

# MOB



## **MOB**

**By Catherine-Anne Toupin  
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## **Centaur Theatre Study Guide**

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## Using this Study Guide

**\*IMPORTANT NOTE TO THE TEACHER\***  
**\*\*PLEASE READ CAREFULLY\*\***

This play contains mature subject matter including: coarse language, violent/sexually explicit language, and nudity. The teacher must consider whether this play is appropriate for her class.

***Spoiler Alert:*** Because this play is a psychological thriller, secrecy and discretion are essential. In order to maintain the elements of suspense and mystery for all audiences, it is essential that the ending not be revealed. This includes any allusion to the characters' identities, occupations and motivations. This also includes any discussion of the central themes related to the performance which may give away the ending.

If taking students to the play over multiple nights, teachers should emphasize that the play *not be discussed* with fellow classmates!!

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This study guide has been divided into Previewing activities and Post Viewing activities including: research activities, comprehension questions, written assignments, oral presentations and class activities. Feel free to use some or all of the questions that best suit your class.

These activities can be done *after watching the performance*. It is essential that the discussions, written assignments, oral presentations and class activities are assigned to students following the play.

## Synopsis

SOPHIE: *When I spoke out against what was happening, that was when the real fun started.*

Sophie, a professional with 20 years' experience in her field, loses her job under questionable circumstances. Confused and hurt, she heads out of town looking for a way to assuage her humiliation and rage, eventually arriving at a quaint B&B run by the matronly Lisa and her warm and welcoming nephew, Martin. After a few well-watered evenings, tongues loosen and a disturbing complicity develops between Martin and Sophie. Was her distraught drive to the country and unexpected arrival at the B&B as random as we think? A brilliant psychological thriller that keeps the audience in suspense to the very end.

“ d'une troublante réalité dont il a été peu question jusqu'ici” - La Presse

## Characters

- **Sophie** – 40-year-old woman, recently unemployed, troubled by something causing her great anxiety.
- **Martin** – 35-year-old unemployed, overweight man who is living with his aunt. Nephew to Lisa.
- **Lisa** – 60ish landlady and Martin's aunt.

## Setting

House/B&B in the country

## Biography – Catherine-Anne Toupin, Playwright



In addition to her career as an actress, Catherine-Anne Toupin is an established playwright and television writer. She graduated from The Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in Montreal in 1999. With Théâtre ni plus ni moins, a theatre company she co-directed from 2000 to 2011, she created *L'envie*, her first play, in 2004, which earned her a Masque award nomination. Her second play, *À présent*, is first produced by the Théâtre de la Manufacture in 2008 and reprised at Théâtre Duceppe in 2010. This work, translated into several languages, has been presented in England, Italy, Mexico and Australia. *Mob* (titled *La meute* in its original French version), her latest play, was first produced in 2018

by the Théâtre de la Manufacture. Highly acclaimed by critics and audiences, this production will be reprised for the fourth time in Montreal in the fall of 2019, reaching more than 80 performances.

A prolific creator, Catherine-Anne Toupin also writes for television. As an actress, as well as starring in all of her plays, her name is associated with some twenty productions on the Montreal stage. On television, her roles in *Les hauts et les bas de Sophie Paquin*, *Caméra Café*, *Mémoires Vives*, *Unité 9*, and most notably *Boomerang*, a series she created and stars in, have made her a very popular and sought-after artist, as evidenced by the award she won at the 2017 Artis Gala in the category Rôle féminin/comédies.

### **Pre-viewing Activities:** **(class activity) Working in groups.**

Brainstorming: Working in groups, discuss the title of the play - "MOB".

- What is the difference between "a mob" and "the mob"?
- What may the title of the play infer about the play's content?

NOTE TO TEACHER: This discussion question is deliberately a *red herring* and is meant to purposely focus attention away from the central themes of the play.

Creating Suspense - (5) Elements of a mystery novel: *Character, Setting, Plot, Problem, Resolution*

Literary elements: *Foreshadowing, Red Herring*

### **Post-viewing Activities:**

#### **Comprehension/Discussion Questions**

1. Why was Sophie fired?
2. In the opening scene, what is upsetting Sophie? What did you think she was afraid of?
3. Specifically, what kind of language was used in the opening scene of the play? Were you shocked? Why? Why not? How did this language make you feel? How does this language heighten the level of suspense?
4. Setting:
  - a. Where does the story take place? How do you know?
  - b. Could this story have happened any other country? Why? Why not?
5. What help does Sophie offer Martin? Why?

6. Does Martin trust Sophie? Should he? Explain.

7. *Characters:*

Sophie

- a. At the beginning of the play, how is Sophie presented? What is she like? Describe her personality. You may find it helpful to make a list of adjectives.
- b. By the middle of the play, what does Sophie do/say that changes the way the audience perceives her? How does she change?
- c. At the end of the play, what is revealed about Sophie? Does the audience learn more about her? What is it?
- d. Are Sophie's actions credible/believable? Why? Why not?

Martin

- a. At the beginning of the play, how is Martin presented? What is he like? Describe his personality. You may find it helpful to make a list of adjectives.
- b. By the middle of the play, what does the audience learn about Martin? What does he want? Is he as confident as he makes himself seem? How does he change?
- c. At the end of the play, what is revealed about Martin?
- d. Are Martin's actions credible/believable? Why? Why not?

Lisa

- a. At the beginning of the play, how is Lisa presented? What is she like? Describe her personality. You may find it helpful to make a list of adjectives.
- b. At the end of the play, what does the audience learn about Lisa?

8. *Plot:*

a. Introduction:

- i. What problems did you think were plaguing Sophie? Why did you *originally* think she was running away?
- ii. How does the dialogue at the beginning of the play help to create suspense?
- iii. Did you think she would be safe hiding in Lisa's house? Why? Why not?

b. Rising Action:

- i. Why did Sophie drink so much?
- ii. Why did Martin spend so much time with Sophie?
- iii. How did Sophie get Martin to confide in her?
- iv. What was Sophie's idea to help Martin earn money?
- v. *As the scene was unfolding*, where did you think Sophie got her idea to help Martin?
- vi. *Red Herring*: What did you think was Sophie's job?

- vii. *Foreshadowing*: According to Sophie, what is a woman's worst fear? What is a man's worst fear? How does this foreshadow what happens later?
  - viii. Why does Lisa join Sophie and Martin's photo shoot? Does this make the success of Sophie's idea seem more credible/realistic? Was this scene credible?
  - c. Climax:
    - i. What does Sophie reveal about herself and Martin?
    - ii. What is revealed about Sophie's identity and why she lost her job?
    - iii. How does this revelation heighten the suspense?
  - d. Falling Action:
    - i. What does the audience learn about Martin?
    - ii. What dilemma does Sophie now face?
  - e. *Resolution*:
    - i. Did Sophie publish her pictures?
    - ii. Was justice done?
9. By taking revenge, was Sophie's *problem* resolved? Why? Why not?

## Class Activities –Group/Pair

### Discussion Questions

1. Was it surprising that a woman (Sophie) could be the predator in the game of sexual harassment? Why? Why not?
2. Why are women normally the victims of sexual harassment, not men?
3. *MOB* is characterized as a psychological thriller in the *cat and mouse* genre. As such, the audience is always in suspense watching the alternating power play between these two characters. Think about the ways the role reversal of Sophie and Martin's characters help create suspense.
4. Was it right for Sophie's company to fire her due to online harassment? If not, what should/could they have done?
5. If a man were enduring the same kind of online harassment, do you think the company would have handled the problem differently? Explain.
6. Was Sophie a victim? Why? Why not?
7. Was Sophie's response to her tormentor appropriate? Why? Why not?

8. Martin says: "The police can't do anything to me. I never touched you." Does this make Martin's actions less criminal? Why? Why not?
9. What was the real underlying problem(s) in the play? There may be more than one.
10. What does the title of the play mean? What does it refer to?
11. Has the *me-too* movement made this play more poignant/significant to you? Explain.

### Written Assignments

1. As a society, we seem to have become accustomed to venting our anger, frustration, hate, sexism and/or racism in a public, often anonymous, forum using social media. What consequences does this have for society? Short term consequences? Long term consequences?
2. Should the government prevent online forums that vent hate, racism, sexism and/or violence? Would censorship of these sites represent a threat to free speech? Explain.
3. According to the playwright: "Theatre is (...) a space where you have to explore disturbing things" (Catherine – Anne Toupin). Explain how art, like this play, can help to raise awareness about cyber-harassment.

### Oral Assignments

1. Awareness Campaign: Working with a group of students, develop an Awareness Campaign to present to your class on one of the following topics:
  - a. How to avert sexual harassment
  - b. How to deal with cyber harassment
  - c. How to stamp out violence in social media
  - d. How to react/report dangerous forums on social media
  - e. How to speak out at work/school against harassment (sexual, social, bullying, etc)
2. Controversial Issue – Do an oral presentation by taking a stand on one of the following topics:
  - a. People have the right to say whatever they want on social media.

- b. Angry/violent/harassing words are equally as hurtful as angry/violent/harassing actions so should be punished in the same way.

## Research Activities

In colloquial usage, the *Cat and Mouse* genre has often been generalized to mean the advantage constantly shifts between the contestants, leading to an impasse or *de facto* stalemate. In classical *Game Theory*, cat and mouse classifies as a "copycat" archetype whereby there exists no equilibrium, and most importantly, no endgame for its two protagonists. (Wikipedia)

Compare and contrast *Cat and Mouse* genre with *Game Theory* to show how the protagonists in *MOB* can never truly resolve their problems.

## Themes

Working in groups or with a partner, give examples of what the following themes mean in the context of the play. Try to write at least one sentence that illustrates how the themes are used.

### Themes

- revenge
- sexual harassment
- corporate profit vs. morality
- Omnipresence of violence in our societies
- Trolls on social media, these anonymous individuals who pollute the discussion forums with their hateful and threatening comments
- Cyber harassment
- Misogyny
- Link between pornography and violence against women