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# **Searchers**

By

**LAURIE BROOKS**

**Dramatic Publishing Company**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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ISBN: 978-1-61959-238-4

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*Searchers* was commissioned and devised with and for The Ensworth School in Nashville, Tenn. It received its premiere at Ingram Arts Center at the high school on April 27, 2017.

CAST:

Ben ..... Nick Sedita  
Sammie ..... Chloe Abram  
Isaac ..... Sam Hood  
Chad ..... Nathaniel Taylor  
Max ..... Ben Wallace  
Emma ..... Bailey Cunningham  
Sydney ..... Sarah Hooton  
Carol ..... McKensie Miller  
Brooklyn ..... Carrie Lee Sullivan  
Mr. Wynn ..... James Gaither  
Archer ..... Payton Terry  
Chloe ..... Caroline Seitz  
Ensemble ..... Ryan Crants, Eliza Eaton,  
Cora Frumkin, Shelly Mischinski,  
Shona O’Bryant, Rodney Owens,  
Corrine Parrish, Connor Phillips,  
Taylor Smith, Lucy Sohr, Bailey Tomlin,  
Jordan Williams, Jordan Yi  
Featured DJ ..... Keith Smith  
Featured Dancers ..... Rachael Byarlay,  
Jaylan Clemmons, Bailee Mason

PRODUCTION:

Director ..... David Berry  
Stage Manager ..... Jack Lovell  
Assistant Stage Managers ..... Custis Lee,  
Morgan Zagerman  
Prop and Costume Managers ..... Elizabeth Rowland,  
Trent Sanchez

Lighting Designer ..... Donnie Lawrence  
Band ..... Connor Phillips, Brennan Bailey,  
Corrina Gill, Corinne Parrish

DEVisING TEAM:

Chloe Abram, Briggs Blevins, Ryan Crants, Bailey Cunningham, Cora Frumkin, McKensie Miller, Shelly Mischinski, Sam Hood, Sarah Hooton, Custis Lee, Audrey McGraw, Lilli Pankow, Meg Richter, Elizabeth Rowland, Nick Sedita, Caroline Seitz, Lucy Sohr, Sam Slipkovich, Carrie Lee Sullivan, Jack Lovell, Jeffrey Tang, Ben Wallace, Jordan Williams, Jordan Yi, Morgan Zagerman, Maggie Zerfoss.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Searchers* was created through a collaboration between playwright, director and a team of high-school students. Our goals: to enable a safe, creative space for students to share their ideas; to offer a playwriting tutorial; and to devise a play to reflect the concerns and authentic voice of young adults. At the beginning of the process, students agreed to a series of criteria to build trust within the group, including the removal of status—in this space we were all equal, the sanctity of the devising space—what is said in the space stays in the space, and respect and civil discourse are expected. Personal stories were not encouraged; imagination was celebrated.

We began the process by asking a simple question: What do you want to write about that reflects your community and why? Responses to that first question formed the backdrop for our work. All ideas were written down on large sheets of paper and posted on the walls. In small groups, larger groups and whole group, we brainstormed, sharing ideas and making decisions about themes, characters and actions. At times, students worked independently, taking part in writing exercises. Active drama-based experiences further built community and discovery of possibilities. Throughout the process, we explored playwriting tools, including structure, character development, theme and theatricality. As ideas began to take shape, it was clear that our group would not be able to agree on a single main character. They had fallen hard for the stories we had created for three characters and, although we tried to choose among them, it was impossible. We knew then that instead of the more traditional single main character, three young adults would form the basis for the play.

Armed with a mountain of ideas and three main characters, I wrote the first draft. The next phase was focused on refining the script. After a brief tutorial on dramaturgy, we discussed language adjustments to reflect current teen-speak. We read the play aloud listening to the rhythm and flow of the plot. This gave rise to further brainstorming and rewrites. Our work culminated with a rehearsed reading for a small, invited audience, including the heads of school.

Now it was time to write the production draft and put the play on its feet. During the rehearsal process, more rewrites were realized as the performance came together. Each of us had a role to play—playwright, director, devising group, actors and tech crew. Our director added student musicians, dancers and a DJ. Ultimately, 52 students played a role in bringing this play to life. The students had been committed to every aspect of the project. Now it truly belonged to them. And the performances? Let's just say our team exceeded my expectations in every way, from start to finish, and audiences not only were fully engaged in the play, but also received the interactive forum as a welcome opportunity for them to participate, too!

—Laurie Brooks, Playwright



## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

We all know that truth can be stranger than fiction, yet we often criticize the stories that we consume on page or screen for being somehow unbelievable or “incredible.” If I have learned anything from living within a school community during the past 14 years, it is that these young peoples’ stories can be every bit as shocking, dramatic, breathtaking and beautiful as those we encounter in the news and entertainment medias. The truth is that, ultimately, there is no “bubble” that protects our loved ones from the pains and hardships of this world.

We say, all too often, that teenagers “have it easy,” that “someday” they will learn the burden of real responsibility and stress. I now know better. I have watched teenagers struggle courageously under potentially overwhelming burdens, some remarkably similar to those featured in this play, and some more challenging still. I have witnessed acts of discipline, devotion, compassion and sheer will that have left me humbled. I have witnessed acts of love that have instructed me in how to live my own ideals more fully.

One of the unique features of a Laurie Brooks play is the interactive forum following the action of the story that puts characters and audience members into conversation with one another. Witnessing the earnest and open dialogue among students, their peers and parents that followed the three performances of *Searchers* affirmed the belief that led me to reach out to Laurie as a collaborator in the first place: that ours is a community capable of having difficult conversations in a way that is both truthful and loving—even when those conversations have to do with some of the most sensitive issues touching our community. It also affirmed the belief that a good theatre program, like a good school, is a safe place to

talk about dangerous things. This is a core value on which both our high school and theatre program are founded.

Dozens of Ensworth students worked with Laurie in a series of workshops throughout the school year to conceive and refine the central themes and questions that were to be explored in this new play, as well as its plot and various characters. Many of those students were represented in the cast that finally brought that work to the stage. I would like to thank all of the students who participated in the creation of this work—it would not exist as it does without your honesty, generosity and courage. I would also like to thank Laurie Brooks for the generosity that she brought to this project and partnership. And, finally, I would like to thank the generous benefactor that made this collaboration possible.

I hope that *Searchers* benefits your community as much as it has benefited ours.

—David Berry,  
Commissioning Director

For David Berry  
Teacher, director and inspiration  
Thanks for being you

# Searchers

## CHARACTERS

SAMMIE: 17.

BEN: 17.

ISAAC: 17.

MR. WYNN: Isaac's dad.

CAROL: Ben's mom, walks with a cane.

ARCHER: Sammie's dad.

CHLOE: Sammie's mom.

BROOKLYN: 14, Ben's sister.

SYDNEY: 17.

EMMA: 17.

MAX: 17.

CHAD: 17.

ENSEMBLE

## PRODUCTION NOTES

This play is designed to create an intimate atmosphere between the actors and the audience. The audience sits on two or three raked sides of a playing space that ideally has multiple levels. The playing space is used for multiple locations that are designed to be simple and nonspecific rather than literal. Set pieces are not necessary. A few chairs and a table may be used. The actors are scattered in the space, seated around and among the audience, allowing for easy access to the playing area. When needed for scenes, the actors move in and out of the playing space during light shifts that signal scene endings. Whether in the scenes or in their seats, actors remain in character for the entire play. The ensemble often speaks not only to each other and the characters but also directly to the audience.

This play is designed with short scenes for a keen sense of forward motion. As a result, the action of the play should not be interrupted by taking actors completely on and off the stage rather than back to their seats in full view of the audience. The ensemble members are an integral part of the play, commenting on and adding to the action with their points of view using assigned dialogue, reactions and facial expressions.

In stage directions, “in” indicates actors move into the playing space. “Out” signals actors move out of the playing space and into their seats. Ensemble size is at the discretion of the director.

# Searchers

*(Lights. Bell rings.*

*ENSEMBLE MEMBERS stand, scan the audience, then speak.)*

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. What do people see,  
When they look at me?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. A reflection?  
A replication?  
An opinion?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. The outside without the inside. An  
idea of who I am.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Is it possible they see the real me?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Not a chance.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Not unless I let them look inside ...

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. And that's risky.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Who can tell me who I really am?  
Inside *and* outside?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. My parents?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. My friends?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. My brother?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. My sister?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. My best friend?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Maybe. Maybe not.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. How about Aunt Susan? She's  
really smart.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. I don't think so.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Am I unique?

Or some carbon copy?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. How can I even know?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Will somebody please show me who I am?

*(ISAAC, SAMMIE and BEN stand, then speak.)*

ISAAC. Not a pretender.

SAMMIE. Not a fake.

BEN. Not synthetic. Authentic.

SAMMIE, BEN & ISAAC. Me.

ENSEMBLE MEMBERS. Three families,  
Three stories,  
A place anywhere in America.

*(SAMMIE, BEN and ISAAC in. They speak to each other and to the audience.)*

SAMMIE. I'm Samantha, Sammie for short.

BEN. Ben. Just Ben.

ISAAC. Isaac. But I'm outa here.

SAMMIE. No way. You gotta be here.

BEN. It's your story, too.

ISAAC. That's why I'm leaving.

*(SAMMIE and BEN pull him back.)*

BEN. Stay. Got it?

SAMMIE. You agreed, remember?

ISAAC. OK. OK.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Three in an endless sea of others

Excavating the questions.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Hoping to find some answers.

BEN. Or maybe get a clue.

ISAAC. Good luck with that.

SAMMIE. Don't be so negative.

*(Lights shift. Bell rings.*

*ENSEMBLE MEMBERS sit. ISAAC out.*

*SAMMIE and BEN lounge with opened books.)*

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(scene title)*. Sammie and Ben:

DIVORCE SUCKS.

BEN. I hate chemistry. It's totally opaque.

SAMMIE. How come you use the weirdest word you can think of when you could just say chem is hard? And anyway, I like chemistry.

BEN. Great. You do my homework.

SAMMIE. Nice try, but I got enough, thanks.

*(Silence.)*

BEN. What are you doing Friday night?

*(SAMMIE gives BEN a look.)*

BEN *(cont'd)*. Chad again?

SAMMIE. Don't say it like that. Besides, he's just Right-Now-Boy. That's all.

BEN. I don't get what you see in that imitation of a person.

SAMMIE. That's nice. And unfair.



BEN. You're right. What I mean to say is he's shallow, unimaginative and without a moral center.

SAMMIE. Changing the subject.

BEN. I mean, is that guy even real or some, you know, Cylon?

SAMMIE. This conversation is getting old.

BEN. OK. It's up to you who you want to hang out with.

SAMMIE. He's fun.

BEN. Right.

SAMMIE. I am right, Benjamin.

BEN. Wrong, Samantha.

*(SAMMIE tackles BEN. BEN pulls away.)*

SAMMIE. What's the matter?

BEN. Nothing. I gotta study, and you're distracting me.

SAMMIE. Sor-ry.

*(CHLOE in.)*

CHLOE. Hi, Ben. I didn't know you were here or I would have come out to say hello.

BEN. Yeah. We're studying.

CHLOE. How's it going? Is she learning anything?

BEN. It's good.

CHLOE. Well, keep up the good work. I gotta run. I'm so late. See you two later.

BEN. Bye, Chloe.

CHLOE. You two have fun!

*(Sound of door closing. CHLOE out.)*

SAMMIE. Good riddance.

BEN. Come on. Chloe's OK.

SAMMIE. Whose side are you on anyway?

BEN. Yours, of course.

SAMMIE. All she cares about is how much money she can get in the divorce, new boyfriends and custody of me. I can't believe what she's doing to Dad. It makes me crazy.

BEN. Divorce sucks.

SAMMIE. And that's not the worst part. The worst is what people say. (*Imitates.*) "Lots of families go through divorce. You'll be fine." Everybody acts like it's nothing and I feel like the whole world is falling apart. I can't stand the way they're always fighting.

BEN. I thought your dad moved out.

SAMMIE. Yeah. He's got that apartment downtown.

BEN. So less fighting?

SAMMIE. Yeah, but still. The stuff they said to each other. It plays in my head, over and over. They used to love each other. I can't ...

*(SAMMIE is close to tears. BEN holds her.*

*Silence.)*

SAMMIE (*cont'd*). He's moving to California.

BEN. Your dad?

SAMMIE. And he wants me to go with him.

BEN. To California? When is he leaving?

SAMMIE. I'm not sure. There might be a custody battle, and I'll have to say who I want to live with.

BEN. What are you going to do?

SAMMIE. I'm not sure. I mean, I love them both. They're my parents, but Mom's a pain and Dad, well, he's fun.

BEN. Fun isn't everything.

SAMMIE. It's something.

BEN. Yeah, but it's the middle of the school year. You won't know anyone there.

SAMMIE. I know.

BEN. I don't want you to go.

*(Silence.)*

BEN *(cont'd)*. Look. Do what you gotta do.

SAMMIE. I don't know what to do. It's messing with me. I can't sleep. I'm having trouble concentrating. And it's all because I don't know how to decide whether to go or stay here.

BEN. When I feel like that, all freaked and crazy, I figure if I wait a little, maybe I'll figure it out.

SAMMIE. You think so?

BEN. Sometimes it works.

SAMMIE. My life's here, you know, everything. But the thought of living alone with Chloe ...

BEN. You're tough. You'll figure it out.

SAMMIE. You're so good for me, Ben.

BEN. Count on it.

SAMMIE. You're the one person who really sees me. I can totally be myself when I'm with you, ever since forever, when we were really little.

BEN. That's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

*(SAMMIE punches BEN's arm.)*

SAMMIE. Stop it.

BEN. Stop what?

SAMMIE. I was being serious.

BEN. Well, don't do that. That's no fun.

SAMMIE. What would I do without you?

BEN. I don't know. Go out with Chad?

*(Lights shift. Bell rings.)*

*SAMMIE and BEN out.*

*ISAAC and his dad, MR. WYNN, in.)*

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(scene title)*. Isaac and his dad, Mr. Wynn.

FRIENDS DON'T TREAT FRIENDS LIKE THAT.

*(ISAAC sees his dad approaching, walks in another direction.)*

MR. WYNN. Hey, Isaac. Wait a minute.

ISAAC. What's up?

MR. WYNN. The library's been pretty quiet today so I hunted up that article I was telling you about. I think it'll really help with that debate topic we talked about yesterday.

ISAAC. Yeah. Thanks, Dad.

MR. WYNN. Are you all right?

*(Tries to feel ISAAC's forehead.)*

ISAAC. Dad, I don't have a temperature.

MR. WYNN. You were coughing last night. With the regionals coming up you can't afford to get sick.

ISAAC. I'm fine. Stop asking. And if I get sick it's not like I made it happen, OK?

*(ISAAC sees CHAD, SYDNEY and MAX stand.)*

ISAAC. I gotta go.

MR. WYNN. Will you be home for dinner tonight?

ISAAC. I don't think so.

MR. WYNN. I'd like to know one way or the other if you'll be home for dinner.

ISAAC. No, I won't.

MR. WYNN. Where will you be?

*(SYDNEY, MAX and CHAD in.)*

ISAAC. I gotta go.

SYDNEY. Hey, Isaac. Hey, Mr. Wynn.

CHAD. I like your tie, Mr. Wynn.

*(CHAD, MAX and SYDNEY snicker. Muffled laughter from some of the seated ENSEMBLE MEMBERS.)*

MAX. See you at the library, Isaac.

*(MAX, SYDNEY and CHAD out.)*

MR. WYNN. Don't pay any attention to them. They're immature and thoughtless.

ISAAC. They're my friends, Dad, OK?

MR. WYNN. Friends don't treat friends like that.

ISAAC. You don't get it.

MR. WYNN. It's possible I know more than you think. I was your age, too, once upon a time, long, long ago.

ISAAC. Really?

MR. WYNN. See you at debate prep. Three o'clock sharp.

ISAAC. I know. I know.

*(Lights shift. Bell rings.*

*MR. WYNN and ISAAC out.*

*SAMMIE, BEN, BROOKLYN and CAROL in. CAROL walks slowly, using a cane.)*

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(scene title.)* Sammie, Ben, Brooklyn, and Carol.

THAT'S WHY THEY CALL IT AN ACCIDENT.

BEN. Well, I don't believe it. None of it. It's stupid.

CAROL. Ben, get ahold of your temper before it gets hold of you, right?

BEN. It's easy for those doctors to say you're not going to get better.

They toss it off like it's nothing.

CAROL. That's not true, Ben. It can't be easy for them either.

BEN. I'm just saying I don't believe it.

SAMMIE. I don't believe it either.

CAROL. I don't want to believe it.

BEN. So don't.

CAROL. I'm trying, Ben. I had this dream last night. I was completely weightless. I floated right up into the clouds and when I sailed down, I tossed this cane right into the trash and walked away, easy and graceful as a dancer. No pain at all. Just like that.

BEN. We should get another opinion.

CAROL. How many opinions do you think we need when they're all saying the same thing?

BEN. Doctors can be wrong. They're just people.

BROOKLYN. Yeah. They're full of it.

CAROL. Brooklyn.

BROOKLYN. Well, they are. And people make mistakes a lot. And, they make assumptions too, all the time.

CAROL. I think I'm finished with second opinions. That's it.

BEN. You're gonna give up? Just like that?

BROOKLYN. Not like you, Ma.

CAROL. Me? Give up? Did I say I give up?

SAMMIE. I didn't hear you say that.

BROOKLYN. You've got a plan, don't you.

BEN. I should have known.

CAROL. I do have a plan. You think I want to spend the rest of my life hobbling around and having someone fetch and carry for me? Not if I can do something about it.

SAMMIE. So, tell us.

BROOKLYN. Yeah. What's the plan?

CAROL. Well, I'll continue the physical therapy and look into some holistic possibilities, diet and lifestyle choices, yoga maybe. You know, look at all the options.

BROOKLYN. For real?

CAROL. I've made up my mind so don't try to talk me out of it.

BEN. Yeah. That's a study in futility.

SAMMIE. I wouldn't dream of talking you out of it. I think it's an inspired idea.

BROOKLYN. I think so, too, Ma.

CAROL. So I have your support? Because that means a lot to me.

SAMMIE. Of course.

BROOKLYN. I want to go with you to the holistic docs. See what they do. Yoga, too.

CAROL. If it's after school, sure.

BROOKLYN. Maybe they have kickboxing.

*(BROOKLYN demonstrates her version of kickboxing.)*

CAROL. We'll find out, won't we.

BEN. OK. Here's the plan. I'll go to college locally and look after you and Brooke while you get better.

BROOKLYN. Brooklyn, please.

BEN. I forgot. Brooklyn.

BROOKLYN. Practice makes perfect.

CAROL. So, forget applying to Stanford, Vanderbilt or Princeton, is that it? Forget about all your plans?

BEN. I can get a good education anywhere. I can transfer.

BROOKLYN. Then Ben won't have to go away for two whole years.

BEN. You need me here, Ma.

CAROL. If you want to help, Ben, here's what you can do to make me truly happy. Go to a great school and work hard. Make friends. Do what you love. And most importantly, be a good citizen of the world.

SAMMIE. I love you, Carol.

CAROL. I love you, too, sweetie.

BEN. Mom, I can do all those things right here *and* take care of you.

SAMMIE. I agree with your mom.

BEN. Thanks for taking my side.

BROOKLYN. I'm on your side.

BEN. If I go, who's going to take care of you?

BROOKLYN. I can do it. But I'd be happier if you were here.