SOFTWARE & TECH

Stop Kiss Script

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Unpacking the Power of the Stop Kiss Script

The **Stop Kiss Script** by Diana Son remains one of the most poignant and frequently performed works in contemporary American theatre. First premiering Off-Broadway in 1998, this two-character play has captivated audiences with its raw emotional honesty, innovative structure, and tender exploration of love, identity, and violence. For directors, actors, and students of drama, the **Stop Kiss Script** is not just a piece of literature—it is a masterclass in subtext, timing, and the devastating shift from everyday life to tragedy. This article provides a comprehensive look at the play, its themes, its structural genius, and why it continues to resonate with modern audiences. Whether you are looking to produce the play, study it, or simply understand its cultural significance, this guide will give you everything you need to appreciate the **Stop Kiss Script**.

The Origins of the Stop Kiss Script: Diana Son's Vision

Diana Son, a Korean-American playwright, wrote *Stop Kiss* in the late 1990s, a time when LGBTQ+ representation in theatre was growing but still often treated as a niche subject. What makes the **Stop Kiss Script** so remarkable is its universal approach. Son did not write a "gay play"; she wrote a love story that happens to involve two women. The script focuses on the slow, tentative connection between Sara and Callie, two women in New York City who are thrown together by circumstance and gradually realize they are falling in love.

The play was initially produced by The New York Shakespeare Festival at the Joseph Papp Public Theater. Critics immediately praised its honest dialogue and its refusal to sensationalize the central relationship. The **Stop Kiss Script** quickly became a staple of regional and community theatres, especially as conversations about LGBTQ+ rights and visibility grew in the early 2000s. Son's writing is spare yet vivid, with moments of humor that make the later tragedy all the more heartbreaking. For anyone studying modern American drama, the **Stop Kiss Script** is an essential text that demonstrates how to handle sensitive subjects with grace and power.

Plot Summary: The Story Behind the Stop Kiss Script

The narrative of the **Stop Kiss Script** unfolds in a non-linear fashion, alternating between scenes that occur before and after a pivotal violent event. This structure is one of the script's most distinctive features and a key reason for its dramatic impact.

Before the Attack: Building a Connection

In the "before" scenes, we see Sara and Callie meeting through a mutual friend. Sara is a shy, somewhat rigid elementary school teacher from the Midwest, while Callie is a more world-weary traffic reporter for a radio station in New York. Their early interactions are filled with awkwardness and playful banter. As the **Stop Kiss Script** progresses, their friendship deepens. They share meals, late-night phone calls, and confidences. The script excels at showing the small, incremental steps toward intimacy—the kind that feels both thrilling and terrifying. Son uses everyday moments—watching a movie, cooking dinner, talking about ex-boyfriends—to build a foundation of trust. The audience watches as two people who never imagined themselves in a same-sex relationship begin to acknowledge their feelings.

After the Attack: The Aftermath

The "after" scenes begin immediately following a brutal hate crime. Callie has been severely beaten after she and Sara share their first kiss in a public park late at night. The **Stop Kiss Script**then shifts between Sara's visits to the hospital, interactions with police and friends, and painful flashbacks to the happier moments before the attack. This structure creates a powerful dramatic irony: the audience knows the joy will be shattered, making every tender scene before the kiss feel both precious and fragile. The script does not dwell on the violence itself; instead, it focuses on the emotional consequences—Sara's guilt, Callie's slow recovery, and the new, complicated dynamics between them.

Key Themes Explored in the Stop Kiss Script

The **Stop Kiss Script**is rich with themes that make it a valuable tool for discussion in classrooms and theatre productions. Understanding these themes will deepen any analysis of the play.

Love and Identity

At its core, the **Stop Kiss Script**is about discovering who you are through love. Both Sara and Callie are at different points in their lives regarding their sexual identity. Callie has had relationships with women before, while Sara is experiencing her first same-sex attraction. The script handles this disparity with sensitivity. It never forces a label on either character; instead, it lets their actions and words define their connection. This ambiguity is one of the play's greatest strengths, allowing audiences of all backgrounds to see themselves in the characters' journey.

Violence and Its Ripple Effects

Hate crimes are unfortunately still a reality, and the **Stop Kiss Script** does not shy away from showing their impact. However, the play is not a simple story of victimhood. By focusing on the aftermath, Son examines how violence can both shatter and strengthen relationships. Sara's decision to stay by Callie's side, despite the trauma, becomes an act of quiet heroism. The script also critiques how society often fails victims of hate crimes—through insensitive police questioning, medical bureaucracy, and the awkwardness of well-meaning friends. The **Stop Kiss Script**is a powerful reminder that violence does not just hurt one person; it ripples outward through entire communities.

The Courage to Be Vulnerable

One of the most moving aspects of the **Stop Kiss Script** is its depiction of vulnerability. Both Sara and Callie struggle to express their feelings, even after the attack. The script is filled with long pauses, unfinished sentences, and moments where characters almost say something but hold back. This is not poor communication—it is realistic human behavior. Son captures the fear of rejection, the terror of saying "I love you" for the first time, and the bravery it takes to simply hold someone's hand. The **Stop Kiss Script**teaches audiences that love often happens in the space between words.

Structure and Style: What Makes the Stop Kiss Script Unique

The **Stop Kiss Script**is often studied as a model of non-linear storytelling in theatre. Here are the key structural elements that make it stand out:

- Non-linear timeline: Scenes jump between "before" and "after," marked only by subtle shifts in lighting or dialogue. This forces the audience to actively piece together the story.
- Two-hander format: The play is almost entirely a two-person show, though there are a few minor offstage voices. This puts immense pressure on the actors to carry the emotional weight.
- Minimalist set and props: The script calls for simple settings—a living room, a park bench, a hospital room.

The focus is squarely on the characters and their interactions.

- Use of silence: Son's stage directions frequently indicate silences or pauses. These quiet moments are some of the most powerful in the script, allowing subtext to speak louder than words.
- Dialogue rooted in naturalism: The conversations feel unscripted, full of interruptions, half-thoughts, and repetition. This realism makes the sudden intrusion of violence all the more jarring.

Directors and actors who work with the **Stop Kiss Script** often note that it requires a deep trust between the two performers. Because the timeline is fractured, the actors must know both the before and after arcs intimately, even when they are only playing one side of the story in a given scene. This makes the **Stop Kiss Script** both a challenge and a reward for any theatre company.

Why the Non-Linear Structure Matters

The decision to shuffle the timeline is not arbitrary. By showing the happy moments alongside the painful aftermath, the **Stop Kiss Script** creates a sense of inevitability and loss. Audiences experience the joy of the first kiss knowing that it will be followed by violence. This heightens every laugh, every glance, every tender gesture. At the same time, the "after" scenes are infused with hope because we have seen the connection that existed before. This structural choice prevents the play from becoming a simple tragedy or a simple romance. Instead, it becomes a meditation on memory—how we hold onto the good even when surrounded by pain.

Performing the Stop Kiss Script: Practical Considerations

If you are considering a production of the **Stop Kiss Script**, there are several factors to keep in mind, from casting to content warnings.

Casting the Roles

The success of any production hinges on the chemistry between the two actors playing Sara and Callie. The **Stop Kiss Script** demands performers who can convey deep emotion through subtle gestures and vocal shifts. Casting directors often look for actors who can play vulnerability without becoming maudlin, and who have the stamina for the play's emotional arc. Because the characters are on stage for nearly the entire runtime, the production is a marathon, not a sprint.

Content Warnings

Given the central event of a hate crime, any production of the **Stop Kiss Script** should include clear content warnings for violence, homophobic slurs, and medical trauma. The script handles the attack with restraint, but the offstage violence is still deeply affecting. Many theatres also offer post-show discussions to allow audiences to process the themes. The **Stop Kiss Script** is often programmed during Pride Month or as part of social justice initiatives, but it can be performed year-round with appropriate context.

Directing the Pauses

One of the biggest challenges in directing the **Stop Kiss Script** is handling the many silences. Each pause must feel organic, not empty. A skilled director will work with the actors to find the emotional truth behind each quiet moment—whether it is awkward hesitation, suppressed anger, or unspoken longing. In many ways, the pauses are the most important part of the script. They are where the audience fills in the gaps, connecting with the characters on a deeply personal level.

Resources for Obtaining the Stop Kiss Script

For those looking to read or license the **Stop Kiss Script**, it is widely available through the following sources:

- Theatrical publishers: Dramatists Play Service, Inc. holds the performance rights. You can purchase a copy of the acting edition directly from them or through online retailers.
- Libraries: Many university and public libraries carry the published script in their drama collections.
- Online booksellers: Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other major vendors sell the paperback edition.
- Educational anthologies: The Stop Kiss Script is frequently included in collections of contemporary American plays or LGBTQ+ drama anthologies.

If you are planning a production, be sure to contact Dramatists Play Service to secure performance rights. Amateur, professional, and educational licenses are available. The **Stop Kiss Script**is also a popular choice for college theatre departments and community groups due to its relatively small cast and simple technical requirements.

Why the Stop Kiss Script Remains Relevant in 2025

In an era where LGBTQ+ rights continue to be debated, and hate crimes remain a frightening reality, the **Stop Kiss Script** has lost none of its power. If anything, it feels more urgent today. The play reminds us that love can be both exhilarating and terrifying, and that the fight for the right to love openly is far from over. The **Stop Kiss Script**also offers a counterpoint to the often sensationalized portrayals of queer people in media. Instead of focusing on coming out or the struggle for acceptance, it simply shows two people falling in love. That ordinariness is its radical act.

The script has also become a staple in theatre education, frequently taught in courses on LGBTQ+ literature, modern American drama, and playwriting. Its non-linear structure and naturalistic dialogue make it a perfect case study for aspiring playwrights. The **Stop Kiss Script**proves that a play does not need a large cast, elaborate sets, or political speeches to create deep social impact. All

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