

College Theater  
Presents



## *Good Kids*

By Naomi Iizuka

Directed by Amelia Barrett

The College Theater Department sincerely thanks the COD Library, and COD Counseling and Advising for research support for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director, and production team, working on the project.

**Note: This production contains material of a highly sensitive nature including strong language and discussion of sexual assault that may be triggering for some individuals.**

### **The Story**

Something happened to Chloe after that party last Saturday night. Something she says she can't remember, but everybody is talking about. Set in a world of High School athletes, popular girls, and an outsider armed with smart phones and social media, *Good Kids* explores the very public aftermath of sexual assault. Adult themes and language.

### **Time**

Now

### **Place:**

A stage.

Scenes happen in various locations: the sports field of a large public high school, the parking lot of a 7-Eleven, a party, a suburban home, a car, cyberspace. All these locations

should be evoked as opposed to literally represented, and action should move fluidly from one space to the next.

## **Characters:**

### **The Girls:**

AMBER, the alpha female of the school, a straight-A student and captain of the girls' varsity soccer team

DAPHNE, Chloe's best friend

MADISON, Amber's teammate

BRIANNA, Amber's teammate

KYLIE, the new girl who aspires to be part of Amber's inner circle

SKYLER, a girl who doesn't fit in, doesn't care, and can't wait to go away to college

CHLOE, a girl from another high school with an independent streak

DEIRDRE, a young woman in a wheelchair who graduated a few years ago and spends a lot of time online

### **The Boys:**

TY, Connor's teammate

TANNER, Connor's teammate

LANDON, Connor's teammate

CONNOR, quarterback of the football team, everything has always come easy to him, all the girls like him and life is full of promise

The girls and boys play the CHORUS OF GOOD KIDS. They also play their parents, coaches, and readers as needed.

## **Acknowledgements:**

*Good Kids* is the first work of a New Play Initiative established by the Big Ten Theatre Consortium. This collaboration among theatre departments will commission, produce, and publicize a series of new plays by female playwrights, with the goal of creating strong female roles.

## **Director's Note:**

The playwright, Naomi Iizuka, lists the time in which this play occurs as now.

Considering the play deals with sexual assault, and the topic, unfortunately, continues to be in the news, even though the play is nearly 10 years old, leads me to consider this topic as part of a larger conversation.

In opening lines of the play, the characters tell us there are many stories: about which versions of the truth we tell each other and ourselves. This proves important when we consider what stories we tell about sexual assault. We may try and distance ourselves from these stories but is this possible? The characters in the story are the same

people that sit among us. And the play offers us no resolution to the problem. It does, however, ask us to bear witness and be problem solvers.

*Good Kids* asks us to confront difficult questions. It asks us to examine what creates a climate where attitudes lead to sexual assault and a culture of victim blaming thrives. Perhaps, we can take the play as a starting point for discussion. Iizuka has said, “You don’t solve a problem like sexual assault with anything other than a deep shift in attitude, and a deep shift in attitude happens conversation by conversation, in dorm rooms, parties, and rehearsal halls.”

Thank you for being part of the conversation.

~AB

## The Playwright

Naomi Iizuka. Naomi Iizuka's most recent play, *17 Reasons (Why)*, was produced at Campo Santo + Intersection for the Arts and published by Stage and Screen in the anthology *Breaking Ground: Adventurous Plays By Adventurous Theatres*, edited by Kent Nicholson. Her other plays include *36 Views*; *Polaroid Stories*; *Language of Angels*; *War of the Worlds* (written in collaboration with Anne Bogart and SITI Company); *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*; *Tattoo Girl*; and *Skin*. Ms. Iizuka's plays have been produced by Actors Theatre of Louisville; Berkeley Repertory Theatre; Campo Santo + Intersection for the Arts in San Francisco; the Dallas Theatre Center and Undermain Theatre in Dallas; Frontera@Hyde Park in Austin; Printer's Devil and Annex in Seattle; NYSF/Joseph Papp Public Theatre, GeVa Theatre, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, Soho Rep, and Tectonic Theatre in New York; San Diego's Sledgehammer Theatre; Northern Light Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta; Alternate Theatre in Montreal; and the Edinburgh Festival. Her plays have been workshopped by San Jose Rep, GeVa Theatre, Bread Loaf, Sundance Theatre Lab, A.S.K. Theatre Projects, the McCarter Theatre, Seattle's A Contemporary Theatre, the Bay Area Playwrights' Festival, Midwest PlayLabs, En Garde Arts/P.S. 122, and New York Theatre Workshop.

*Language of Angels* was published in TheatreForum; *War of the Worlds* and *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls* were published by Smith and Kraus; *Tattoo Girl* is included in *From The Other Side of the Century*, published by Sun and Moon; and *Skin* is included in *Out of the Fringe*, published by TCG. *Polaroid Stories* is published by Dramatic Publishing, and *Language of Angels*, *Aloha, Say the Pretty Girls*, *Anon(ymous)*, and *Tattoo Girl* are published by Playscripts, Inc. *36 Views* was published in American Theatre and has since been published by Overlook Press.

Ms. Iizuka is currently working on commissions from the Guthrie Theater, Actors Theatre of Louisville, the Kennedy Center, the Children's Theatre of Minneapolis, and the Mark

Taper Forum. She is a member of New Dramatists and the recipient of a Whiting Award, a Rockefeller Foundation MAP grant, a Gerbode Foundation Fellowship, an NEA/TCG Artist-in-Residence grant, a McKnight Fellowship, a PEN Center USA West Award for Drama, the Stavis Award from the National Theatre Conference, Princeton University's Hodder Fellowship, and a Jerome Playwriting Fellowship. Ms. Iizuka has taught playwriting at the University of Iowa and the University of Texas, Austin, and currently teaches at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

### **Interview excerpt:**

*“Good Kids is a story about a fictional (but all too recognizably real) rape, told through the eyes of high school students who experienced it, witnessed it, committed it, and were affected by it.*

**Alan Katz:** *So this play is the first Big Ten Commission, designed to bring new plays by women and roles for young female actors to the forefront. This play seems to be “ripped from the headlines” with many examples of young people and rape in the news, especially in the Steubenville case. Why this play for this commission?*

**Naomi Iizuka:** When Alan McVey of the University of Iowa first approached me about writing a play for the Big Ten Initiative, he said that it was his hope and the hope of his colleagues that the plays they commissioned would explore subject matter that would speak to the students, faculty and university communities that comprise the Big Ten. This particular topic, which has been at the center of discussions nationwide, became the center of our discussions as something that the many communities that the Big Ten represents were grappling with.

**AK:** *When you get a commission like this, what’s your initial process like?*

**NI:** It really varies. I talked to a great number of people when developing this play, and I did a lot of archival research as well. I started with the Steubenville case, but, sadly, as I worked on the play, I found so many other cases that were arriving, literally as I wrote. I remember a particular case at Dartmouth, but many others around the country, where this issue was being faced. I talked to students. And I read a great deal, especially online articles. Particularly, I read the comment sections of online articles dealing with these cases. Those comment sections were eye-opening: the level of discourse, the mindsets being reiterated again and again about women and men and sexuality. I found it disturbing, but I needed to dig deeper into it. It wasn’t a particular article or comment thread. There was so much of the same thing; you could take your pick.

**AK:** *Where did you start with your words for the play?*

**NI:** It started chronologically for this play with the first section, since rewritten and revised over time. The first scene is a like a chorus, a multitude of voices, young women and young men [talking about how they and others in their community view the rape and it's results]. Some of the first things that I wrote. And it comes back throughout the play, beginning and end. I think that it was really important: that *Good Kids* is not one or two people's stories, but that it was a community story, many different attitudes and points of view that shape what happened and how we talk about what happened.

**AK:** *Is it your goal to send a particular message?*

**NI:** If this play gets people to start talking in deeper and different ways, that would be a great thing. I don't presume to have the definitive word. One thing that's really important to me is that there are assumptions that come out in the comments sections I was talking about, but they also come out in conversations, that are really troubling. And instead of ignoring those assumptions, I wanted to put those disturbing and toxic ideas into the play to show how an idea or way of talking can have real life consequences that are more destructive than one would ever imagine. Those ways of speaking and attitudes can affect events, decision-making and action."<sup>1</sup>

## **Good Kids is based on a true story?**

Iizuka wrote *Good Kids* as a response to the events and the community reaction to the rape of Jane Doe, 17, by Trent Mays and Ma'lik Richmond, both 16, on August 12, 2012 in Steubenville, Ohio. "The case is not the first time a high school football team has been entangled in accusations of sexual assault. But the situation in Steubenville has another layer to it that separates it from many others: It is a sexual assault accusation in the age of social media, when teenagers are capturing much of their lives on their camera phones — even repugnant, possibly criminal behavior, as they did in Steubenville in August — and then posting it on the Web, like a graphic, public diary."

"...Within days of the possible sexual assault, an online personality" [a 45 year old blogger named Alexandria Goddard] "who often blogs about crime zeroed in on those public comments and photographs and injected herself into the story, complicating it and

---

<sup>1</sup> Katz, Alan. "UpClose: Naomi Iizuka, Women's Voices Theater Festival." DC Theatre Scene. 9, October, 2015. <https://dctheatrescene.com/2015/10/09/upclose-naomi-iizuka-womens-voices-theater-festival/>

igniting ire in the community. She posted the information on her site and wrote online that the police and town officials were giving the football players special treatment.”<sup>2</sup>

In the actual case, the two young men were “charged with digitally penetrating the intoxicated girl twice on the night of August 11, 2012. Richmond and Mays were found delinquent, which is the juvenile equivalent of being found guilty. Mays was also convicted of a second felony charge of using a minor in nudity oriented materials for taking and distributing photographs of the victim in states of undress.

...After the verdict, Ohio attorney general, Michael DeWine, planned to convene a grand jury to investigate whether others should be charged in the case. At least 16 people refused to talk to investigators about the case, which has deeply divided a town with a long tradition of supporting its high school football team and players.”<sup>3</sup>

The play leaves the conclusion aside in-order to explore the complexities of public opinion and social media accounts of the night and those involved directly.

## **What is Steubenville? And what happened?**

“Steubenville is a small town on the Ohio River and the border of West Virginia. Ohio has no professional football teams, making high school and college football teams the center of the sport-loving state's attention. This was especially the case in Steubenville.

### **Key points from the Steubenville case:**

From posting videos to various social media platforms to publicly tweeting about Jane Doe during and after the assault the public saw:

- A 12-minute video posted where a former classmate referred to Doe as ‘dead’ and joked about the assault.
- Another video of the actual assault that was later deleted.
- An Instagram photo of Mays and Richmond holding Doe, inebriated and on the verge of blackout, by her arms and legs.

Sexual assault cases often rely on a lot of ‘he said, she said’ accounts of events, which can lead to conflicting information when the jury and judge must pick a side in the case. However, with this case the social media and digital evidence was so drastic that the conflicting accounts were almost null. Teenagers put their whole lives on the internet, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Macure, Juliet and Schweber, Nate. “Rape Case Unfolds on Web and Splits City.” The New York Times. Dec. 16, 2012. <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/17/sports/high-school-football-rape-case-unfolds-online-and-divides-steubenville-ohio.html?pagewanted=all>.

<sup>3</sup> Dahl, Julia, “Steubenville Rape Trial Verdict: Judge finds both teens guilty of raping 16-year-old girl.” 18, March 2013. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/steubenville-rape-trial-verdict-judge-finds-both-teens-guilty-of-rape-16-year-old-girl/>

this case was one of the first involving sexual assault that showed how our usage of social media can come back to bite us.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Digital Evidence

There were hundreds of texts, photos, videos, tweets, and other evidence collected from Mays’s phone and other social media accounts. This evidence almost completely documented the assault, who did what, and who was truly to blame. “Despite all the talk of conspiracy, the evidence presented at trial suggested a free-for-all: a scrum of young men all trying to blame each other. The day after the parties, it came out, Anthony Craig had texted the girl, ‘I seriously felt so fucking bad for you and I couldn’t do shit about it. I’m so sorry.’ He neglected to mention that he had taken photographs of her while she was naked and incapacitated. Evan Westlake testified that he was ‘stunned at what I saw’ in Mark Cole’s basement, and that he ‘just wanted to get out of there.’ Yet, after he left, he went back to the second party and made the video of Nodianos. In the background, you can hear him encouraging Nodianos—‘How do you feel on a dead girl?’—and laughing’.”<sup>5</sup>

## Lack of Physical Evidence

Although there was plentiful digital evidence that indicated Mays and Richmond had assaulted Jane Doe, there was little to no physical evidence that an assault had occurred. “When the parents came in, on Tuesday, August 14th, three days after the party, they presented a difficult case. There was no physical evidence of a crime, and the victim had no memory of one occurring. Fifteen years ago, Richmond and Mays would have escaped suspicion: before smartphones and Twitter, rumors floated around high schools and then dissipated, often before adults knew what was real and what was adolescent imagination... When the victim’s parents first went to the police, they were not sure they would press charges. The family “just wanted to get through it and get done,” their attorney, Bob Fitzsimmons, told me. The victim wasn’t certain that a crime had been committed; at one point, she’d texted Mays to assure him that “we know you didn’t rape me.” More than anything, she wanted the night to go away. “Honestly, I was praying that everything I heard wasn’t true, and I didn’t want to get myself in a bunch of drama because I knew everyone would just try and blame me,” she said.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Wernecke, Lorelei . Naomi Iizuka's *Good Kids* presented by Illinois State University's School of Theatre and Dance. <https://lawern1.wixsite.com/goodkids2021/steubenville>. October 22, 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Levy, Ariel. “Trial by Twitter.” *The New Yorker*. 29, July 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/05/trial-by-twitter>.

<sup>6</sup> Levy, Ariel. “Trial by Twitter.” *The New Yorker*. 29, July 2013. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2013/08/05/trial-by-twitter>.

## Administrative Cover-Up

“Several administrative staff and faculty at Steubenville High School were accused of hiding evidence and lying under oath to protect the school, its football team, and its reputation. Two faculty members were eventually brought to court, and one was convicted. He was given 80 days in jail with a year of community service.

## Jane Doe's Testimony

Since Jane Doe was extremely inebriated, she did not remember the assault. She could only watch less than a minute of the video of her assault before breaking down, and therefore her testimony was not based on her own memory of the events but rather on her feelings afterward and other accounts of that night.”<sup>7</sup>

## The “Chorus”

Iizuka call the ensemble a “Chorus of Good Kids.” A “chorus” refers to the tradition of the Greek Chorus. “The purpose of the Greek chorus was to provide background and summary information to the audience to help them understand what was going on in the performance. They commented on themes, expressed what the main characters couldn’t say (like secrets, thoughts, and fears) and provided other characters with information and insights.”<sup>8</sup>

“*Good Kids* is not the story of Chloe and Connor or Landon and Skyler, but it is the story of a community. It is a story about points of view that shape our view and reactions to events and our society: how we discuss and process our behaviors. “What’s harder is to look at our own unconscious biases, look at how we talk about men and women, what we don’t examine in our own lives in terms of speech and attitudes. That’s a much more challenging activity. That’s what we need to be talking about. Ask How are my unconscious biases contributing to an environment where this is happening with terrible frequency?”<sup>9</sup>

The characters in this play are not sympathetic, the ideas in the play are difficult, and uncomfortable. It reminds me of *The Laramie Project* (1998) that attempt to represent differing points of views from a community on stage, without drawing conclusions. The Chorus, who I think is (us) the audience, reminds me of the Kitty Genovese, Queens, NY case. The case of the bystander effect, where people witness an attack but fail to intervene. Does being part of a group make us lose our empathy, our individual

---

<sup>7</sup>Wernecke, Lorelei . Naomi Iizuka's *Good Kids* presented by Illinois State University's School of Theatre and Dance. <https://lawern1.wixsite.com/goodkids2021/steubenville>. October 22, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Theatrefolk. “Exploring the Greek Chorus.” <https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/exploring-greek-chorus/>

<sup>9</sup> Katz, Alan. “UpClose: Naomi Iizuka, Women’s Voices Theater Festival.” DC Theatre Scene. 9, October, 2015. <https://dctheatrescene.com/2015/10/09/upclose-naomi-iizuka-womens-voices-theater-festival/>



judgement, our sense of self? These are the question the play holds a mirror up to **AT** the audience.

## **If you need resources and information on Sexual Assault**

- DuPage help <https://211dupage.gov/>
- IL Coalition Against Sexual Assault <https://icasa.org/>
- [National Sexual Assault Hotline](#) at (800) 656-HOPE (a 24-hour confidential hotline)
- Rockford Sexual assault: <https://www.rockfordsexualassaultcounseling.org/>
- For prevention: <https://www.niu.edu/prevention-education-outreach/resources/index.shtml>
- Great videos to use: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OrAdC6ySiY>

## **Things to think about before the performance:**

- Are you familiar with the Steubenville, Ohio case or any other assault cases from the news? Which ones and why?
- What do you think about the title of the play? What does the phrase “Good Kids” mean to you?
- Since our stage has no curtain to cover the set, you can see the set prior to the production. Look at the design of the set and notice some of the details. What does it remind you of?
- Because of our “warnings” are you nervous about what you are about to witness? How will you handle content that makes you uncomfortable?

## **Things to watch for in performance:**

- Look closely at the physical elements of the set. Notice the vertical and horizontal elements. Notice the color and texture. What is the design of the production communicating with these statements?
- Notice the lighting of the production. What feelings are created through atmosphere and color choice?
- Notice the sound design of the production. What are the specific elements that you notice and why?
- Look at the colors and cut of the costumes. How do the costumes communicate time, place, economic status, connections and character?
- Listen closely for repeated elements in the dialogue and if they always remain the same or change.
- The time-line of the play is not linear — notice how this affects your experience.
- Notice when the entire group becomes a “chorus.” Can you figure out how they are common or different as groups?
- Are the “boys” relationships different than the “girls”?
- Notice the number of times the characters use their phones.

- Notice when the actors address the audience.
- Notice when the actors are part of the audience.

### **Things to think about after the performance:**

- Is there a resolution (for you) in the play?
- Was there a subtle “classism” in the play?
- What were the hierarchies in the play?
- What is the idea that you are left with within the story? i.e. is there a call to action?
- Do you think you will look at relationships differently or the same, after this story?

### **Other Analysis “Tools”:**

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’ In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive his point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

### **The running time for this production is approximately 1 hour and 10 minutes with no intermission**

Please join us for a **pre-show discussion Thursday, February 29, 6:45p** preceding the preview performance. Note that pre-show discussions will include the director and designers, and will be a discussion of the approach to this production.

There will be a **post-show discussion** following the **Friday, March 8** performance. The post-show will be with director, cast and crew, and we will be fielding questions from the audience.

**Please join us!**