of trauma. The play delves into the psychological scars that soldiers carry with them long after the battlefield has faded. Memory is portrayed as both a burden and a bridge, enabling characters to connect with one another while also trapping them in past horrors.

Identity and Self-Discovery

Through the characters' interactions, Gow examines how individuals define themselves in the aftermath of conflict. The play asks whether identity is something inherent or something that is forged through experience, relationships, and the choices we make.

Community and Isolation

The isolated setting of *Away*underscores the tension between community and isolation. While the characters are physically together, they are emotionally distant, illustrating how trauma can isolate even those who are close.

Language as Healing

Gow's lyrical dialogue is not merely stylistic; it serves as a form of therapy. The act of speaking, listening, and being heard becomes a mechanism for healing, a theme that resonates throughout the play.

Character Analysis

David

David is the protagonist, a young soldier grappling with the loss of his brother and the guilt associated with surviving the war. His internal monologues reveal a mind torn between the desire to move forward and the pull of haunting memories.

Thomas

Thomas is an older war veteran who serves as a mentor figure to David. He embodies the stoic acceptance of

trauma, but his own hidden vulnerabilities surface as the night progresses.

Emily

Emily, a civilian who has been displaced by war, provides a contrasting perspective. She is pragmatic, yet deeply affected by the loss of her family, and her interactions with the soldiers highlight the civilian cost of conflict.

Other Supporting Characters

Gow's ensemble cast includes a range of characters—each with unique backgrounds—that enrich the narrative tapestry. Their brief but impactful scenes provide insight into the broader social impact of war.

Analyzing Language and Style

Michael Gow's writing in *Away* is often described as poetic yet grounded. The dialogue is layered with metaphor, allusion, and subtle irony. A few techniques worth noting include:

- Repetition: Gow uses repeated phrases to underscore themes of memory and trauma.
- Non-linear narrative: The play's structure interweaves past and present, mirroring the way trauma disrupts linear time.
- Sound symbolism: The use of ambient sounds—such as the distant rumble of artillery—enhances the emotional atmosphere.
- Silence: Moments of quiet are as powerful as spoken words, allowing the audience to absorb the weight of unspoken pain.

A Structured Study Guide

Below is a step-by-step framework to help you study *Away* effectively. This guide can be adapted for individual study, group discussion, or classroom instruction.

Step 1: Read the Text Thoroughly

Read the play at least twice. The first read is for general comprehension; the second read should focus on identifying key themes, motifs, and character arcs.

Step 2: Annotate as You Go

Use sticky notes or a digital annotation tool to mark:

- Significant lines that hint at themes.
- Moments of conflict or resolution.
- Any recurring symbols or motifs.

Step 3: Create a Character Map

Draw a diagram that shows how each character relates to the others. Highlight:

- Relationships (family, friend, mentor).
- Conflicts and alliances.
- Character growth or change.

Step 4: Identify Key Scenes

Mark the pivotal scenes that drive the narrative. For each scene, answer:

- What is the conflict?
- What does the scene reveal about a character?

- How does it contribute to the overall theme?

Step 5: Write Analytical Essays

Choose a theme or character and write a 500–700 word essay. Use evidence from the text to support your analysis. Remember to maintain an academic tone while keeping the language engaging.

Step 6: Prepare Discussion Questions

Create open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking. Here are some examples:

- How does Gow use memory to build tension in the play?
- In what ways do the characters' interactions reflect the broader societal impact of war?
- Does the play suggest that healing is possible? Why or why not?

Step 7: Explore Performance Perspectives

Consider how the play would be staged. Think about:

- Set design: How can the isolation be visually represented?
- Lighting: How can lighting enhance the emotional landscape?
- Sound: How can ambient sounds reinforce themes?

Step 8: Reflect on Personal Connection

Ask yourself how the play's themes resonate with your own experiences or beliefs. Write a personal reflection that ties the text to broader human concerns.

Suggested Study Questions

1. What is the significance of the river in the play, and how does it symbolize the boundary between past and present?
2. How does Gow's use of lyrical language affect the audience's perception of the characters' internal struggles?
3. In what ways does the play challenge conventional narratives about heroism and sacrifice?
4. What role does silence play in the development of the characters' relationships?
5. Can the characters in Away ever truly escape their trauma? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

Recommended Resources for Further Study

- Academic Journals: Look for articles in Australian Theatre Magazine and Modern Drama that analyze Michael Gow's work.
- Audio Recordings: Listen to the original production of Away to hear how actors interpret the text.
- Interviews: Read or watch interviews with Michael Gow for insights into his creative process.
- Online forums and discussion groups dedicated to contemporary Australian drama can also provide fresh perspectives.

Performance Tips for Actors

For actors preparing a role in *Away*, consider the following:

- Embrace the emotional depth: The characters' trauma is not merely a plot device; it's a living, breathing reality. Build your portrayal from genuine feelings.
- Use physicality: The isolation of the setting can be mirrored through body language—tight, constrained movements versus open, expansive gestures.
- Pay attention to pauses: Silence is a powerful tool; use it to convey unspoken pain.

- Connect with your co actors: The dynamic between characters is crucial. Build trust and authenticity in your interactions.

Conclusion

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