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# *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan

## Study Guide

Keaton Shapiro - April 26, 2016

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## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Play</b>	<b>4</b>
The Characters	4
The Playwright	5
Synopsis	6
<b>Life in Mumbai</b>	<b>9</b>
A Map of Mumbai	10
A (Brief) History of India and England	11
Marriage and Home Life	13
The House	13
The Wife and the Mother-in-Law	13
<b>What About Us?</b>	<b>14</b>
Consumer Culture in America	14
The Rich at the Expense of the Poor	15
I Wanna Live Forever	16
Where Have I Heard This Before?	17
If you could have anything... <i>(activity)</i>	18
<b>Online Resources Used</b>	<b>19</b>

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## Introduction

Hi! Welcome to the Study Guide for *Harvest* by Manjula Padmanabhan. We're so excited to have you join us for this wonderful production. We hope you find this study guide enjoyable as well as informative, and hope that it serves to enhance not only the production you saw but also the conversations you have, and continue to have, about the play and its themes.

Thank you so much!  
The Staff of *Harvest*

*“Briefing complete, initiate  
departure procedure”  
- Harvest, p17*

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# The Play

## Characters

*as described by the Playwright*

### The Donors:

**Om** — 20 years old, he has been laid off from his job as a clerk and is the bread-earner of his small family.

**Jaya** — Om's wife. Thin and haggard, she looks older than her 19 years.

**Ma** — Om's mother and Jaya's mother-in-law. She is 60 years old.

**Jeetu** — Om's younger brother, 17 and handsome. He works as a male prostitute and has a dashing, easy-going likable personality.

**Bidyut Bai** — An elderly neighbor, self-effacing.

### The Guards

A group of 3 commando-like characters who collect from the donors.

**Guard 1** — The leader of the team. A man in his mid-40s with military bearing.

**Guard 2** — A young woman, unsmiling and efficient.

**Guard 3** — A male clone of Guard 2.

### The Agents

Space-age delivery-persons. Roles are interchangeable with the guards but they do not belong to the same agency.

### The Receivers

**Ginni** — blonde, white-skinned epitome of an American-style youth goddess, with a sweet and sexy voice.

**Virgil** — never seen. Has an American cigarette-commercial accent — rich and smoky, attractive and rugged.

### *Fun Fact!*

The word **Om** is a mystic syllable, and is considered the most sacred mantra. It is often used in meditation and Yoga.

## About the Playwright — Manjula Padmanabhan

Manjula Padmanabhan is an Indian fiction writer, artist, and playwright, as well as India's first female cartoonist, having illustrated 21 children books and created *Suki*, a long running cartoon strip in the Sunday Observer and the Pioneers. She was born in Delhi, but grew up in Sweden, Pakistan, and Thailand, eventually going to University at Bombay University, where she earned her BA in Economics and an MA in history.



*This is a cartoon from her famous Suki strip series.*

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## Synopsis

**Setting:** Bombay, 2010

### ACT I

After losing his job, Om, a 20 year old man who lives with his mother (Ma), brother (Jeetu), and wife (Jaya) in an extremely small room, must find a job. While he is out applying for a job, Jaya and Ma bicker about Jaya and Om's relationship — Ma is never satisfied with Jaya and feels as though her son deserves a better wife. Om returns from his application process with a new job, but the position comes with a catch. When Jaya questions him about what happened at the factory where he was hired, he tells her about how they had to stand in line for ever and many people collapsed due to heat, hunger, and dehydration. Ma remains oblivious. In preparation for the Guards to arrive, Om tells his mother to simply stay quiet — she won't. The Guards arrive, enter, and begin to set up equipment and dismantle the kitchen. As they do so, one begins to question Om, making sure that those who live in the house are accounted for. At this point Jaya must begin to act as though Om is her brother, and Jeetu is her husband. Once the questions have been answered and the contact module has been set up, the Guards leave.

As Jaya and Om explain to Ma what his new job is, it begins to become clear to us that Om is being groomed to donate a part of his body. What part that is they do not know. While they are speaking, the contact module lights up and Ginni appears. She questions Om, as well as everyone else in the home, while looking at the squalor in which they live. When they tell Ginni that their home has no toilet, she is shocked and immediately sends one to be put in. While asking about the conditions in which they live, Ginni upsets Jaya.

Jaya goes out to find Jeetu, who has been working on the streets as a prostitute, as he needs to be in the house the next time the Guards arrive or they will seem to have been lying. The two have been having an affair, but Jaya intends to stop it. Jeetu has other ideas, however, and pleasures Jaya while they speak. He also makes it clear that he will not be coming back to their home.

### ACT II

Two months later, the residence has started to transform into a sleek new home, with brand new appliances, a television, a bathroom in home, and convertible furniture to allow for more functionality within the small space. Ma has begun to spend all of her time watching television, but still yells and barks at everyone who addresses her. Om realizes that he is late to eat, a problem because Ginni is about to call at any moment and Om is meant to be sticking to strict meal times. They also realize that there is a neighbor using their bathroom, which is itself a problem because Om is meant to be isolated so as to not get sick or damage any parts of his body. As the neighbor finally leaves, the ring from the contact module sounds and Ginni appears on screen. As they talk, Ginni reminds them, "The most

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important thing is to keep *Auwm* smiling. Coz if *Auwm*'s smiling, it means his body's smiling, it means that his organs are smiling," (38). All of a sudden there is a knock at the door, something Ginni is not allowed to know about.

When she finally hangs up, they open the door. In staggers Jeetu, for the first time since before Om's new job, covered in muck with torn clothing and matted hair. Ma has no interest in him staying, and wants him out immediately. Om is more concerned about his own health and wellbeing than his brother's and also wants Jeetu to leave, but Om blames it on the expiry of Jeetu's contract to live in the home.

When Ginni is expected to call again, Om begins to panic. He cannot have a dirty, unaccounted for person in his home or Ginni will be very unhappy. Then there is another knocking at the door. They stand there, wondering and arguing about who it may be as the knocking continues. Jaya, Om, and Ma are all very nervous and scared about who it could be. When Jaya finally answers the door, it turns out to be a package for Ma which she ordered from the TV.

Though Jeetu has been cleaned up, Om is panicking about Ginni's reaction to the new, unaccounted for addition to their household. Ma pays no attention while Jaya attempts to reason with Om. Ma's only focus is the television. There is a big fight between Jaya and Jeetu and Ma which results in Jeetu telling them all of his affair with Jaya. As they argue, they hear booted steps arriving.

The Guards begin to pound on the door and everyone in the home panics. Jaya finally opens the door and the Guards rush in, headed straight for Jeetu. To the protest of Jeetu and Jaya, following the direction of Ma and Om, the guards take Jeetu as the donor, thinking he is Om and refusing to listen to any argument to the contrary.

While Jaya and Om discuss what to do upon Jeetu's return, they hear him approach. He comes into the living area, his eyes wrapped in heavy bandages. It is clear that his eyes have been donated.

### **ACT III**

Jeetu, who now wears goggles over his lack of eyes, is very angry with Om and Jaya. Ma sits and watches TV with headphones on. As Jeetu and Om argue over why Om took the job in the first place, and why he offered up Jeetu in the final moments, the warning sound from the contact module plays. Once Ginni is on screen, she looks for Om. Jeetu is suddenly able to see, but only what Ginni sees, like they have a telepathic link. They have a conversation about Ginni's home and what she looks like, while the others are unable to see any of it. Gina's beauty captivates Jeetu, and he agrees to do anything for her and she tells him the guards will come for him. When Ginni leaves, Jeetu is blind again. Again, there is a knock at the door.

The Guards enter and take Jeetu, who goes willingly now. Om tries to make them take him instead, but the guards have decided that Jeetu is now Om, and that is who they will be

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taking. Once the Guards leave, despite Om's fight for them to take him, they lock the door to the home from the outside leaving Om, Jaya, and Ma all trapped.

Suddenly more boot steps are heard charging down the hall. It is, once again, a delivery for Ma. This one is a fully immersive experience. In spite of Jaya's protests, Ma asks the Agents to set up the VideoCouch, a fully self-sufficient machine. The VideoCouch is installed, and Ma is installed into it. She is hooked up to IVs of nutrition and fluid, and placed inside the box, which is locked shut, to watch TV for the rest of her days. After the Agents leave, Om states that he is going to InterPlanta, the company who runs and creates the machinery and the company that runs the donation service. Jaya does not stop him.

As Jaya is sleeping, alone for the first time, the contact module begins to make a noise and hovers over her. She wakes up, startled. A voice speaks to her, but not one we have heard before. Jaya does not want to speak to the voice. The voice introduces himself as Virgil and tells Jaya he can show himself to her. She protests, but eventually agrees. When he reveals himself, he is Jeetu — more accurately, he is in Jeetu's body. Jaya immediately bursts into tears, while Virgil wonders why she isn't happy to see him. Virgil tells Jaya that Ginna wasn't real, that he was the only one who was real. He also tells her that the contact module was never really turned off. He could always see and hear what Jaya, Ma, Om, and Jeetu were doing and talking about. There were no secrets. He then reveals that in fact, the healthy body he has wanted all along was Jaya's, in order to bear children. He tells her that, where he lives, they look for young men's bodies to inhabit and young women to carry the babies to term. This is because they lost the ability to procreate on their own, they were all living so long that the generations were at war with each other.

Despite Virgil's requests, Jaya refuses to be impregnated by him. As he continues to ask, she tries to hit the module. After many tries, she manages a direct hit, destroying the module in a shower of sparks and a room full of blue and purple light. The Guards enter, holding a phone on which Virgil is speaking, still trying to convince Jaya to have the baby. She begins to collect pills, and tells Virgil that if he wants to impregnate her he must do it in person. When he tells her it's unreasonable, she begins to collect all the pills in her home, narrating to Virgil the whole time, "I'm going to take the ones for staying awake, until I run out of them. And if I don't hear the sound of your own hand on my door before that time, I'll take my life. If the guards cause me any discomfort whatsoever — I'll take my life. If you do anything other than come here in person — I'll take my life," (91). After pronouncing her name wrong, as "Zhaya," for the umpteenth time, Jaya tells him to say it correctly, and that she won't talk to him until he says it right. She tells him she wants, for the first time, to be left alone to take her pills and watch TV. Blackout.

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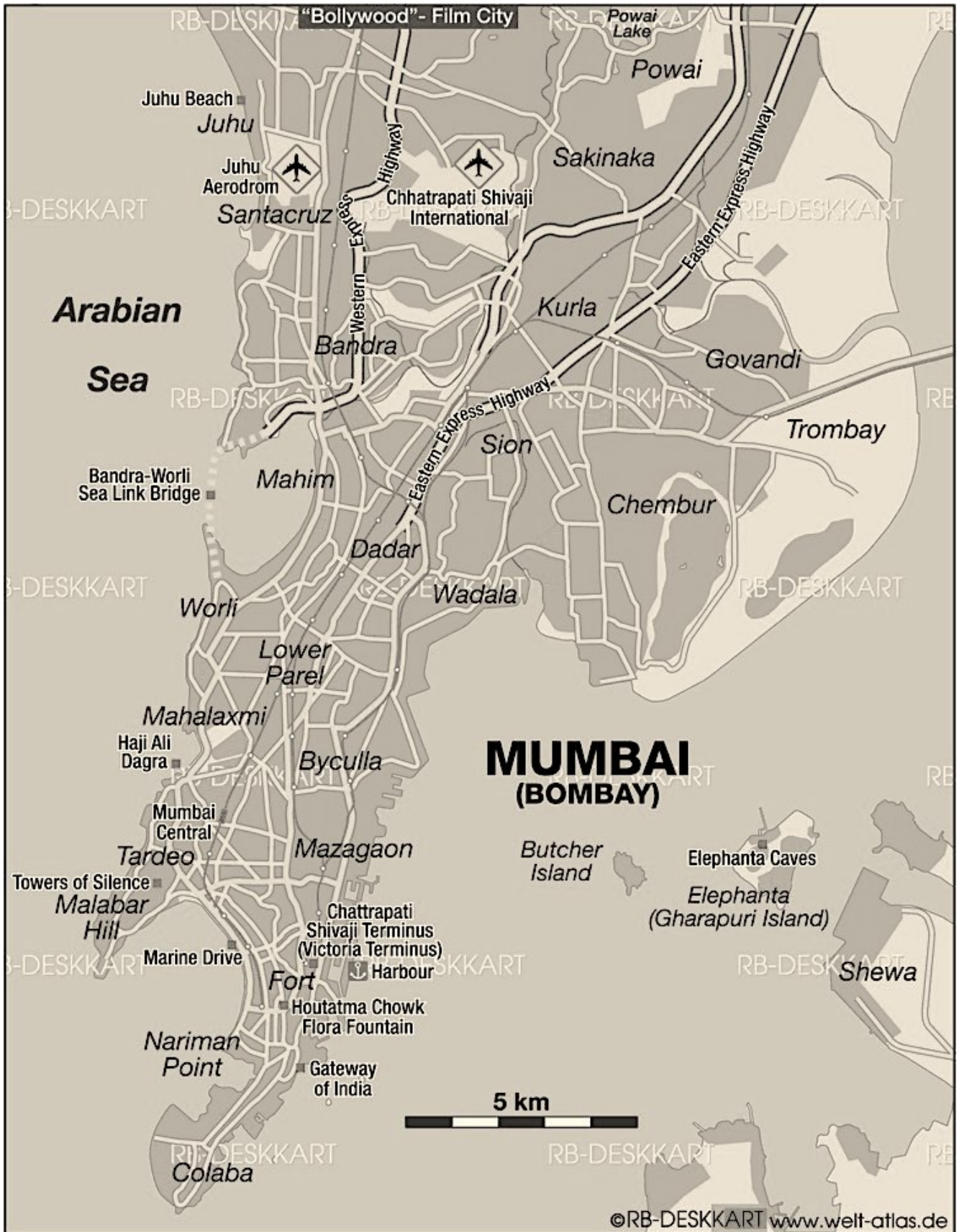
This play takes place in Bombay, which was renamed Mumbai in 1995, and is the capital of the Indian state Maharashtra, which is located on India's western coast. Mumbai is the hub of India's industrial trade, and is the country's industrial and financial capital. The city is 25 square miles, a little less than half the size of Pittsburgh which measures ~56 square miles. Mumbai's population, however, is over 30x Pittsburgh's, with 10 million people compared to our 305,000. That's a whole lot of people in a pretty small amount of space.

Mumbai is almost 8,000 miles away from us here in Pittsburgh too. It would take you around 84 days to walk there, and you'd have to cross an ocean!



Since they're so far away, a lot of our customs are a little different than ours, so without further ado, here's some information about

## Life in Mumbai...



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## A (Brief) History of India and England

In 1601, the British began to charter the East India Company, a company designed to trade with India and Southeast Asia. This trading route was especially important due to the spices that could be found in India and Southeast Asia, and the East Indian spice trade was a major economic power, but had been primarily used by the Spanish and the Portuguese until the end of the 16th century. Once Spain and Portugal's stronghold on the spice trade had been released, due to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England sensed its opportunity.

After some failed attempts at contact, King James I sent a messenger to the court of the Mogul emperor Jahangir in 1614. Jahangir had no interest in trading with the British, but after some winning over, King James's messenger, Sir Thomas Roe, won his respect and was able to establish a trade.

By 1720 the Mogul empire was collapsing. While other countries were struggling to gain control over India, the East India Trading Company established an army of British as well as native Indian troops on Indian soil. As the army won battle after battle, the East India Company slowly established more dominance over the people of India. By the 1800s they had created a society that was heavily influenced by England and which operated on British custom. This new British rule was called **The Raj** — from the Sanskrit term “*raja*” meaning “king.”

In 1857, the native Indian soldiers began to revolt against their British counterparts and massacred all of the British people they could find in Delhi — the capitol of India (now a part of New Delhi). A year later, in 1858, the British regained control. They abolished the East India Company entirely and the British crown took over power in India. This takeover had never been planned, but after they felt their countrymen were in danger and that their interests were threatened, the British felt the need to gain control.

British control remained, with relative peace, for almost 100 years, but in 1947 India finally gained its independence after the development and rise of the Indian Nationalist movement, the movement led by Mahatma Gandhi focusing on non-violent forms of protest.

India's relationship with the Western world has been in flux for centuries, as you can see. The India-US relation is no exception. Though the two countries have shown support in the past, India's nuclear weaponry made the United States less willing to support them during the Cold War era and the US officially withdrew all nuclear assistance in 1978. The US still had various factories and plants on Indian soil, however, and a toxic gas leak in 1984 further harmed the relationship. Former president Bill Clinton eased these tensions in 2000, however, when he visited India, established the Indo-U.S. Science and Technology Forum promoting collaboration in STEM fields between the two nations, and in 2001 lifted the ban on India sanctions and restrictions.

Again, India has fluctuated between trust and support from the west, and massive amounts of damage and destruction on both sides. India's relationship with the Western world is, clearly, very complex.

### Your thoughts...

How do you think this kind of tension might affect a story in which Indian people interact with people from the Western World? How would this kind of story change over time? How would this play be different if it had been written in 1720 or 1984 instead of the year it was actually written in, 1995? What if it was written today?

### Fun Fact!

#### The Art of Saree Wearing

Possession of a Saree will never be a waste. The Cloth is Convertible to any fancy wear like maxis and frocks



1. Hold inner end of the saree with your left hand.



2. Making sure that the saree is at floor level, tuck the top border of inner end into the Petticoat.



3. Then pass the Saree around to the front maintaining the same height.



4. Keep the top edge level, tuck in a little to keep Saree firm.



5. Start folding the pleats from the right holding tuck the edge of the Saree.



6. Hold the pleats together and adjust the height so that bottom edge is at floor level.



7. Tuck in the pleats into petticoat. The pleats should fall straight.



8. Bring around the saree.



9. Hold it in your right and pass on to your left, arranging the border evenly.



10. Hold it in your right and pass on to your left, arranging the border evenly.



11. Hold it in your right and pass on to your left, arranging the border evenly.



12. Drape on your left shoulder allowing the end piece to fall casually.

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## Marriage and Home Life in India

Like in the majority of marriages around the world, when a woman in Bombay gets married she is expected to move out of her family home and move in with her new husband. The majority of these marriages are arranged, and any marriage for love is often looked down upon as an impulsive act of passion. In an Indian marriage, you are not just marrying your spouse, you are also marrying their entire family. Typically, and ideally, this would form a joint family – a family that includes kinsmen, and generally includes everyone in an extended family, about 3 or 4 generations back, living together.

### The House

The average house size, even for those who do not live in joint family houses, is 5.3 people to a household. That's nearly double the US average, which is 2.6. The houses in which people live are, even in more urban areas, often made of mud and other natural materials; over 100 million have dirt floors and the average per capita space for living, sleeping, cooking, washing, and bathroom needs is about 10 feet X 10 feet — roughly the size of a small American living room. 78% of homes don't have a bathroom inside either, meaning all 5.3 people, are expected to use an outhouse or find another way to take care of those needs, especially because only about 12.5% of houses in India are properly connected to sewage lines.

These houses use fire to cook, as opposed to gas stoves, and about 68% of homes have no television. What these things mean is that, in populated areas, there is often a bathroom, kitchen, or television that is shared by a large group of people.

### The Wife and the Mother-in-Law

The relationship between the Indian wife and her mother-in-law is, often fraught with mistrust, insult, and general difficulty. This is due to many factors: generational differences, traditional expectation of women, pride and overprotection over the husband, etc. A lot of it is also due to the expectation that the wife move in with her husband's family, making for close quarters in an environment that, technically, belongs to the husband's family.

### *Fun Fact!*

**Bindis** -- the dot worn primarily by Hindu women -- are placed between the eyebrows at the sixth chakra 'agna,' which translates to 'command' and is the seat of concealed wisdom. A red bindi has many meanings, one of which is to signify that a woman is married.

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# What about us?

## Consumer culture in America

It's no secret that in America we like *stuff*. We like to have things in our possession, that's why the commercials that play during the Super Bowl are such a big deal. There are many examples of the tendency for the Western world to buy things that we want, as opposed to what we *need* to survive. This is not a new phenomenon, but it is one that is common to those who have, as a community, a large amount of income that could be considered "disposable."

All this means we have a lot more money for the kind of things you would find in a magazine like SkyMall. Here are some examples:

### **Definition!**

**Disposable Income** is the money that a household has available for spending and saving after income taxes have been removed. This includes money for necessities, as well as any surplus used for fun gadgets and things not necessary for survival.



You see my point... None of these things are necessary. They may be fun, or cool, or funny, and we are able to desire them as much as we want, but not a single one of these items is necessary - yet they exist.

### **Your thoughts...**

What do you think this says about Western culture as compared to Eastern? What other examples of our consumer-based culture can you think of?

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## The Rich at the Expense of the Poor

This play specifically deals with the personal impact that Western greed and entitlement can have on people in impoverished areas who simply need a job. Unfortunately, there are many instances in which a product or option that is available to the wealthy, and helps them very much, comes at the cost of those who do not have the same means. Sometimes this means that the wealthy buy all of a certain medicine before the price drops enough for the poor to purchase it. Other times it means that the poor are working hard to make the thing that the wealthy will buy in order to put food on the table.

This phenomenon has occurred throughout history, from the gladiatorial duels, and executions by lion that would take place at the Colosseum in Ancient Greece, to the Bull Fights of Spain, to the more hidden things like the manufacturing of plastic toys overseas in China at the expense of those employees.

### Your thoughts...

Have you ever gotten something at the expense of someone else? How did that make you, and that other person, feel? Would you knowingly do it again?

Can you think of any other examples of situations in the Western world in which the wealthy obtain things at the expense of the poor? What about situations in which Western consumerism comes at the cost of Eastern peoples?

How do you think we, as students and educated people, can work to balance this inequality? What kind of changes need to be made? Do you have any ideas of how to make those changes?

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## I Wanna Live Forever...

*A non-exhaustive list of things people have tried in order to become immortal*

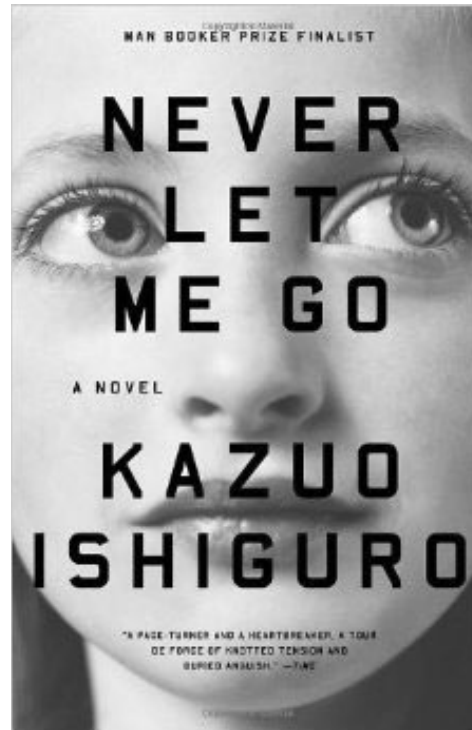
- ❖ **Eating a Mermaid** — Japanese mythology described a creature called the ningyo as a cross between a monkey and a carp. One story tells of a girl who was accidentally brought ningyo meat by her father. Upon eating it, she was cursed with immortality
- ❖ **Self-Mummification** — A few monks, who were practitioners of Shingon Buddhism, have begun to self-mummify in order to stop the natural decay of their bodies. The process involves starving oneself, drinking a resin-like substance, and entering a burial chamber. They see themselves as existing in a deep meditative trance as opposed to being seen as dead.
- ❖ **Blood Transfusions** — Alexander Bogdanov, a Bolshevik artist and inventor, believed that blood transfusions were not only key to rejuvenation of the body and mind, but would also help one maintain eternal youth.
- ❖ **Drinking Gold** — King Henry VII's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, would drink a potion consisting of gold chloride and diethyl ether which would, according to the apothecaries, would prevent aging. It did not work, however, and she died at age 66.
- ❖ **The Philosopher's Stone** — If you recognize the name but can't quite put your finger on why, this is the stone after which the first *Harry Potter* is named. This stone was expected to rejuvenate human beings and make them immortal. Many of the recipes and instructions to create a philosopher's stone, which many alchemists (including Sir Isaac Newton) attempted and none succeeded in, call for high amounts of mercury. It has since been proven just how detrimental to one's health mercury can be, and it often results in premature death and illness.
- ❖ **Guinea Pig Testicles** — Charles-Édouard Brown-Séquard, a psychologist and neurologist, believed that injecting extracts from the testicles of guinea pigs and dogs could rejuvenate someone and make them immortal.
- ❖ **Numerous spells and rituals** — Almost any spell book you purchase, unless it is specific, will have some sort of rejuvenation or eternal life spell within it.
- ❖ **Bathing in the Blood of Virgins** — Countess Elizabeth Báthory, of Hungary, was a countess and serial killer in the late 16th century who took to drinking blood, as well as to bathing in the blood of virgins whom she'd killed in order to stay young and beautiful.

### *Fun Fact!*

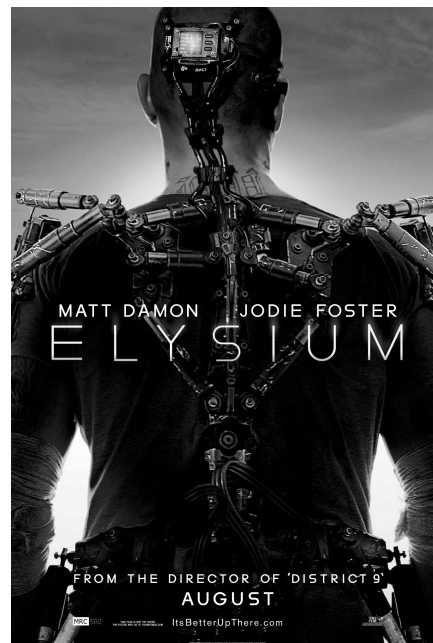
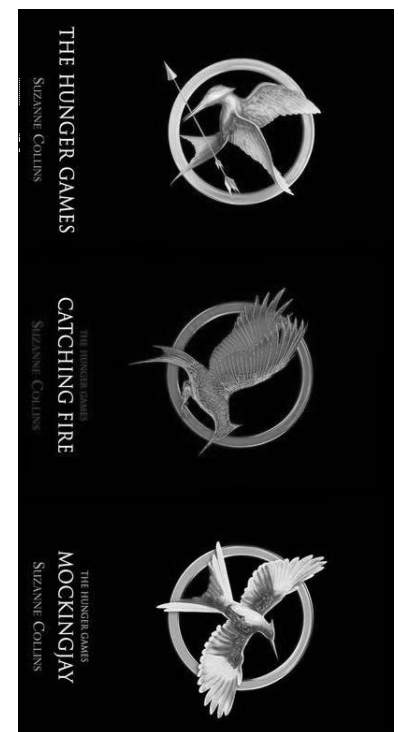
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J.K. Rowling was originally called Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone but was changed for its US printing because publishers thought that American children would associate the word Philosopher with an old, boring guy instead of associating it with magic and wouldn't buy the book.

## Where have I heard this before?

There are many books, tv shows, and video games that deal with themes similar to the ones in this play — dystopian futures and clones used as organ donors specifically. Here are a few I recognized:



- Orphan Black (TV)
- Black Mirror (TV)
- Never Let Me Go (Book & Movie)
- The Hunger Games Trilogy (Book & Movie Series)
- Elysium (Movie)

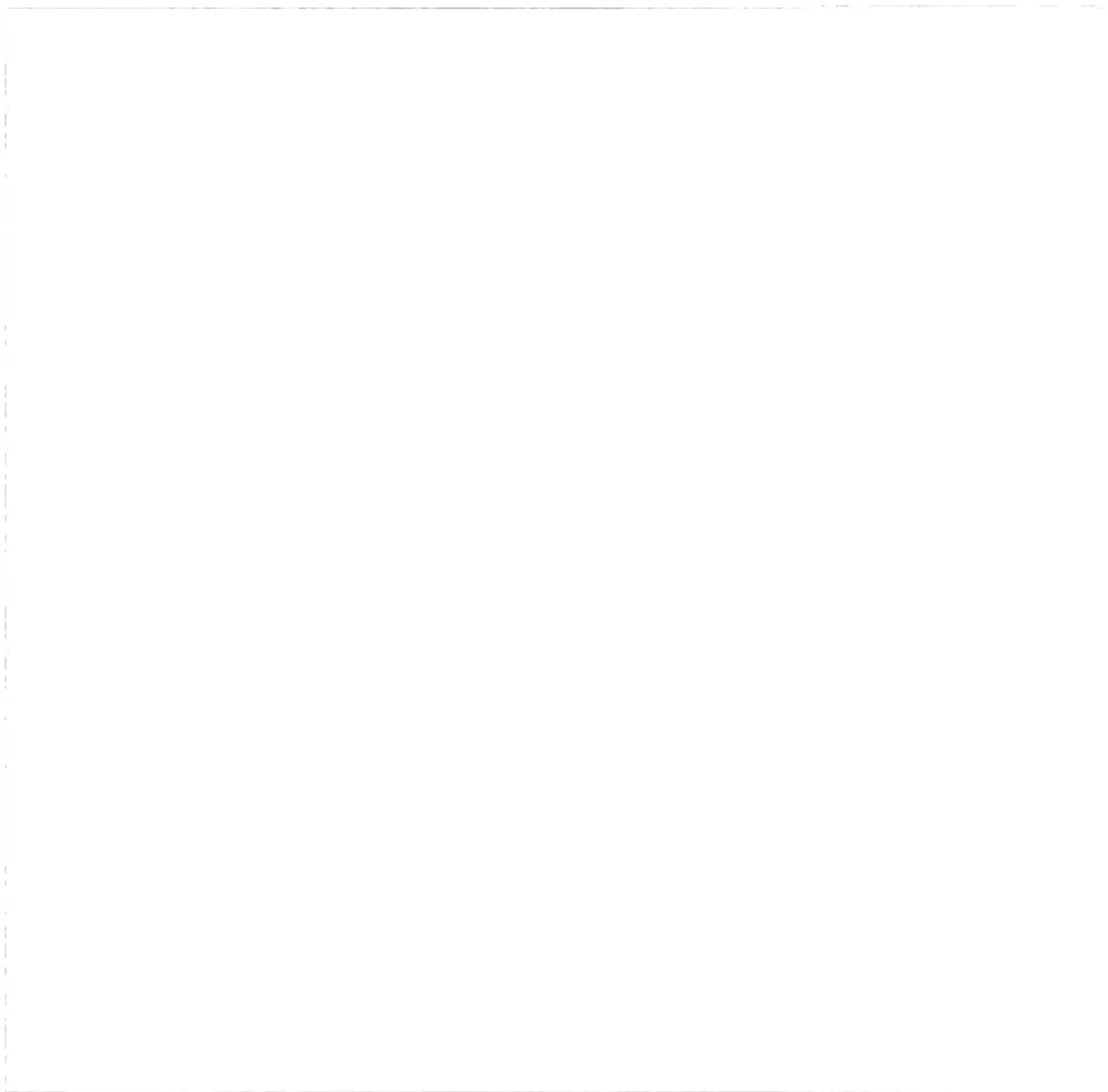


**Your thoughts...**  
Can you think of any other pop culture examples? What themes do they address? What are they saying about those themes?

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*If you could have a machine that did absolutely anything...*

*like make you ice cream while you were playing a video game, or braided your hair while you ate breakfast, what would it be? Draw a picture of it here:*



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## Online Resources Used:

- ❖ <http://www.sanskritimagazine.com/culture/bindi-meaning-and-significance-of-the-dot-on-forehead/>
- ❖ <http://hinduism.about.com/od/bindis/a/bindi.htm>
- ❖ <http://thebigfatindianwedding.com/2014/the-essential-guide-to-maharashtrian-weddings-wedding-traditions>
- ❖ <http://www.everyculture.com/Ge-It/India.html>
- ❖ <http://www.east-indians.com/marriagesongs.html>
- ❖ <http://family.jrank.org/pages/859/India-Family-Life-Family-Values.html>
- ❖ <http://www.prb.org/Publications/Articles/2008/howindianslive.aspx>
- ❖ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/33-of-Indians-live-in-less-space-than-US-prisoners/articleshow/3753189.cms>
- ❖ [http://pittsburgh.about.com/od/facts/f/how\\_big.htm](http://pittsburgh.about.com/od/facts/f/how_big.htm)
- ❖ <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Mumbai.aspx>
- ❖ <http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045214/4261000>
- ❖ <https://www.welt-atlas.de/datenbank/karten/karte-5-802.gif>
- ❖ <https://legacy.fordham.edu/Halsall/india/1617englandindies.asp>
- ❖ <http://www.britannica.com/topic/East-India-Company>
- ❖ <http://holisticthought.com/indian-national-movement-1917-1947/>
- ❖ <http://history1800s.about.com/od/thebritishempire/tp/indiatimeline01.htm>
- ❖ [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire\\_seapower/east\\_india\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/east_india_01.shtml)
- ❖ <http://www.iusstf.org/>
- ❖ <http://www.cfr.org/india/timeline-us-india-relations/p32994>
- ❖ <https://www.quora.com/Why-do-a-majority-of-Indian-mothers-in-law-mistreat-their-daughters-in-law>
- ❖ <http://madh-mama.blogspot.com/2013/08/the-psychology-of-indian-mother-in-law.html>
- ❖ <https://www.quora.com/How-do-Indian-women-feel-about-living-with-their-parents-in-law>
- ❖ <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/relationships/man-woman/How-to-tackle-your-mother-in-law/articleshow/35715299.cms>
- ❖ <http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/manjula-padmanabhan-playwright-journalist-and-a-children-book-author>
- ❖ <http://manjulapadmanabhan.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.sawnet.org/books/authors.php?Padmanabhan+Manjula>
- ❖ <http://persweb.wabash.edu/facstaff/royaltyr/AncientCities/web/bradleyj/Project%201/Games.html>
- ❖ <http://io9.gizmodo.com/7-ways-that-people-died-trying-to-become-immortal-1691947345>
- ❖ [http://www.spellsofmagic.com/spells/health\\_spells/immortality\\_spells/1769/page.html](http://www.spellsofmagic.com/spells/health_spells/immortality_spells/1769/page.html)
- ❖ <http://listverse.com/2013/09/18/10-mythological-ways-to-become-immortal/>
- ❖ <http://study.com/academy/lesson/what-is-consumerism-definition-history-examples.html>