

## Oleanna by David Mamet

Kyle - Carol, college student, early-20s  
Sam - John, professor, mid-30s



Sam-

Oleanna by David Mamet was the first play after reading I was certain that I wanted to perform. The plot is simple and based on a “he said, she said” principle, but behind it all, Mamet clearly wants us to focus on the power struggle between the smug, pedantic professor John and his failing student Carol taking place in their conversations. John feels certain of his position in the world as an almost tenured professor in the professional world and as the father of his budding family in his domestic life at the beginning of the play. Carol comes in for help in order to not fail out of his class, and small actions taken by John, whether they are actual harassment or not, set John up for a fall. Throughout the play, Mamet adds details that create John’s downfall at Carol’s hands, yet as John’s world is crumbling around him, the audience is not sure whether to feel sympathy for him or be glad of Carol’s triumph. Both of the characters are unlikable; Carol is for her vindictive desire to see John fall over technicalities in the law and John because of his hubris. I found that while reading the play my sympathies would shift literally from line to line as the power struggle between the two characters developed. At the end, the conclusion left me in greater doubt over who the true victim was than at the beginning.

Coming into our scene, the final in the play, Mamet does not make it clear who knows what. John clearly does not know he is being prosecuted for rape, but Carol does not make it clear whether she is aware of his ignorance. In this situation, John slowly realizes that Carol one by one has taken away everything John holds of value: his job, his book, his wife, and his son. We hope to encapsulate in this short scene the doubt, the build-up of tension, and the shocking conclusion.

Kyle-

As Sam and I worked on developing the power struggles between the characters in each scene, we tried to build up both the characters’ strengths and weaknesses. Carol is a young girl, slightly older than me, at a university, which she enjoys a lot. Though I do not think that Carol is a stupid girl, she is not the brightest student, often stumbling over vocabulary and writing feverishly in her notebook. David Mamet makes it clear that she loves school—despite her awful grades—and builds this relationship between teacher and student around a specific class. That she chooses to meet with her professor shows that Carol is a determined and motivated young girl, despite her naivety and underprivileged background.

Before this scene, her and John’s relationship is very clearly unequal; his subtle remarks about her inability to ever be as educated or as sophisticated as he reveals that he is a man that she will struggle to get any real help out of. She tries relentlessly nevertheless, but to no avail. When he touches her with questionable intent, Carol is unsure of what to do. Her professor, who always establishes his power over her, has lost it suddenly. Entering this scene, Carol has consulted a lawyer and has begun to pursue criminal charges against him. For this reason, when he calls her in to speak to her in this scene, she is confused. She assumed everything was over. I believe that Carol here shows a lot more of her awkward intimidation at the start of this scene. I try to convey her discomfort in the beginning and then gradually become more confident as she begins to argue with him, displaying a power over him she has never experienced before. More comfortable in the dominant position, she oversteps her boundaries and sets her professor back into a position where in order to obtain any minimal amount of control over her, he has to seize it.

## Selected Acting Scenes with Kyle Kankonde and Sam Thorpe



**Thursday, May 5, 9:45 AM**

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## ***A Doll's House* - Henrik Ibsen**

Kyle - Nora, housewife, mid-30s  
Sam - Torvald, banker, early 40s

Sam-

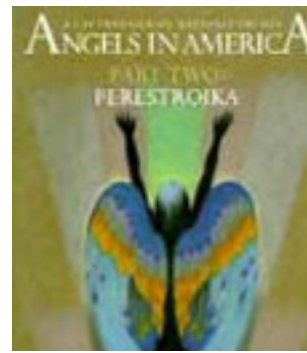
When I first read *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, I was surprised by its modernity. While it points the play's dialogue feels old-fashioned and awkward translated from the original Norwegian, underneath the creaky framework are notions thoroughly radical for its day on the role of women in the family and society. The relationship between the husband, Torvald Helmer, and his wife, Nora, lie at the center of the play. Because of her husband's illness during the early years of their marriage, necessity forced Nora to forge papers in order to secure a loan to provide Torvald with a trip to the south to help him recover. Nora proves herself to be capable, resourceful and everything her husband is not; Torvald prefers to withdraw to the shelter of the house, away the problems of the world, where he is allowed to be the master. I see the conflict that rages around Nora's sole act of independence as a conflict between the conservative Victorian ideals epitomized in Torvald's cloying condescension for his wife and Nora's thoroughly modern desire to learn to become an independent woman in spite of her limited life experience.

Out the three characters I am playing in these scenes, I can only empathize with Torvald. Torvald is old fashioned in his views on the role of women in the house, something I do not agree with at all, but his affection, albeit selfish affection, in my mind makes sense. Despite the fact that his fabricated domestic bliss comes at the expense of Nora's independence, Torvald manages to avoid coming across as malicious. Torvald is too weak and ineffectual to intentionally act in a manner that he knows would harm his wife. He still manages to hurt her, but only through his adherence to his antiquated values, not a conscious decision to trap Nora in a gilded cage.

Kyle-

I find Nora to be a very interesting character to portray for this project. She is respectful and loving woman who really cherishes her children. She has been raised to think a certain way, to be subservient to men, and to abide by societal rules that bound and constrict. Still, she manages to serve as the rock in the home, the solid foundation that all family and friends rely on. She is generous with her skills and her time and puts the needs of others over her own. She contemplates her life and where she is often in her free moments when she is alone or with her best friend, Christine.

Torvald and Nora have an argument, which happens to be the fight that gives her the confidence to leave this limited life in search of something much more personal and satisfying. In this scene, she enters the room nervous and unsure if she will maintain her courage when she confronts Torvald about their life together. She knows he will not understand, that he will not let her go, but has faith that leaving this life is best for her. I really admire Nora and when I thought about how I would play her, I thought about how difficult this confrontation would be in real life. I try to feel her anxiety, her hope, her fear in this scene. She has the control in this scene, but I did not interpret that she was happy with her dominance; I get the feeling Nora wishes her life with Torvald was a happy one. But in her heart of hearts, she knows that she cannot love him or her life with him anymore. Though the couple struggles to cope, Nora finally frees them all in the end.



## ***Angels in America* - Tony Kushner**

Kyle - Norman Arriega (a.k.a. Belize), Black homosexual male nurse, late 30s  
Sam - Roy Cohn, U.S. attorney, closeted homosexual, AIDS patient, late 50s

Sam-

When Kyle and I were sitting down to select the play from which we would cut our third scene from, we both agreed that a comedic scene would be both fun and useful to lessen the tension created by our other two very dramatic, very charged scenes. Somewhere along the line, we ended up selecting two connected scenes from the second play of *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner that manage to exceed the other two scenes in intensity. We are not disappointed though in our choice; the two scenes between Belize and Roy are confrontations between two very distinct and very real characters, and while they are intense, they reveal a lot about these two characters and present unique acting obstacle for both Kyle and myself.

These two scenes center on the clash of Belize and Roy's very forceful personalities. These scenes in themselves are a lesson in acting for both of us. Aside from including another challenging scene for the audience, Kyle and I were both slightly daunted by the acting challenge presented by this scene. Kyle is Belize, a black, male, former drag queen nurse, and I am Roy Cohn, a self-hating, anti-Semitic Jew and a homophobic homosexual. Roy is a thoroughly despicable man, and to inhabit his mind seemed unforgiveable. The manner in which he speaks to Belize, alternating between rude and in-your-face to self centered and manipulating is a way I would never consider to speak to a fellow human being. The character Roy Cohn truly forces me to learn to delineate in my mind between the character's actions and my own, while remaining fully cognizant of the scene that we are creating.

Kyle-

Belize is a force; he is captivating and strong, compassionate and stubborn. His attitudes are complex and his thoughts and actions are quick and calculated. Taking on a character like Belize was a little daunting; I have never played a gay man before. Working to justify his words, his accent, and his demeanor took a lot of interpretation and work outside of our rehearsal times. I struggled to understand the experience of a gay man and tried to imagine what that experience would feel like.

I pictured a man overwhelmed and frustrated by his place within the most isolated minority—a black homosexual. Belize has to juggle the pros and cons of his identity in New York City right in the midst of the AIDS outbreak in the 80s. I see Belize has a solid figure, a man who is very sure of himself and his place and has found ways to thrive within it. His love for people and goodness give him faith and life. He is bound to his closest friends and his family. He is determined to guide and lead, even when he is at his worst. His friends and family rely on him because he is brutally honest, yet selfless.

I love *Angels in America* because of the depth and intricacy of the relationships—nothing is clean-cut or simple—which I believe is very realistic. In this particular scene, we worked with two very dynamic and influential characters in their own (very different) ways. The dominant figure alternates throughout as neither one can quite gain complete control. Belize relies on a lot of inner strength to get through his interactions with Roy. A force himself, Roy represents all that Belize hates and because they are so extremely opposite, conflicts erupt quite easily. The power struggle within this scene is exciting and unpredictable and the way they both need each other for different things at different times makes this a very interesting and complex relationship.