

STUDY GUIDE

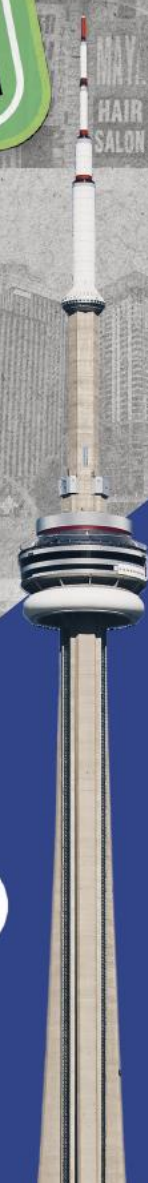
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SPRIET STAGE, OCTOBER 17 TO NOVEMBER 4, 2023
OPENING NIGHT OCTOBER 20

KIM'S CONVENIENCE

Written by and Starring INS CHOI

KIM'S CONVENIENCE was originally produced as part of the
2011 Toronto Fringe Festival.

The premiere production of KIM'S CONVENIENCE was produced by
Soulpepper Theatre Company, Toronto, ON.

"Kim's Convenience" is presented by arrangement with Concord
Theatricals on behalf of Samuel French, Inc.

www.concordtheatricals.com

The photographing and video/audio recording of this production is strictly prohibited.

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CONTENT ADVISORY

This production includes ethnocentrism, negative Japanese and Black stereotypes, prejudice and biased opinions of race characteristics, sexuality and body types, as well as mild language.

About the Playwright

Ins Choi is a Korean Canadian poet, playwright, and actor who was born in South Korea, and then raised in Scarborough, Ontario. Choi has performed with many theatre companies such as Fu-GEN, Canadian Stage, the Stratford Festival, Soupppper and the Grand Theatre. He currently resides in Toronto with his wife and two children.

Creation of Kim's

In 2005, Ins Choi began writing his first play, *Kim's Convenience*. After a successful debut in 2011 at the Toronto Fringe Festival, it was later turned into a television series in 2016 on CBC. Ins Choi used his own family experiences of moving to Canada and living in Toronto as his inspiration for *Kim's Convenience*.

Curriculum Connections

- The Arts (Visual Arts; Drama)
- English (Media Studies; The Writer's Craft, Canadian Literature)
- Canadian and World Studies (Issues in Canadian Geography; Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group; Canada: History, Identity, and Culture; Making Personal Economic Choices)
- Business (Introduction to Business)
- Social Sciences and Humanities (Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice; World Cultures; Exploring Family Studies; Dynamic of Human Relationships; Families in Canada; Challenge and Change in Society)

Themes

- ★ UNDERSTANDING
- ★ LOVE
- ★ FORGIVENESS
- ★ LEGACY
- ★ FAMILY





Kim's Convenience: The Rise of Asian Representation in Theatre

“I don't know how other people write plays. But, I didn't start with a story. I started with funny characters I loved who made me laugh.” These are the words of Ins Choi, the celebrated Korean-Canadian playwright and actor, reflecting on the genesis of his modern Canadian classic, *Kim's Convenience* - not the beloved TV show that graced CBC screens for five seasons, but rather the play that set it all in motion. This is the story of how it all began, and how, after a span of 12 years, Choi is returning to the play that launched his career, poised to take on the title character for the very first time at the Grand Theatre.

The year was 1998, and Ins Choi had just graduated from the acting program at York University, brimming with talent and promise. However, a significant obstacle loomed in his path: the glaring absence of roles for Asian actors. Fortunately, Choi was not alone in his sentiments. Enter: Nina Lee Aquino, an award-winning Filipino-Canadian director and dramaturg. After founding fu-GEN, the Asian Canadian Theatre Company, Aquino invited Choi to be a part of a new playwrighting unit. Although he had never written a play before, Choi was inspired by the vibrancy of the group and strongly aligned with Aquino's vision of adding their voices to Canadian theatre. So, he timidly agreed. His first task: write a play about something you know. For Choi, the choice was obvious: a Korean family and their convenience store. Growing up, he had many friends whose parents operated convenience stores in Toronto. Moreover, his own family had lived above one when they first immigrated to Canada. With this vivid setting in his mind, Choi was inspired and instantly coined a title: *Kim's Convenience*. He humorously quipped, “Kim is the most popular Korean last name, so I thought if every Kim in Toronto came to see the show, it might do okay.”

Coming from a family with two older sisters and five cousins all verbally jousting at every get together, Choi knew his play would revolve around humorous family dynamics. His writing began with the family patriarch known as Appa, engaging with customers in various scenes. From there, came his wise wife Umma and their spirited daughter Janet. But there was still no real story. It wasn't until Jung, the prodigal son of the family, was created that a story came to life. Although, at first, it wasn't the conventional story that fans know today.

Choi confessed, “I actually intended for it to be more experimental. Originally, I was going to play the roles of Appa and Jung, and someone else would play Umma and Janet. But then it all changed.” And so, a story was born about a first-generation Korean immigrant, a father of two, and the proud proprietor of *Kim's Convenience*, who, after 30 years of building his empire from nothing, now grapples with his changing neighbourhood, and the growing chasm between him and his second-generation children.

Kim's Convenience premiered in Toronto's Fringe Festival on July 6, 2011, instantly becoming a sensation and selling out its seven-show run – with Choi directing, producing, and portraying the role of Jung. Subsequently, the play was adopted by Toronto's Soulpepper Theatre in 2012, becoming the most commercially successful production in the company's history. Since then, the show has toured theaters across North America, including an off-Broadway run, and inspired the hit TV show bearing the same name, which Choi also contributed to developing and writing.

Now, 12 years after its Fringe premiere, Choi is embarking on a new chapter, tackling the role of Appa for the first time under the direction of Esther Jun, who originated the character of Janet. From October 17 to November 4, Ins and his fellow cast members will take to the Grand's Spriet Stage, presenting a hilarious tale of family, regret, and convenience store antics – designed to delight both devoted fans of the TV show and newcomers alike.

For Choi, it's a source of immense excitement that his play, featuring an Asian cast and creative team, will kick off the Grand's 2023/24 Season. After a lifetime of not witnessing Asian narratives and faces on stage, a real transformation is underway throughout Canada – including at the Grand. Choi eloquently states, “12 years ago, there was a desperate need for Asian artists to make new spaces for our stories to be heard because the main stream theatres weren't listening. Lots has changed. Things are different now. Could more progress be made? Absolutely. But, for now, this is something worth celebrating.”

Characters

Appa	A 59-year old 1 st generation Korean-Canadian man, who is the owner of Kim's Convenience.
Umma	A 56-year-old 1 st generation Korean-Canadian women, who is married to Appa.
Janet	A 30-year-old 2 nd generation Korean-Canadian women, who is the daughter of Appa and Umma.
Jung	A 32-year-old 2 nd generation Korean-Canadian man, who is the son of Appa and Umma.
Rich	A Kenyan customer who buys a Bingo card, cigarettes, and an Insam Energy Beverage.
Mr. Lee	A successful real estate agent, who is Appa's “black friend with Korean last name”.
Mike	A Jamaican customer who comes in to buy Vaseline.
Alex	A police officer, and childhood friend of Jung and Janet.

Synopsis

numbers correspond to translated sections of dialogue on next page

The play begins with Appa opening up his shop, *Kim's Convenience*, and beginning his day. After cashing out a customer (Rich), he notices a Japanese car (Honda) in the no parking zone. Appa tells his daughter Janet that she needs to call the police. Janet tries to reason with Appa, but eventually calls the police. Mr. Lee, a realtor friend of Appa's, enters the store as Janet leaves. Mr. Lee mentions that Walmart is moving in nearby and gives Appa a business card with an offer to buy the store. After Appa rejects his offer, Mr. Lee asks what Appa's exit plan is and leaves his card on the counter for him to reconsider his offer.

As Janet reenters the store, Appa tells Janet to call the police again to take back the complaint of the parked car. While Janet argues with Appa, her mother Umma, enters the store and puts an end to their discussion.¹ Umma notices the offer from Mr. Lee, and points out that Appa could retire with that amount before leaving for church.² After Umma leaves the store, Appa asks Janet if she has a life plan, and suggests she should take over the store. As they talk about this, a customer named Mike enters to buy Vaseline. Appa suspects Mike will steal something, and begins listing conditions why someone would or wouldn't steal from his store. Appa confronts the man and uses a hapkido hold (a Korean fighting style) on him after he tries to run- forcing him to empty his pockets and repeat an apology that turns into a prayer (**Advisory: language**).

Responding to the call that was made earlier about the parked car, a police officer enters the shop. The responder turns out to be Alex, a childhood friend of Janet and Jung. Wanting to reconnect with Jung, Alex asks for his phone number. Appa avoids the question and sends him away with snacks. Later that day, Alex returns to the store to leave his number. Janet reveals that her brother Jung left years ago as a teenager, after an argument with Appa that turned physical. Changing topics, Janet asks to take a photo of Alex. They begin to flirt and decide to go out for lunch together.

Appa begins to press Janet about taking over the store again. He insists that since he has given his whole life to her, it is only fair that she gives half her life over to the business so he can retire. Janet argues about all the time she has given to the store over the years without being paid. Appa retaliates by listing all the expense and sacrifices he has made investing in Janet's life (**Advisory: language**).⁴

That night, Umma meets Jung at church, and brings him money for his 2-month-old baby. Jung explains how he is unhappy with his wife and job. He compares his life against successful friends he knew when he was younger, and he feels compelled to leave his family and start somewhere fresh. Umma reminds him how much Appa sacrificed when leaving Korea, so that their family could have more opportunities in Canada – Jung must endure for his own child.⁵

Alex comes back to the store to talk with Janet, but Appa interferes. After a brief interrogation, Appa uses a hapkido hold on Alex and demands he kiss Janet and ask her to marry him. Getting out of Appa's hold, Alex confesses his feelings to Janet, and they agree to go on a second date. As Appa reflects on a memory of Janet when she was 14 years old, he decides he wants her to live the way she chooses. After not visiting for many years, Jung goes to *Kim's Convenience* to talk with Appa. As they begin to catch up with each other, Jung reveals how unhappy he is at work and asks Appa if he would consider giving him a job. After telling Jung his decision, he explains that his life story isn't the store, but his family.

Korean Translation for Sections in Kim's

¹ As Umma enters: Will you two quit it?

Janet with a mischievous smile, exits to the back of the store.

² Umma: Just leave it, I'll clean it up when I get back.

Appa: This Sunday Mr. Chae wants to get together for dinner. How's your schedule?

Umma: What's this?

Appa: Oh... that's uh... Mr. Lee's offer... for the store.

Umma: I didn't know you were selling the store?

Appa: Mr. Lee... I wasn't. He just made an offer. Just now.

Umma: It's a generous offer.

Appa: I know.

Umma: You could retire.

Appa: I know.

then Umma says: Janet. Janet I'm going to church. Janet!?!

[Janet: What!?!]

Umma: I'm going to church.

[Janet: Then go already.]

Umma: Ugh, I swear, she's gonna be the death of me, the death of me.

³ **after Appa and Janet's argument**

Umma: Oh my goodness, look at me, always forgetting things, always. What's wrong? What is it?

Appa: Never mind.

Umma: Honey? Honey?

Umma begins to sing as she gets her things together to leave

⁴ **after the flashback of naming the store**

Appa: When did you get in?

Umma: Just got here. Did you eat it all?

Appa: Yeah. What is it?

Umma: Nothing. Where's Janet?

Appa: Out. Mr. Chae wants to have us for dinner this Sunday. Did you hear me? What's wrong?

Umma: Nothing. Yeah, it's fine. I'm going up.

Appa: What is it? Honey? Honey?

Umma takes the tray of food and exits to the back. Appa looks at the 'offer' and picks up the phone



Appa's Korean Test – Will you pass!?

Feel free to use our [BLOOKET](#) Version to test your knowledge!

1. What did Admiral Yi-Soon Shi invent in 1592?
 - A. Turtle ship
 - B. Galley
 - C. Battleship
 - D. Tug boat

2. What year did North Korea advance to the quarter finals after beating Italy (1-0) in the World cup Soccer tournament? (*hint* after world war two)
 - A. 1972
 - B. 1949
 - C. 1966
 - D. 1953

3. What was Canada's best-selling car in 1984? How many units were sold?
 - A. Chevrolet C/K Pickup – 45, 000 sales
 - B. Hyundai Pony – 50,000 sales
 - C. Ford F-Series – 43,000 sales
 - D. Plymouth Reliant – 32,000 sales

4. What is the body of water between Korea and Japan called?
 - A. The East Sea
 - B. Pacific Sea
 - C. The South Sea
 - D. Sea of Japan

5. Kim Hyong-Sun crossed what two fruits together to create a nectarine?
 - A. Plum and Peach
 - B. Peach and Grape
 - C. Orange and Kumquat
 - D. Plum and Orange

6. What year did Se Ri Park become the first non-white women to ever win the LPGA gold championship (which continues to be dominated by Korean women today!)? (*hint* it was the year google was founded)

- A. 1999
- B. 1997
- C. 1998
- D. 2000

7. In 2002, what countries hosted the World Cup soccer tournament?

- A. Japan and Italy
- B. Canada and USA
- C. South Korea and Japan
- D. Slovakia and Switzerland

8. In the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, what winter sport did Yu Na Kim win a gold medal in?

- A. Curling
- B. Skiing
- C. Bobsled
- D. Figure Skating

9. Park Ji Sung was captain of South Korea's national soccer team, and was Manchester United's midfielder. He was often called 3rd lung because he never gave up! What was his jersey number?

- A. 23
- B. 7
- C. 13
- D. 4

Now that you have completed Appa's test, did you pass? Check your answers!



ANSWER KEY:
1.A 2.C 3.B 4.A 5.A 6.C 7.C 8.D 9.C

Questions to consider:

- Do you know some of the history for your own culture?
- Do you feel connected to your own culture? Why or why not?



Immigration in Canada

1st Generation: Someone who was born in one country, and has moved to a different one. (Example: Appa was born in Korea, but moved to Canada later on in life. Appa is a 1st generation immigrant.)

2nd Generation: Someone who has at least one parent who immigrated to a new country. (Example: Janet and Jung were born in Canada, but both of their parents (Umma and Appa) were born in Korea before moving to Canada. Janet and Jung are 2nd generation immigrants.)

3rd Generation and Higher: Someone who has grandparents who are born in one country and have moved to a different one. (Example: Appa and Umma are the grandparents of Jung's son, Sonam. Sonam is a 3rd generation immigrant.)

Data from the 2021 Census for [London, Ontario](#) (Total Population = 416, 270):

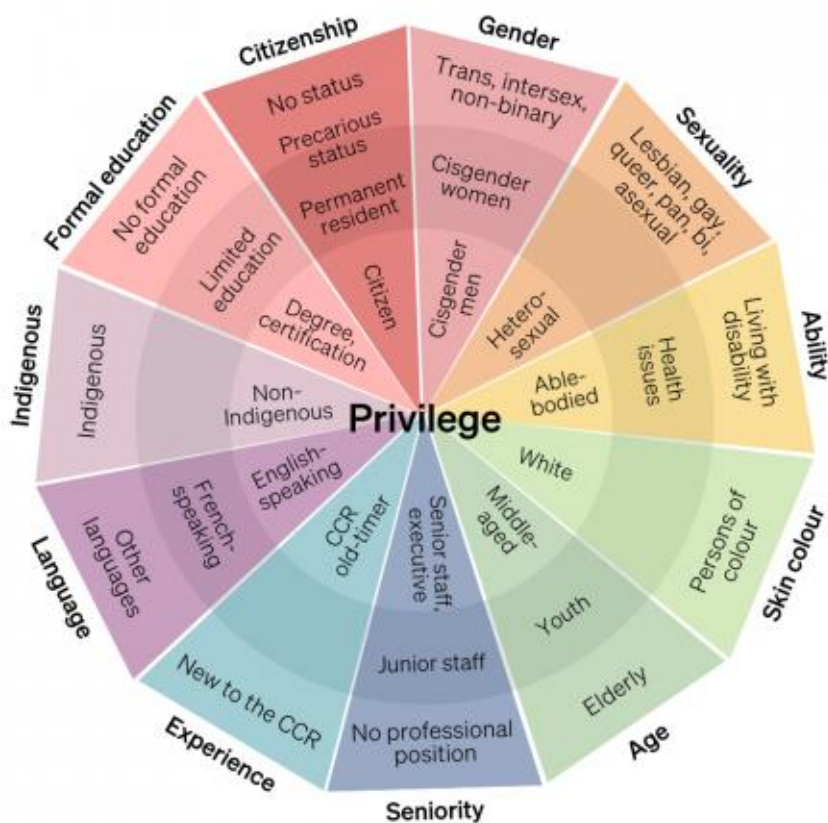
Immigrant Generations	Number of People Recorded	Total Percent of Population
1 st Generation	126,795	30.5%
2 nd Generation	85,390	20.5%
3 rd Generation and Higher	204,085	49%

Consider the following [Privilege Wheel](#)

What barriers do you think immigrants face coming to Canada?

Do 1st generation and 2nd generation immigrants face different challenges?

Where do you land on this wheel?



Resources:
Canadian Council for Refugees
Statistics Canada

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

- How can the medium of theatre reflect people and society? How can it portray Canadian identity?
- How does a theatre include appropriate cultural representation on stage? (casting, playwright, music, etc.)
- If you were to write about your family history, what story would you choose to share?
- What does the word “stereotype” mean? Is stereotyping harmful? Why or why not?
- How do you make your life feel meaningful? What does success look like to you?
- Looking at the poster for the show, what sorts of themes and ideas do you think this play will discuss?
- How are various art forms used in theatre? Does it help enhance the storyline? Why or why not?

Pre-Show Classroom Activities

- Research the history of a convenience store in your neighbourhood. Who owns it and what is their story? How do convenience stores contribute to the community and business market where you live?
- What makes up your own identity? After thinking on your own, and then discussing it with an elbow partner, write down **three words** that you think describe your identity.

Post-Show Discussion Questions

- What did this play make you think about in relation to topics like immigration and family?
- If you have seen the TV show, is there anything that surprised you about the stage play? Are there any differences? Any similarities?
- Do you think telling a story through a stage play is an effective medium? Why or why not?
- Why is Asian representation on stage important? How can it be empowering? What is the impact of sharing diverse stories onstage?
- Appa talked about what his legacy will be. What does it mean to leave a legacy behind? What kind of legacy do you want to leave?
- In *Kim’s Convenience*, Appa regularly demonstrates his pride for being Korean. Would you describe this as being ethnocentric or patriotic? Justify your answer.

Post-Show Classroom Activities

- Appa is approached by Mr. Lee to sell his store since Walmart will now be nearby, and Umma’s church is bought by a condo company. The process of changing the character of a neighborhood by lots of wealthier individuals moving in is called **gentrification**. Think about your own neighbourhood/city and write a brief paragraph about how it has changed over the years.
- Consider members of your own family. Inhabit the role of a member of your family and identify what makes their character unique: how do they move, what do they care about, how does their voice sound? Through writing or acting in role, take on the identity of this family member and celebrate one of their successes (real or imagined). In this character’s voice, write a journal entry or monologue about something they have achieved or are proud of. How does it feel to “walk in their shoes”?