

**HEARST** *foundations*

Palm Beach Dramaworks is committed to using drama as a tool to raise awareness about the opioid overdose epidemic. In an effort to support education and awareness at the middle school level, this tour uses the power of storytelling and the performing arts to draw attention to the severity of this issue.

### The Characters

**Kal:** A boy who's floating; sophomore in high school

**Valora:** A girl who's racing; freshman in high school

**Neri:** A girl who hangs around the edges; 8th grade

### The Setting

Various locations and in their memories.

### Time

Now

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## The Story

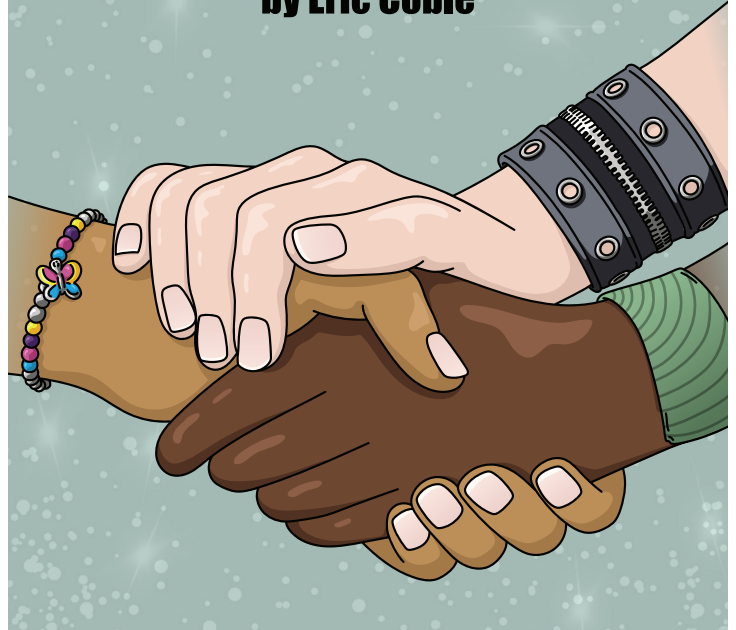
The following is a thorough, moment to moment retelling of the plot, giving educators a thorough understanding of the play. The characters speak reflectively, sharing their memories of the recent past.

Kal, Valora, and Neri enter to reveal their greatest wish: Kal wants to be a musician, Valora wants to run a mile in 3 minutes and 43 seconds, and Neri wants to build a time machine.

Kal admits that his grades are poor, especially in algebra. He says his mother yells at him constantly for his lack of drive, so he puts on his headphones to quiet the noise. He loves to play the guitar and hopes the videos he posts on TikTok will make him rich. His grandmother supports his dream and allows him to practice at her home for hours. She tells him, "You're gonna be something, Kal."

# HUNGRY GHOSTS

**A PLAY ABOUT IMPACT**  
by Eric Coble



Valora excels at running on her high school track team, and she mentions that college reps are now attending her meets. Though it feels awkward to be watched, she concentrates fully on her speed.

Neri, Valora's younger sister, states a time machine would allow her to go back and correct some of her embarrassing moments. Most importantly, though, she would like to go back in time to stop Valora. Neri acknowledges that she is shy and "never popular," while her sister is good at everything. She says Valora is "smart and cool," and never hesitates to include her in everything she does.

Kal talks about his best friends Ramiro and Jeremy, with whom he plays Fortnite. He says that if a music career doesn't work, he would like to be a video game tester.

Neri appears in Valora's room before a race, and they share a fun, weekly pre-race ritual to boost Valora's confidence. Valora transitions to the track meet, and Neri cheers from the stands. Valora describes a competitor in front of her who trips and falls. When Valora attempts to avoid the accident, her foot catches on the fallen runner's leg, and she falls, badly injuring her knee. This is the moment Neri says she wants to go back in time to change.

Kal reflects on a Saturday night when he, Ramiro, and Jeremy went to a party and first drank beer. Someone offered them marijuana and they reluctantly accepted. Kal talks about how the marijuana made him feel: "Like we had all the time and space we needed for the rest of our lives."

After surgery to repair her knee, Valora realizes recovery will be long, and she will never be able to run "full out again." She mentions her prescription, a two-week supply of "pain pills" to ease the soreness. She is told that the medication is an opioid, and they are addictive. When she returns to school, she hears sympathy from everyone, but she feels her friends' lives continue while hers will never be the same. She is now unsure about her identity and her future without running. Neri mentions that their parents are very worried, and they've "started murmuring."

Valora realizes that the opioids not only stop the pain, but they put her in "a warm cloud blanket." At that point, her prescription ends. She recalls that a friend's mother had surgery recently, and she asks her friend to look in her mother's medicine cabinet, "Just in case I need them." Valora says her friend "comes through" and brings her several pills. Kal thinks that "getting high" gives him greater musical ability, and he seeks to recapture that high to pursue his dreams. He mentions contacting the man at the party who first gave him and his friends marijuana, a guy named Ledger, who "has the goods." Kal and Valora both admit how relieved they feel now that they have a source.

Neri is happy that Valora finally seems like her old self. At the same time, Valora learns that her friend will no longer steal pills from her mother's medicine cabinet. Kal mentions that he's composing many songs while high and recording them on his phone. However, when he listens to them the next day, they sound basic. He uses his birthday money to buy marijuana from Ledger, and Ramiro and Jeremy chip in for several weeks. However, they say it's too expensive, and that they're "...going

back to beer." Kal is angry but determined that he'll buy it himself.

As the effects of the prescription opioids wear off during school, Valora feels the physical results: sweating palms, labored breathing, and the pain in her knee. Without a source, she decides to go to the park where she knows "the real stoners hang out." She tells a dealer she needs "Oxy or Vicodin." He tells her he knows someone who can help, but she needs to return with cash.

Kal mentions that over the summer he worked at a grocery store stocking shelves. In order to earn money now to purchase marijuana, he asks his former supervisor for a job on weekends and weeknights. The supervisor agrees, and Kal is thrilled. Valora admits that her father is very sympathetic to her condition and happy to give her spending money for outings with friends. She admits, however, that she is lying to her father and using the money to secure her "warm cloud blanket." Neri nervously questions Valora after hearing her tell their mother she went "out with Amber." Neri says she saw Amber at choir practice. Valora becomes angry and accuses Neri of calling her a liar.

Kal admits he wants to feel good "every night," but that the high is diminishing, requiring him to smoke more. After confronting Ledger, Ledger tells him that his body is now used to it, so he needs the "top-of-the-line stuff. The only downside," Ledger says, "is that it's way expensive." Kal tells him he's determined to get the necessary cash.

Valora decides her injury prevents her from running, so she gets rid of her running shoes. Neri admits that watching Valora decline is like watching a horror movie where an evil spirit enters someone's body. Kal realizes Ledger was right, and the more expensive marijuana gives him the high he seeks. It's so expensive, he says the only way he can buy it regularly is to quit school and work full time. Ledger tells him that if he wants to get high for half the cost, he should try "Vicodin or Percocet." Kal is concerned because he's heard they're "super addictive," but Ledger tells him that if he has a "good dealer," he will get safe pills. Ledger suggests Kal speak to a fellow student, Valora, who can attest to its quality.

Kal introduces himself to Valora and asks if the pills she's taking are "worth it?" He says that he's concerned about deadly fentanyl cut into opioids. Valora is shocked that Ledger gave him her name but tells him that "One pill doesn't kill you." She echoes Ledger's promise that his stuff isn't dangerous. Valora defensively explains that she

only takes opioids to help her knee, and that she's going to stop completely when it heals. When he asks if he'll become addicted, she tells him, "I'm not." Kal decides to buy the opioids, and they make him "feel good again."

Kal says he's met other young people who "do Oxy," and one who does heroin. He decides heroin is too much. Kal acknowledges one new friend has his own apartment, and that's where he now spends most of his time.

Neri sadly reveals that Valora and her parents now shout at one another regularly, and there is a lot of tension at home. Valora says that arguments with her parents lead to anxiety and require "more meds." Kal discloses that in order to purchase opioids he is taking money from his mother's wallet. He further realizes that if he pawns his video game console, he can make quick cash. Valora admits that her grades are slipping, and no longer cares about going to college. Kal pawns his electric guitar, which gives him enough cash for two weeks.

Neri recounts a Chinese ghost story she learned in school about "hungry ghosts" who are "doomed to want food all the time," and are never satisfied. She says that Valora is "turning into one of those."

Kal says that he's low on money, sleeping through work shifts, failing in school, and his mother has given up on him. An acquaintance, Deaver, tells Kal that he can get high for less money by taking heroin. When Kal tells him that he doesn't like needles, Deaver tells him that he can "just snort it."

Valora divulges that due to her grades her father will no longer give her spending money. She states that she loves her father, but all she can focus on is getting high. She says she is seeking a way to stay high while spending less money.

Valora sees Kal and asks if he has any pills. He tells her that he's no longer taking pills but doing "H," heroine. Valora asks if it works, and Kal tells her it's "amazing." She admits she needs something that lasts longer than pills so that she doesn't have to take as much. He tells her it's cheap so she requests a contact. He says he's meeting him now and asks if she wants to come. After hesitating, she says yes.

Neri, trying to determine what is going on with Valora, starts going through her backpack when she's out of the room. She finds pills in a secret pocket, and her instinct is to throw them away. She faces the dilemma of angering

Valora, knowing if she does nothing Valora will die. Neri puts the drugs back and says nothing.

Valora and Kal, now friends, talk about lost time, and don't know if days or even weeks are going by. Valora asks Kal if he's heard about the boy from school who overdosed. He hasn't but says it's "probably fentanyl." Valora asks if it will happen to them, but Kal says "Deaver and Ledger are careful." Valora asks if his nose is running all time, and he's not sure. She says that her eyes water all the time, and she feels "achey and tired," like she has the flu . . . even when she's high. She thinks she should increase her dose. Kal tells her that he was told injecting with a needle "is faster and better than the other way." Kal wants to try it, but Valora says she heard needles might cause infection, and that the kid who died recently "had maggots living in the rotten parts of his arm." Kal says he probably used a dirty needle and he would only use a clean one. Kal asks her to try it with him, but she's unsure. He tells her that they'll just try it once, and if they don't like it like they'll stop. When Valora asks if the heroine will be pure, Kal says that "Deaver knows exactly how much other stuff to put in it to really give it a kick. He's been doing it for years." Valora agrees to try it with Kal once.

Neri says that she now gets up in the middle of the night to see if Valora is still alive. One night, she sees multiple spots on Valora's arm, which is outside the blanket. After she screams, her parents come into the bedroom, and Valora accuses Neri of betrayal, telling her, "I hate you." Neri reveals that Valora was taken to rehab but doesn't know if she saved her or killed her. At school she is now known as the "Sister of the Junkie," and nobody talks to her.

Kal loses his job and spends a lot of time at his grandmother's house. He says she's the only one who is concerned about him. Noticing his grandmother's valuable belongings, he begins putting them in his pockets to pawn. He knows it makes him a bad person, but feels she'll forgive him. He just needs to get high one more time.

Valora recounts how the withdrawal experience in rehab was terrible. She says she felt hot and cold, her heart raced, she couldn't sleep and she vomited quite a bit. Neri says her parents are now arguing more and more, and she has to hide in her room to escape the tension. She focuses on studying and getting straight A grades so that her parents won't have to worry about her, too. She feels ignored because they're focusing so much on Valora.

Kal feels guilty about stealing from his grandmother, but he needs money. After finding her checkbook, he writes checks to himself, forging his grandmother's signature. One day, the bank teller tells him there is a problem and to wait. A policeman appears next to Kal and takes him away.

Valora has finally made it through rehab and returns home. Neri is happy and scared because she doesn't know if Valora still loves her. Valora runs and hugs Neri, and Neri is relieved. They happily go through their previous pre-race ritual. As their dad makes Valora's favorite meal, lasagna, Valora goes to her room and realizes her family went through the bedroom and found her hidden "stashes." She tells her family she is going for a walk, and Neri asks if she can come with her. Valora implies she needs solitary time, and Neri proudly says her sister is "gonna make it." Valora tells herself she will just need "a pill or two."

Valora describes seeking Ledger at the park, where she takes three pills before returning home. She tells her family she'll be in her room, and to call her when dinner is ready. She feels like "My warm cloud blanket is back." When their father calls them to dinner, Neri excitedly walks to Valora's bedroom. She sees Valora is not breathing, and her parents call 911. She says the paramedics administered Narcan, but it was too late. Neri recounts her parents' anguish. Valora stands and exits from the stage.

Kal explains the tough withdrawal process he experienced in prison and realizes it was the best thing for him. He admits he's going to be in jail for a while because his grandmother pressed charges. He speaks about the loneliness and sadness he feels, and how all he wants "is a hit." He asks an inmate with an illegal phone to google Valora, and learns she's overdosed. He tries not to think about her too much so he can concentrate on writing lyrics. When he's released, he wants his guitar back.

Neri says that Valora's death created conflict in her family, stating that her father is "destroyed." She feels great anger toward Valora, but also tells her all the time that she's sorry and that she loves her. She just wants to build a time machine so that she can see her again.



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