

A Soulpepper Production

# KIM'S CONVENIENCE

by Ins Choi



## STUDY GUIDE

prepared by Kathy Quayle, Education Coordinator, The Grand Theatre (London, ON)

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photo of Ins Choi by Cylla von Tiedemann

# Curriculum Connections

*Kim's Convenience* directly supports learning in the subject areas and curriculum in the following ways:

**Language (Elementary) / English (Secondary):** listening to understand, question, view, evaluate, think critically, reflect, connect to the world and appreciate the cultural impact and aesthetic power of text.

**The Arts:** observing to deepen awareness and appreciate diverse perspectives; experience empathy; identify aesthetic and human values; encourage innovative thinking, spontaneity, intuition, divergent thinking, and improvisation. Supporting the arts encourages responsible and critically literate citizens in society and of the world.

**Canadian and World Studies:** observing interactions with and within social and physical environments; understanding Canada's heritage and its physical, social, cultural, governmental, legal, and economic structures and relationships; helping to perceive Canada in a global context and understand its place and role in the world community.

**Business:** observing the effect on the standard of living and quality of lives; on the environment in which students live and which future generations will inherit; observing the function of a family-run business, the role it plays in our society, the opportunities it generates, the skills it requires, and the impact it can have on the family's lives and on society, today and in the future.

**Social Sciences and the Humanities:** observing human beings and their behaviour within their world and society; observing individual development, family life, resource management and conflict resolution.

## Synopsis

**Setting:** Regent Park convenience store, Toronto, 2012.

MR. KIM owns and runs his own business, Kim's Convenience. He is an honest worker and a family man, who prides himself on being a good judge of character. He began his convenience store business years ago to support his family, and he hopes it will provide a secure future for his daughter JANET.

As Mr. Kim looks forward to retirement with his wife UMMA, he is faced with choices and challenges. Regent Park is growing with new condos and a potential business competitor, Walmart. Realtor MR. LEE offers to purchase his store and property. Furthermore, daughter Janet has her heart set on photography, with no interest in taking over the store.

Is it not until Mr. Kim's long-lost son JUNG returns home to reunite with his family that he is reassured about the future and legacy of Kim's Convenience.

*Kim's Convenience* is a story about family, identity, dreams, struggle, choices, faith, loss, and reconciliation.

## About the Playwright

Ins Choi was born in South Korea and moved with his family at an early age to Canada, living with his cousins above his uncle's store, Kim's Groceries, in Toronto. Mr. Choi's father worked at the store, took ESL classes at night, and was also a pastor at a Christian church. Religion and the family business were two key influences for Mr. Choi, who saw them as the mother and father of Korean culture. Mr. Choi later studied theatre and recognized the need for plays with Asian voices: Asian writing, Asian stories, and lead Asian characters. After graduating from theatre school, he worked with fellow Asian theatre artists and practitioners. The script that became *Kim's Convenience* started out as a vignette written when Mr. Choi was a member of Fu-GEN Asian Canadian Theatre Company's playwrighting unit in 2005.

## About the Play

The play *Kim's Convenience* began as a conversation between Mr. Choi and a friend. Early ideas were to have the play set in a convenience store, centred around a Korean family, performed in an actual convenience store.

Mr. Choi started writing a few funny scenes, like sketch comedy. Over time more scenes and character development added to his piece and eventually Mr. Choi had it workshopped with a group of actors.

Some of the content is based on his uncle's experiences when he opened up a shop in South Central Los Angeles, USA. Choi's uncle cared for his customers, and though he got short changed by some, he continued to trust and help the community. When other stores were being looted and burned at the time of the L.A. riots, his store was safe.

Mr. Choi hopes audience members will see the families running corner stores in a new light, with more understanding and respect.

Mr. Choi calls *Kim's Convenience* his "love letter to [his] parents and to all first-generation immigrants who call Canada their home."

*Kim's Convenience* premiered in the 2011 Toronto Fringe Festival, where it played to sold-out houses and was awarded Best New Play. The production was then invited to open Soulpepper Theatre's 2012-13 Season, again playing to sold-out crowds, and winning Toronto Theatre Critics' Awards for Best Canadian Play and Best Actor for Paul Sun-Hyung Lee.

Respected Toronto website Theatromania placed *Kim's Convenience* in the Top 4 of 13 theatre shows in Toronto to be celebrated in the year to come.

Director Weyni Mengesha was named a 'Top Theatre Artist' as director for *Kim's Convenience* by critic Jon Kaplan of Now Magazine, for "capturing emotional truth," and knowing how "to touch an audience's collective heart, sometimes with a feather-light nudge and sometimes with the force of a lightning bolt."

## Cast and Artistic Team



**INS CHOI Jung / Playwright**

**SOULPEPPER:** Resident Artist, 2013; *Kim's Convenience*, *Alligator Pie*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Death of a Salesman*, Double Bill: *(re)Birth: E.E. Cummings in Song & Window on Toronto*.

**OTHER THEATRE:** *lady in the red dress* (fu-GEN/Factory); *Hamlet*, *The Odyssey* (Stratford); *Banana Boys* (fu-GEN); *Hongbu and Nolbu* (YPT).

**OTHER:** Ins is creating a solo show called *Subway Stations of the Cross*. His play, *Kim's Convenience* is touring across Canada in 2013/14.



**GRACE LYNN KUNG Janet**

**SOULPEPPER:** *La Ronde*, *Kim's Convenience*.

**OTHER THEATRE:** *Yukonstyle* (CanStage); *a nanking winter* (Nightwood); *Paper Series* (fu-GEN).

**FILM & TELEVISION:** *Slings and Arrows*, *Away from Her*, *Being Erica*, *George Stroumboulopoulos Tonight*, *InSecurity*, *Hypercube*, *House Party*, *Cubicle Warriors*, *P2*, *Open House*, *Billable Hours*, *The Listener*, *Degrassi: The Next Generation*, *Blue State*, *Lost and Delirious*.

OTHER: Two Certificates of Distinction in Speech and Drama from Trinity College London (UK); *Voice* (Grand Central Studios - UK, Pirate Radio - CDA); Gemini Award nominee for Best Leading Comedic Actress



**PAUL SUN-HYUNG LEE** *Appa*

SOULPEPPER: *Kim's Convenience*.

OTHER THEATRE: (Selected credits) *Ali & Ali: The Deportation Hearings* (Newworld/Cahoots); *The Monster Under the Bed* (YPT); *Godzilla* (Crows); *The Hobbit* (YPT); *1837: The Farmers Revolt* (TPM).

FILM & TELEVISION: (Selected credits) *Robocop*, *Untitled Work of Paul Shepard*, *Ice Princess*, *The Echo*, *P2*; *Warehouse 13*, *XIII*, *Almost Heroes*, *Alphas*, *Covert Affairs*, *Degrassi*, *Train 48*.

OTHER: 2012 Toronto Theatre Critics' Association Award for Best Actor (*Kim's Convenience*); Dora Nomination for Outstanding Performance by a Male in a Principal Role 2012 (*Kim's Convenience*) & 2010 (*Monster Under the Bed*).



**ANDRE SILLS** *Rich/Mr. Lee/Mike/Alex*

SOULPEPPER: *Kim's Convenience*, *You Can't Take It With You*, *Home*, *Window on Toronto*.

OTHER THEATRE: *Shakespeare's Nigga*, *Ruined* (Obsidian); *Intimate Apparel* (ATP), *Cruel & Tender*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Canadian Stage); *Courageous* (NewStages); *Out At Sea* (ARC); *Richard III* (Hart House Theatre); *Taming of the Shrew*, *As You Like It* (Theatre By The Bay); *The Overwhelming* (Studio 180/CanadianStage); *Othello*, *Radio Golf* (St. Louis Black Rep).

OTHER: Four seasons at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival of Canada, attended Birmingham Conservatory, member of The Actors Repertory Company and Graduate of the George Brown Theatre School.



**JEAN YOON** *Umma*

SOULPEPPER: *Kim's Convenience*.

OTHER THEATRE: *The Rez Sisters* (Factory Theatre); *Tout Comme Elle* (Necessary Angel); *Hana's Suitcase* (YPT); *Godzilla* (Crows Theatre); *Yes Yoko Solo* (Loud Mouth Asian Babes); *A Club of Small Men* (Civilized Theatre); *Blessings* (Tarragon); *Noran Bang: The Yellow Room* (Cahoots Theatre Projects).

FILM & TELEVISION: *Orphan Black*, *The Firm*, *Being Erica*, *Warehouse 13*, *Dream House*, *Time Traveler's Wife*, *The Best Years*.

OTHER: 2007 Gemini Nomination for *Dragon Boys*. Playwright: *Hongbu & Nolbu: The Tale of the Magic Pumpkins* (YPT), *The Yoko Ono Project* (LMAB/TPM). Dora Nomination, Outstanding New Play for *The Yoko Ono Project*.



**WEYNI MENGESHA** *Director*

SOULPEPPER: Director: *Kim's Convenience* (2012), *A Raisin in the Sun* (2008, 2010), *BLiNK*. Assistant Director: *As You Like It*, *The Threepenny Opera*, *The Time of Your Life*, *Three Sisters*.

OTHER THEATRE: Director: *The Small Room at the Top of the Stairs* (Tarragon Theatre) *Hosanna* (Stratford Shakespeare festival) *Yellowman* (Nightwood Theatre/Obsidian Theatre Company); *blood.claat* (Theatre Passe Muraille/Great Canadian Theatre Company); *'da kink in my hair* (Theatre Passe

Muraille/Mirvish/Hackney Empire London); *The Taxi Project* (Pen Canada). Dramaturge: *Another Africa* (Volcano Theatre/Canstage).

OTHER: Upcoming: *Lungs* (Tarragon). Toronto Arts Council Foundation Emerging Artist of the Year 2008; Harry Jerome Award; Harold Award. Dora nomination for *'da kink in my hair*, *blood.claat* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. Toronto Critics Award best director for *The Small Room at the Top of the Stairs*.

**ALBERT SCHULTZ** *Remount Director*

Albert Schultz was born 1963 in Port Hope, Ontario and was drawn to acting through his mother's community theatre work. He trained at York University and the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art before joining the Stratford Festival Young Company under Robin Phillips where he played several leading roles including a lauded turn as Romeo.

Beginning in 1992, Albert spent three years on CBC's hit television series *Street Legal*, followed by two seasons as the lead in the series *Side Effects*. His feature film work includes *Beautiful Dreamers*, *I Love a Man in Uniform*, *Maximum Risk*, *Balls Up*, *Under My Skin*, and most recently the lead in CTV's made for TV film *Shades of Black* (a biography of Conrad Black) which aired in December 2006.

Albert is the Founding Artistic Director of Soulpepper Theatre Company and General Director of the Young Centre for the Performing Arts. Albert regularly directs and appears on stage with Soulpepper. As an actor, recent highlights include *Hamlet* (2004 & 2005), *Uncle Vanya* (2001, 2002 & 2008), *Our Town* (1999, 2006 & 2007), *The Real Thing* (2006) and *The Odd Couple* (2008). He also leads the Soulpepper Academy and the company's youth outreach and access initiatives.

Albert's many honours include The City of Toronto Barbara Hamilton Memorial Award, the DareArts Foundation Cultural Award, The Toronto Arts Council William Kilbourn Award, the Salute to the City Award and the Joan Chalmers National Award for Artistic Direction. For his work on behalf of UNICEF, Albert received the Queen Elizabeth II Golden Jubilee Medal.

Albert has received Honorary Degrees from Queen's and Bishop's Universities in recognition of his contributions to Canadian Theatre.

#### **KEN MacKENZIE** *Set and Costume Designer*

SOULPEPPER: Resident Artist 2013. Set & Costume Designer: *Kim's Convenience*, *Home*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (2011). Set Designer: *The Barber of Seville*, *The Norman Conquests*. Lighting Designer & Actor: *Alligator Pie*. Production Designer: *Double Bill* (2011). Set & Video Designer: *Oh What A Lovely War* (2010). Set & Lighting Designer (collaborator): *The Cherry Orchard* (2010), Costume Designer: *Death of a Salesman* (2010).

OTHER: Ken is a graduate of the California Institute of the Arts. Ken was a nominee for the 2013 Virginia and Myrtle Cooper award in Costume design.

#### **LORENZO SAVOINI** *Lighting Designer*

SOULPEPPER: Resident Artist, Resident Designer, 2013. Set, Costume & Video Designer: *La Ronde*. Set & Costume Designer: *Angels in America*, *High Life*, *The Crucible*, *Exit the King*, *The Threepenny Opera*. Lighting Designer: *The Norman Conquests*, *Kim's Convenience*, *Home*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Billy Bishop Goes to War*, *The Glass Menagerie*. Set & Lighting Designer: *Antigone*. Set Designer: *The Royal Comedians*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Time of Your Life*, *The Odd Couple*, *Of the Fields*, *Lately*, *Three Sisters*, *The Caretaker*.

OTHER THEATRE: Stratford Festival (6 seasons), Canadian Opera Company, Tarragon, Theatre Calgary, Canadian Stage, Neptune Theatre.

**THOMAS RYDER PAYNE** *Sound Designer*

SOULPEPPER: *Kim's Convenience, Ghosts, La Ronde.*

OTHER THEATRE: Designs for Stratford, Canadian Stage, National Arts Centre, Theatre Calgary, GCTC, Tarragon, Volcano, Aluna, Modern Times and many others.

OTHER: Starting as a songwriter with a 4-track recorder, Thomas has followed a varied musical career including studying with composer James Tenney, recording and touring for six years with the Juno nominated band Joydrop and producing numerous records. Winner of two Dora Awards and six nominations.

**KAT CHIN** *Stage Manager*

SOULPEPPER: Stage Manager: *Kim's Convenience*. Assistant Stage Manager: *Death of a Salesman* (2012), *The Sunshine Boys*, *Double Bill: (re)Birth: E.E. Cummings in Song + Window on Toronto*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*. Apprentice Stage Manager: *Black Comedy & The Real Inspector Hound*, *Uncle Vanya* (2008), *The Odd Couple*, *As You Like It*.

OTHER THEATRE: Stage Manager: *Kim's Convenience* (Fringe); *The Magic Flute*, *Der Freischütz*, *Don Giovanni*, *Iphigenie en Tauride* (Opera Atelier); *Ivona, Princess of Burgundia* (George Brown); *The Invisible Girl* (LKTYP); *lady in the red dress* (fu-GEN).

OTHER: TIFF since 2004, National Ballet of Canada, Stratford Shakespeare Festival.

**NEHA ROSS** *Assistant Stage Manager*

SOULPEPPER: Assistant Stage Manager: *Kim's Convenience*.

OTHER THEATRE: Stage Manager: *Iceland* (Factory); *Fare Game: A Life in Toronto's Taxis* (Theatre Passe Muraille); *Brown Balls* (fu-GEN); *People Power* (Carlos Bulosan). Apprentice Stage Manager: *Brothel #9* (Factory); *who knew grannie: a dub aria* (Obsidian); *Hallaj* (Modern Times Stage); *The Bird* (Union8); *The Taste of Empire*, *The Madness of the Square* (Cahoots Theatre Projects); *lady in the red dress* (fu- GEN).

OTHER: Graduated from Theatre Arts - Technical Production, Sheridan College. Has worked on various events and theatre productions in Mumbai, India (2011-2012).



**SEAN BAEK** *Fight Director*

SOULPEPPER: Fight Director: *Kim's Convenience*.

OTHER THEATRE: *Brown Balls* (fu-GEN); *Nisei Blue* (ATP); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare In Action); Three seasons at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival, following the Festival's Birmingham Conservatory for Classical Training in 2005/06.

FILM & TELEVISION: *Total Recall*, *Flashpoint*, *Alphas*, *Taken From Me: The Tiffany Rubin Story*, *Hard Core Logo 2*, *Kissed By Lightning*, *ReGenesis*.

**KELLY McEVENUE** *Alexander Coach*

SOULPEPPER: Resident Artist 2013. Alexander Technique/Movement Coach: *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, *La Ronde*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Kim's Convenience*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Farther West*.

OTHER THEATRE: Stratford Shakespeare Festival & Birmingham Conservatory. *The Lion King* (Mirvish); *The Syringa Tree* (Canadian Stage).

FILM & TELEVISION: *Canadian Film Centre Conservatory*, *Triple Sensation*, *Terry: The Story of Terry Fox*.

OTHER: Faculty member of Humber College Theatre Program, guest teacher at National Theatre School, published book, "The Actor and the Alexander Technique", A&E Black Publishers, London & New York.

## Suggested Activities

### Visual Arts Activities

- Be store owners: if you were to own your own business what would you sell? Design the product label, the store layout, or even some of the products themselves.
- Be a costume designer: what would your costume designs look like for the cast of *Kim's Convenience* if you were a designer?
- Design a new poster for the production.

## Drama Activities

- Create character outlines of family members or people close to you. Script monologues for your characters or imagine a ‘what if’ scenario for an interesting fictional dialogue.
- In small groups, act out scenarios of a store theft and its aftermath. Portray the characters of store owner, thief, police officer, and possible witnesses. What are each character’s stories? Could you tell the story in a series of tableaux? Explore what happens if the thief is caught or not.

## Language / English Activities

- Write a theatre review of *Kim’s Convenience*. Compare your review to existing online theatre reviews of *Kim’s Convenience*.
- If you were to write about your family history, what story would you choose to share?

## Business

- Imagine a new product on the market. Create a business outline with a description of your product (including its features, advantages, and benefits), along with your sale price, target audience, and marketing plan.

## Geography and History

- Research the history of convenience stores in your neighbourhood. How do convenience stores contribute to the community and business market where you live?
- Interview your classmates or school staff about their personal experiences with convenience stores. Do they have a story to share?

## Resources

Wikipedia. “Regent Park”[Online.] Jan. 4, 2013

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regent\\_Park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regent_Park)

YouTube. “Ins Choi.” [Online.] Jan. 7, 2012

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4jjl2PdM8sw>

YouTube. “Interview with Ins Choi”. [Online.] Jan. 7, 2013.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVEylYgIHQo>