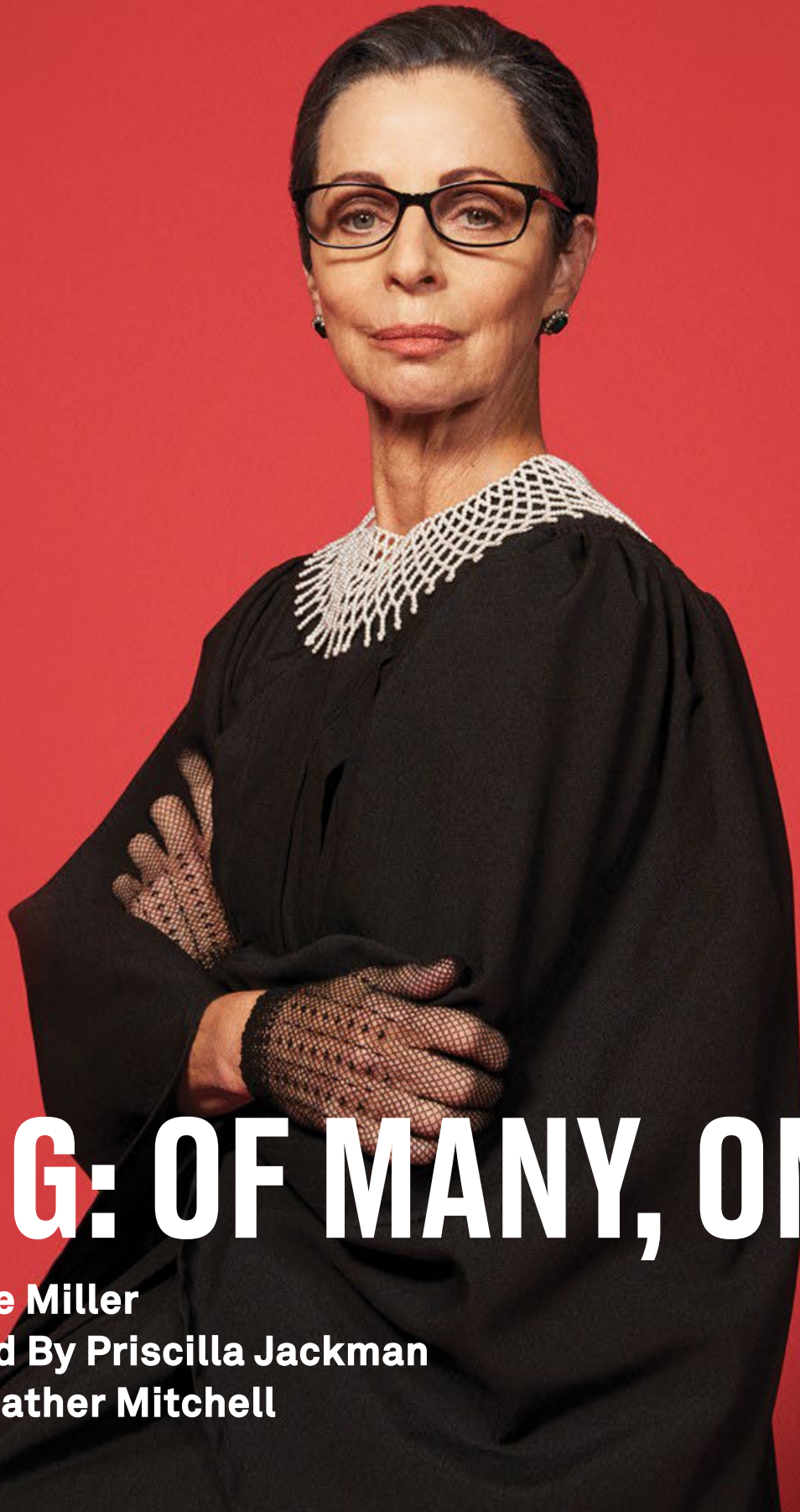


**SYDNEY  
THEATRE  
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EDUCATION**

**ON CUE**



# **RBG: OF MANY, ONE**

**By Suzie Miller**

**Directed By Priscilla Jackman**

**With Heather Mitchell**

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Image: Heather Mitchell. Photo: Rene Vaile.

Compiled by Kelly Young.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. You can contact the Education Team on **education@sydneytheatre.com.au**

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**Sydney Theatre Company acknowledges the Gadigal of the Eora nation who are the traditional custodians of the land and waters on which the Company gathers. We pay our respects to Elders past and present, and we extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and with whom we share stories.**

## CAST AND CREATIVES

# RBG: OF MANY, ONE

By Suzie Miller

**Ruth Bader Ginsburg**  
Heather Mitchell

**Director**  
Priscilla Jackman

**Designer**  
David Fleischer

**Lighting Designer**  
Alexander Berlage

**Composer & Sound Designer**  
Paul Charlier

**Voice & Dialect Coach**  
Jennifer White

**Associate Sound Designer (Tour)**  
Zac Saric

**Production Manager**  
Aiden Brennan

**Company Stage Manager**  
Katie Hankin

**Assistant Stage Manager**  
Brooke Kiss

**Costume Coordinator**  
Scott Fisher

**Wardrobe, Wig, Hair & Make-Up  
Supervisor**  
Lauren A. Proietti

**Wig Stylist**  
Carla D'Annunzio

**Costume Day Maintenance**  
Nyok Kim Chang

**Lighting Supervisor & Realiser**  
Ethan Hamill

**Sound Supervisor & Realiser**  
Hayley Forward

**Staging Supervisor**  
Zachary White

**Production Photographers**  
Prudence Upton  
Daniel Boud

THIS PLAY PREMIERED AT WHARF 1 THEATRE, SYDNEY ON 3 NOVEMBER 2022

THIS SEASON OPENED AT RIVERSIDE THEATRE, PARRAMATTA ON 6 MARCH 2025

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION SUPPORTED BY STC ANGELS IN ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCES ALLAN & IAN NAREV, MARK COULTER & DR ADAM BAYES. 2024 NATIONAL TOUR SUPPORTED BY STC ANGELS IN ASSOCIATION WITH DAVID GONSKI AC & ORLI WARGON OAM.

PRESENTING PARTNER

Allens >>



# DIRECTOR'S NOTE: PRISCILLA JACKMAN

When we first opened *RBG: Of Many, One* in October 2022, we could not have predicted that Suzie Miller's deeply affecting text and Ruth's own messages of tolerance, humanity and equality would become even more timely in the years that followed, as the world steadfastly continues on its trajectory to the right.

What was clear, however, right from my initial reading of the first draft of Suzie's exquisite script, was that our production must showcase, front and centre, the virtuosity of Heather Mitchell's breathtaking craft. Not only is Heather required to convincingly become the iconic Ruth Bader Ginsburg, from 13 years of age to 87 inclusive, but also to inhabit every other role in the play. Suzie's unique 'monodrama form' also requires exceptional skill and a sophisticated dexterity from the creative team. The storytelling requires the rapid transformation of character, time, space, location, rhythm – and within very modest parameters and with very few external elements, we sought to actively create an aesthetic and theatrical language that would clearly, efficiently, and with great innovation and theatricality – invite audiences to connect with Ruth, to deeply understand and 'experience' her life's trajectory and her contributions to our world.

The gift of working within this deep collaboration alongside Heather, Suzie, David, Alex, Paul, our creative associates and stage management team, Katie and Brooke, has been an extraordinary and sacred journey – and one I believe Ruth herself would entirely approve of.

Structurally, *RBG: Of Many, One*, is divided into three parts, each focusing on a distinct period of Ginsburg's life. Part 1 deals with the domestic sphere – Ruth's childhood, adolescence and student days. Part 2 expands as we witness Ruth inhabiting elite environments, such as the Supreme Court, as well as the growth of her status and impact. By Part 3 she has literally exploded into the zeitgeist, operating actively in the global world – she is a celebrity, a cultural icon – the Notorious RBG. Ruth's interactions with three presidents in each part, (Clinton, Obama and Trump), provides a meditation on leadership and gender. Through the lens of this one woman, we witness a counterpoint to the distinct models of masculine leadership each of the iconic presidential figures represent.

One of my favourite aspects of Suzie's script, is the parallel Ruth finds between her love of opera and using her voice in court. Opera was an almost spiritual experience for Ruth - a detail woven lovingly throughout this production- our tribute to her advocacy of the performing arts. While there is a plethora of information about RBG's life available, we hope audiences (new and returning) walk away viscerally moved by the experience of RBG in this unique theatrical form. Furthermore, we hope this production offers personal insight into the continued relevance of RBG's wisdom and provocation for our world. Through the work, which has now played to over 100,000 audience members across Australia since its premier season in 2022, we are reminded of the deeply progressive catalyst for steadfast change that RBG represents, and the need for vigilance in continuing her fight for justice, equality, understanding, compassion and human connection. Perhaps RBG's message has never been as important, as in our world today.

# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT: SUZIE MILLER

As a young female law student I looked up to women judges; they were groundbreakers for me, and they remain so. The more women in powerful legal positions, the more opportunity for the law to be influenced by women's lived experiences. Ruth Bader Ginsburg, herself, brought all her intelligence and thoughtfulness to her judicial profession; she brought her feminism, her roles as mother, daughter, life-partner; she brought her Jewish background, her childhood of loss and socio-economic repression, she brought her incredibly flexible mind and her sharp senses. She brought herself as a woman completely and without apology. All of which has not only influenced the USA but women's lives around the world – including women and lawyers in Australia.

Throughout her life, RBG felt strongly about democracy and the rule of law, and to ensure both of these, she applauded the strict separation of executive and judicial powers. The rule of law, in short, means that no one is above the law – including leaders and politicians. This accountability and transparency must never be taken for granted, and the separation of powers – that the government and the courts must never interfere with or seek to influence each other – is a way of keeping the checks and balances on both the government and judges of the day. This is democracy in action.

It is ironic that her words have come back to haunt us all – I wrote this play during the pandemic - because her warning against interference between courts and presidents is something that is paramount in today's world. Democracy is only as strong as its institutions, and in many countries we are seeing those institutions rattled and swaying under pressure. If they collapse so too does democracy. RBG was often blamed for not resigning. This play attempts to show how she did not believe in judges playing party politics, however even she, with her enormous intellect, might never have envisioned how the court would become so partisan, so politicised in her country.

That she died with some sense of how that was coming about is tragic, especially when she had been on the verge of what she believed was a woman in the White House. Can we blame her for not seeing that dashed when no one else saw it either? Was vanity at play or purity and vision?

Nevertheless, perhaps her seemingly unrelenting and critiqued belief in the institution of the court might well come back to serve us. The court could perhaps be the one thing that will act to keep in check the extravagances of executive power and wildly undemocratic rulings by today's politicians. Perhaps at the root of her not resigning was a sense that she must stand against presidents telling courts and judges what to do – and in that regard her stance was about saving democracies. If we take a long view, perhaps it is this arm of democracy, the judiciary, that will ultimately rebalance the system in the longer term – or not. Of course, this play cannot say, instead it explores the deeply human, brilliant mind and service of RBG the woman and the judge.

With *RBG: Of Many, One*, I was so warmly supported by the STC in expressing my unique vision for the play, and that has continued right up to this season of the show. I thank them all once again for their brilliance and love.

# SYNOPSIS



It is the summer of 1993 and Ruth Bader Ginsburg is waiting for a life-changing phone call.

As the minutes tick by, Ruth recalls the incredible life that led to this moment: the loving support of her mother in her formative years, the moment she discovered opera, her ascent through the legal profession and the trials and triumphs she faced growing up as a working-class, Jewish woman in America.

Over the course of three historic conversations with three very different presidents, the story of this powerhouse of legal knowledge, political thought and moral conviction will unfold against the backdrop of a rapidly changing world.

This is the story of one incredible woman, her inspiring rise to the highest office in the American judiciary, the complex decisions she grappled with during that period and the numerous civil rights causes she defended. At the same time, this is a dioramic study of the power of the individual in society, and the changing attitudes toward representation and inclusion over the last 50 years.

# CURRICULUM LINKS

## SUITABLE FOR

Years 9 – 12

Drama Stage 5 & 6

History Stage 5 (Depth Study)

## FORM, STYLE, & CONVENTION

- Non-linear narrative
- Dramatic Irony
- Realism
- Monologue
- Opera

## THEMES & IDEAS

- Gender and Ambition
- Power and Justice
- American Identity



# CHARACTER ANALYSIS

## Ruth Bader Ginsburg

Born in 1933 in Brooklyn to parents Celia and Nathan Bader, Joan Ruth Bader was the youngest of two children. Ruth's sister, Marilyn, died of meningitis when Ruth was a baby and her mother, Celia, died of cancer just before Ruth graduated from James Madison High School. Celia was a bright student and had hoped to further her education but was unable to do so because of her gender. As a result, she took a great interest in Ruth's education, encouraging her to develop her obvious intellectual gifts. Celia's early death was deeply felt by Ruth, and she carried her mother's ambitions for her throughout her life.

After high school, Ruth attended Cornell University, followed by Harvard Law School and Columbia Law School. Marrying her husband Martin (Marty) in 1954 after graduating from Cornell, Ruth had two children, Jane, and James. During the late 1950s and early 1960s the legal profession was dominated by men, causing Ruth to struggle to find employment. During the 1970s, Bader Ginsburg became increasingly involved in the struggle for gender equality, choosing to work on high profile cases in which she focused on ending discrimination through the legal system.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton appointed Bader Ginsburg to the Supreme Court of the USA. She was the second woman to be appointed. During this period, Bader Ginsburg became well known for her liberal approach to interpreting the Constitution, redefining understandings of equality. Throughout her tenure as a Supreme Court Justice, Bader Ginsburg wrote detailed, thoughtful, and passionate analysis of the legal decisions, particularly when she dissented from the majority. These dissenting opinions became the basis of her emergence as "Notorious RBG", a cultural icon whose tiny stature and serious demeanour contrasted with her enormous intellect and passion for equity.

After Marty's death and her own bouts of ill health, it was expected that Bader Ginsburg would retire in 2013, allowing then President Barack Obama to replace her with a candidate of his choosing before he left office. Bader Ginsburg declined to retire and died in office in 2020, with six weeks left before the Trump/Biden Presidential election. Her position was filled by Donald Trump before he left office.

# FORM, STYLE AND CONVENTION

**Playwright Suzie Miller has chosen to fuse several theatrical styles to create both the interior and exterior world of Ruth Bader Ginsburg.**

## Form

The narrative structure of *RBG: Of Many, One* follows a non-linear trajectory through RBG's life. Circularity and fluidity of time is used to explore memory, inner thoughts, and human experience. A key device in Miller's exploration of form is her use of dramatic irony, which allows the audience to reflect on the shifts in American politics, society, and culture across historical periods, from a contemporary vantage point. Dramatic irony is the positioning of the narrative so that the audience is aware of a great deal more information than the characters.

## Style

### Realism

Realism aims to recreate the experience of real life on the stage using all available theatrical elements. The aim of Realism is to create an empathetic response in the audience as they follow the journey of the character through to a resolution.

### Monologue

A monologue is a performance by one actor. It can be the performance of a long piece of dialogue within a play. Or it can be a production that contains only one actor.

### Opera

Opera is a performance style that tells a story through orchestral music, with the characters played by classically trained singers. The singing is always continuous and does not break to include scenes with spoken dialogue. The conventions of Opera include highly stylised and theatrical Elements of Production, overtly theatrical performances including voice and gesture, to create a deeply emotional response in the audience. One of the key conventions of Opera is that the narrative is told through a recitative, which is sung in rhythms that are similar to natural speech. The expression of deep emotion occurs in an aria, which is written to be as moving as possible, whilst allowing the artist to demonstrate their skills.

# THEMES AND IDEAS

## Gender and Ambition

Suzie Miller's script, *RBG: Of Many, One* explores the relationship between gender and ambition in 20th Century America. With the focus on mid-century American legal, political, and social history, Miller's text provides the audience with an historical understanding of the quest for women's rights through Bader Ginsburg's individual perspective on her life and achievements. Framed by Ruth Bader Ginsburg's own liberal feminist perspective, Miller's work offers the audience an opportunity to engage with the strategies and struggles for women's rights through different points in history, using a liberal feminist approach.

Bader Ginsburg's feminism can be characterised as belonging to a white middle-class tradition that focuses on changing laws to provide access to those areas of society from which women were (and are) excluded. Agitating to allow access to the same career choices as men, wage equality and equal treatment under the law are often the focus of liberal feminists. Intersectional feminists suggest that such an approach ignores the other barriers to women's success including acknowledgment of race, sexual orientation, gender diversity, class, and ableism, which also work together to magnify inequality.

"This is it!

The way to change things. To change the law!"

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 26)

Bader Ginsburg's context, so different to contemporary understandings and experiences of societal narratives of gender equality with its stultifying constraints on intelligent, ambitious women, was a stifling place for women of that period. Bader Ginsburg's successful career, her measured, middle-class approach to change, and the importance of male support in an individual woman's quest for equality is reflective of a liberal feminist approach that yielded huge change for women in the 20th Century.

Miller's script emphasises the contained, measured approach to change that was synonymous with Bader Ginsburg. Learnt from her mother Celia, and seemingly effective in disguising her fierce passion and intellect, the narrative appears to suggest that, in part, Bader Ginsburg's success was a result of this approach. Later in Miller's narrative, the audience experiences the vitriol of Trump's response to Bader Ginsburg's tweet about him, demonstrating societal disapproval and disciplining of a woman who dares express her thoughts in an open manner.

"She's lost her mind! Justice Ginsburg's mind is shot – resign!"

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 51)

With Bader Ginsburg saying:

"I have interfered where no one should. That fury of mine."

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 53)

## DIRECTOR PRISCILLA JACKMAN ON GENDER AND AMBITION

*RBG: Of Many, One* traces the life journey of feminist icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg, from her childhood in Brooklyn to her rise as the second woman on the Supreme Court of USA, and finally to her status as a global icon and voice of equality. Bader Ginsburg is important for Australian audiences because her fight for justice and equality was for all people. The implementation of sex discrimination laws here in Australia took longer than those overseas and tended to be informed by practices in America and globally. In this way, Bader Ginsburg's fight for equality in her society rippled around the world as she became a voice for freedom, democracy and equality everywhere. The play carries many themes around gender and ambition, as we come to understand the life's work, discrimination faced, victories won and even some flaws of Bader Ginsburg over the course of her extraordinary life. The figure of her husband Marty Ginsburg also represents a supremely progressive voice as a '1950s man' and a terrific role model for men. Through the lens of RBG we understand more about the rise of feminism, the fight for equality, and hopefully the play inspires Australian audiences to continue to be vigilant in our contemporary efforts to create a fair and just society for all people.



## Power and Justice

“I strongly abide by the separation of the judiciary and the executive. The constitution can only work its magic, democracy can only be maintained, if we never meddle in the affairs of the other.”

*(RBG: Of Many, One, pg. 7)*

The US Supreme Court was established as part of the US Constitution. Its function is to hold the ultimate judicial power of the United States. The Supreme Court is the place where final legal decisions are made, government power is contained, and human rights are protected. As such, it is the final decision maker in legal disputes between the 51 states of America, government ministers and ambassadors, federal law, and the US Constitution.

The importance of the Supreme Court in managing and balancing the power of the government is of vital importance in a liberal democratic society. This is because it sets limits on the actions and activities of the government by making decisions that prioritise the values of the US Constitution over and above the political views of the day. These values, for example, include equality before the law and freedom of speech.

Made up of an odd number of judges and appointed by the President, the US Supreme Court evaluates legal arguments presented to it and decides whether a case violates the constitution or whether it does not. If most judges agree on a way forward, it is called a majority opinion. If a judge disagrees with a decision made by the court and is in the minority, they are entitled to write a dissenting opinion. These opinions explain flaws in the thinking of the majority and why the decisions should have been different. Dissents, far from being a waste of time, often lay out a pathway for future challenges to the majority decision taken by the Supreme Court.

Suzie Miller’s script acknowledges the historical shift to a more conservative outlook in America, reflected in both the politics of the day, the politicised appointments of Supreme Court Judges and the increasing conservatism of decisions made by the US Supreme Court. Miller’s script explores the power and importance of a judge’s dissenting opinion in the protection of democracy. Carefully written and different to the neutral language used in writing an assent, dissents are both of the law and outside it. It might be expected that a dissent weakens the institution of the Supreme Court by exposing differences in legal thinking, however, the opportunity to freely express different thinking can also be seen as exercising the right to free speech, thus strengthening the robust nature of institution by demonstrating its ability to withstand different points of view.

Miller’s script incorporates many of Bader Ginsburg’s cases, including her dissent on the *Burwell vs Hobby Lobby Stores* case in which the Court supported the idea that:

“... explicit Christian faith says that contraception is immoral and so they won’t allow employees’ health care to cover contraception.”

*(RBG: Of Many, One, pg. 47)*

Holding her liberal feminist understanding of equality, Bader Ginsburg challenged the logic of the assent by centring on the rights of individual female employees and their ability to participate in the workplace under such a decision.

“My dissent is strong. A profit company is not a religious organisation. The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the nation, has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives”

*(RBG: Of Many, One, pg. 47 - 48)*

The politicised nature of appointing judges to the Supreme Court is also explored in Miller’s script, reinforcing the importance of Bader Ginsburg’s dissenting arguments in the face of the shift to the conservative right in American politics. Appointed by (Democrat) President Bill Clinton, and explored by Miller in Part 2 in a scene with then (Democrat) President Barack Obama in 2013, and continued into the Biden/Trump election campaign of 2020 and framed by Bader Ginsburg’s famous media comments on (Republican) Donald Trump, Miller explores the tension between the notion of impartiality of judges, the politicised nature of their appointment and the impact on the lives of ordinary women and minority groups in America.

## **DIRECTOR PRISCILLA JACKMAN ON POWER AND JUSTICE**

Themes of power and justice are explored at length by Suzie Miller, particularly in her depiction of RBG in her interactions with each of the presidents of the United States: Clinton (Part 1), Obama (Part 2) and Trump (Part 3).

RBG refers numerous times throughout the play to the ‘Rule of Law’ and the importance of the distinction between judicial and congress powers. What she means by this, is that for a just and democratic society to operate, the justice system (courts) must operate independently of the political system (government). If government can determine the outcome of courts (or vice versa), corruption can breed. When the two systems of governance and power remain separate, all citizens – whether they are high up in politics or everyday people – are all entitled to a fair trial and that no one is above the law.

She first outlines her value system on the importance of this, in Part 1: The Oval Office, when she is being interviewed by President Clinton, to see if she will be appointed to the Supreme Court of America. She says:

“I strongly abide by the separation of the judiciary and the executive. The constitution can only work its magic, democracy can only be maintained, if we never meddle in each other’s affairs”.

*(RBG: Of Many, One, pg. 7)*

As a creative team, we chose to light RBG in an oval spotlight, reflecting the location of the Oval Office. Physically, she stands tall, and I directed Heather to hold two different points of focus, to differentiate for the audience her eye contact when she is playing RBG and when she is playing Clinton. She furthered this distinction between the two characters by taking on a southern drawl for Clinton, using slower tempo rhythms, and an outward arm gesture, to physically suggest his power and ease in the situation and ‘taking up space’. In contrast as RBG, Heather adopted a more compact physical stance, to demonstrate RBG’s nervousness in the situation. She explored faster tempo rhythms for RBG and rapidly moved between ‘talking to Clinton’ and turning to the audience delivering asides as narrator. When it came to the important lines about the reflection on democracy and power however, Heather, as RBG, delivered these with confidence and poise, as we wanted to clearly demonstrate to the audience not only how important this theme is in the play (as this is the first time it is heard), but also to communicate RBG’s personal love of law and democracy, and her confidence on all judicial matters.

During Part 2, the Obama lunch scenes, Bader Ginsburg expands on this theme of power and justice. She suggests to Obama that:

“The separation of President and Congress from the Judiciary is one of the pillars of the United States democratic system. We must never interfere or tell each other what to do. We are each other’s checks and balances to guard against a rogue court or a rogue president.”

*(RBG: Of Many, One, pg. 40)*

In this scene RBG takes up a seated position, as if she is addressing President Obama across a table at lunch. We used the singular prop of a white serviette to reinforce this suggested location, and the backdrop of the wall structure. Bader Ginsburg is 80 years old in this scene, and Heather adjusted the tone of her voice to depict this. She slightly curled her spine, extending her neck forward, to suggest the older physicality of RBG. Despite her age, RBG is still fiercely focused and intellectually dexterous in this scene as she delivers some of the most important lines of the play regarding the Rule of Law and her belief in the importance of democracy and the systems of law.

Part 3 is extremely interesting in terms of dramatic tension and irony because in her later years, Ruth failed to follow her own advice and spoke out in warning of Trump during the presidential race in 2016. This was extremely out of character, because as a judge she had no right to speak out politically – as it was her role to remain unbiased. Dramatically, this is one of the largest climatic moments in the play and reflects a grave misjudgement which caused Ruth enormous personal and professional shame as she ‘falls from grace’. She says:

“I told Obama not to meddle in the court, I said, ‘just as a judge like me should never meddle in the workings of Congress’ And now, I have done that very thing. I have spoken up against a presidential candidate. I have interfered where no judge should. The only time in my career when I favoured emotion over process...And so publicly. I am so ashamed of myself and this fallibility, it hurts”.

*(RBG, Of Many One, pg. 53)*

Directorially, we made specific choices to mark the climax of Ruth speaking out by positioning Heather centre. We used mobile light boxes operated by our Stage Technician and Assistant Stage Manager, in a series of choreographed moves that punctuate the lines of Bader Ginsburg speaking out to the media including Times and CNN. She says:

“I don’t even want to contemplate four years of a Trump presidency and the effect it could have on the court... Trump is a faker with an ego.”

*(RBG, Of Many One, pg. 51)*

After each line, we used sharp, explosive sound to suggest the pop and frenzy of the paparazzi. Our Lighting Designer, Alexander Berlage, co-ordinated an aggressive series of sharp short lighting cues (like strobe) that added to the tension of this moment. Our Composer & Sound Designer, Paul Charlier, also used a drone like backing to further underpin the dramatic tension. As the tidal wave of condemnation for Bader Ginsburg rose on social media, we used an overlay of tweet sounds and pulsing rhythms. I directed Heather to move upstage rapidly in a series of diagonal moves, positioning her far upstage, so that she became dwarfed by the set structure. In this way the very ‘columns’ that represented her rise to power and the Supreme Court in Part 2, now looked to loom above her. This was a symbolic way of communicating the growing emotional distress of RBG as her ‘fall from grace’ caused both personal and professional shame.

In this way, throughout the script there are many references to themes of justice and power. A range of directorial and creative choices were employed to communicate RBG’s views on justice and power at various junctions in her journey, often seen in relationship to the presidential figures that she encountered throughout her career.

## AMERICAN IDENTITY

Suzie Miller's exploration of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's life functions as a device with which to interrogate America, offering a comment on the political, social, and cultural shifts through which she lived, enacted change, and became a revered cultural icon.

It is no coincidence that Bader Ginsburg was able to rise to her position during the 20th Century, an historical period in which America was an undisputed global superpower. Its economic and cultural hegemony, built on the success of its capitalist economy, with its focus on market forces, development of the military industrial complex, and accumulation of wealth and global cultural industries, strengthened the hegemonic narrative of liberal freedoms and benevolent capitalism. Miller's narrative offers an individual's experience of the impact of the decline of this narrative, as it curdled with the rise of the conservative religious right. Beginning with the Reagan Administration, and escalating over the early 21st Century, the conservative religious right has grown in influence as global challenges to American economic and military power emerged and its population struggle with the results of decades of neo-liberal economic policies.

The production of *RBG: Of Many, One*, manipulates theatrical form, the theatrical device of dramatic irony and the theatrical style of Opera to explore audience understanding of an America in decline, with state institutions including the judiciary, under extreme pressure from an increasingly polarised political landscape.

Miller's use of narrative shifts through time allows the audience to experience the optimism of the fight for gender equality and other social justice campaigns during the early 1970s, a period in which America was just beginning to exit the post-World War Two economic boom. The inexorable move to Parts 2 and 3, including the end of Bader Ginsburg's life, is marked by the rise of Trump and the conservative right in American politics, including their attack on women's rights. Watching in 2024, the audience engages from the vantage point of the end of first Trump and Biden Administrations, nostalgic for the certainties of a liberal democracy characterised by reason and objectivity and supported by a thriving, healthy economy.

Fusing Realism with Opera, Miller heightens the audience's emotional connection to Bader Ginsburg's individual character, and the collective tragedy unfolding throughout the narrative. The conventions of Opera, designed to convey profound depths of human experience and emotion, has been harnessed by Director Jackman and Composer & Sound Designer Paul Charlier in both narrative choices and Charlier's sound design, enhancing the audience's emotional connection to an individual woman who, by her own admission, was serious and contained.

Like its defender Bader Ginsburg, older versions of America become an object of nostalgia. As such, Miller's play offers the audience to remember, celebrate and mourn, both the woman and the nation, and challenge the efficacy of the narrative of liberal change, liberal feminism, the success of capitalism and the place of America in the world. Bader Ginsburg embodies the ideal images of what America understands itself to be, that once might have existed but does no longer.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## Gender and Ambition

The classroom activities in this section use extracts from *RBG: Of Many, One*. These extracts reflect the discrimination based on gender that Ruth experienced over her life and career. They also ask students to reflect upon a liberal feminist position and the way it challenges discrimination:

### Extracts

“But I don’t understand, Momma. I can play the cello in the orchestra. I can beat the boys in every single class in school. I can speak Hebrew as well as all the other boys. I know more than most of them about Jewish history. So why? Why do they get to have a bar mitzvah? Or rather why do girls not get to have one?”  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 10)

“He has invited us here to ask us “why do you think you have the right to take up a space at law school instead of a man... I (say) I guess I must study law so that I can talk to my husband about his work.”  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 20)

“The other man who’s my ally is Marty, my secret weapon. He believes in sharing the raising of our children. And this changes everything.”  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 24)

“But hold yourself... see it but do not live the life of rage... never lift your voice above the others. The only way to make your own life is to stay independent. Not reliant on any man. Be your own lady and your strengths and independence will hold you.”  
*Celia Bader. To her daughter, Ruth.*  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 10 – 11)

### Activity 1

As a class, discuss the ideas found in the extracts provided.

- a. Brainstorm the words that you would use to describe what Ruth is experiencing in the extracts. Create a word bank on the whiteboard from the suggestions from the class.
- b. Group the words into two categories that reflect the discrimination Ruth faces and the way in which both Celia and Marty are offered as solutions to that discrimination.

## Activity 2

Working in groups of 4 – 5 students:

- a. Using the word bank created in the class discussion, choose one word from each category, and create a freeze frame that represents each of the two words chosen. As each group shows their images, note the similarities between the first set of images and the second.
- b. Once this process has been completed, discuss the differences between the first set of images and the second set of images. What are the differences? If we were to summarise the power imbalance between the two, what might it be?
- c. Create a freeze frame that creates a “bridge” between the first and second image. As a class, brainstorm the adjectives that are generated by these images.

## Activity 3

Working in groups of 4 – 5 students read the extracts provided below:

- “For the first time as a lawyer I am standing up in the Supreme Court. All five feet of me. Arguing before the highest judge in the land. ‘The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment of the constitution does not allow discrimination on the basis of sex’. And... we win!”  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 26)
  - “1978 Duren versus Missouri. Women are allowed to be excused from juries due to home duties! I argue in court... The Constitution of the United States of America cannot tolerate a system where women are not judged by their own peers.”  
(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 27 – 28)
- a. Brainstorm the characteristics of women that might have been able to access legal challenges to the law in the Supreme Court, as exemplified in the extracts above. Support your thinking with reasons as to why this might be the case.
  - b. Allocate the following types of feminist thought to each group. For example, Socialist Feminism, Radical Feminism, Black Feminism, Eco-Feminism and Queer Feminism. Using the two script extracts above, each group should research, adapt, rehearse, and perform the extracts to reflect their allocated strand of feminist thought.
  - c. Class discussion that focuses on the difference between schools of feminist thought and Bader Ginsburg’s Liberal Feminist approach to change. What does this activity suggest about the differences between feminist approaches to equality? Why might liberal feminism have been the change agent of choice for middle class women like RBG?

## Activity 4 - Class Debate

Choose a representative from each group to represent different schools of feminism. Create a panel of experts to discuss the following questions from their allocated feminist perspective. Questions to consider and discuss:

- Liberal Feminism is the only way to change society.

- Bader Ginsburg’s feminist approach to change is redundant.
- Does Liberal Feminism pave the way for other feminist approaches to change?

### Activity 5

In the conversation with President Barack Obama, Bader Ginsburg is asked by the President if she has considered the impact of her legacy if a conservative judge is appointed after her death.

“I falter. He’s smart. Knows my Achilles. I inwardly shudder at all the work I have done in the courts being undone by a future right-wing court.”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 44)

- Working in groups of 4 – 5, devise a group response to the following question:  
Is Ruth Bader Ginsburg ambitious? In your response, characterise the nature of her ambition.
- Toward the end of the production, Bader Ginsburg tweets her thoughts about Trump’s potential election as President. Working in the same groups, discuss how Trump uses societal ideas about women’s ambition against Bader Ginsburg. Revisit the improvised scene above and incorporate society’s views about ambitious women and how these views ultimately control women’s voices.



# Power and Justice

## Activity 1

Working as a class, divide the class into halves. Within each half, divide the class into groups of 4 – 5 students.

- a. The first half of the class work with extracts from Suzie Miller’s script in which Bader Ginsburg speaks of the role of the Supreme Court to protect democratic values.

Some examples include:

- “Ruth: I strongly abide by the separation of the judiciary and the executive. The constitution can only work its magic, democracy can only be maintained, if we never meddle in the affairs of the other. Clinton: Except for right now where I must appoint a judge and therefore, I have my nose right in the business of the judiciary.”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 7)

- “I never dreamed that this country would decide the presidency before it was certain that the voting was fair.”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 38)

- “My dissent is strong. A profit company is not a religious organisation. The ability of women to participate equally in the economic and social life of the nation, has been facilitated by their ability to control their reproductive lives”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 47 – 8)

- “Sandra, the first woman on the bench, a Republican, she’s reaching out to me beyond the partisan divide. Beyond all our differences with welcoming arms.

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 33)

- “It gave me exactly what I needed to draft into law equal pay despite gender”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 39)

- b. In the second half of the class, divide the class into groups of 4 – 5 students. These students work with the extracts below from Suzie Miller’s script in which dramatic irony is used to heighten the audience’s understanding of the importance of protecting the non-partisan role of the Supreme Court in American Society.

Some examples include:

- “In 1973 there’s a landmark abortion case being heard before the Supreme Court. Roe vs Wade... It’s not my case but I follow it closely of course... But HANG ON. The court held that the right to abortion rests on the right to privacy between a woman and her doctor. It isn’t strong enough. The win in Roe versus Wade isn’t really about the woman’s choice, it’s the doctor’s freedom to practice... I speak up... The court failed to make abortion a watertight right. I’m warning that one day abortion rights can be overturned.”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pp. 28 – 29)

- “I must be prepared for what is coming. A new president. A woman. Soon, I hope. She will read these dissents. Take them to Congress and will change the laws. And change this nation.” (pg. 48)

- “This new generation wants to make life better not just for oneself, but for one’s community.” (pg. 49)

- “I’m at a dinner party. I don’t know all the guests but it’s a pleasant group. All Democrat supporters. Still as a member of the judiciary I must be careful what I say in company. The talk is all about this joke of a presidential race. Hilary is doing a marvellous job, ahead in the polls. Against this awful Donald Trump man, this New York money maker.”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pp. 49 – 50)

- c. Create a montage of quotes, freeze frames and movement that represents the mood and atmosphere of each selection – one that reflects Bader Ginsburg’s view of the Supreme Court’s role in American society and one that reflects the mood and atmosphere of a contemporary audience as they experience Bader Ginsburg’s optimism about the future.

Present each to the class and reflect on the following question:

Playwright Suzie Miller uses the theatrical device of dramatic irony throughout *RBG: Of Many, One*. What is playwright Suzie Miller asking the audience to reflect on?

## Activity 2

Using the final scene of Part 1, consider the appointment of Bader Ginsburg by Bill Clinton.

“And I hear loud and clear. President Bill Clinton word for word: I’m going to ask you tomorrow, in the Rose Garden at the White House, to accept a position as one of the nine judges on the Supreme Court of the United States of America”

(*RBG: Of Many, One*, pg. 30)

As a class, discuss the following questions:

- What political persuasion is Bill Clinton? What political persuasion is Donald Trump?
- What is the prevailing atmosphere of Bader Ginsburg’s response to being nominated to the Supreme Court? Does the audience question this appointment at this stage of the production? Why or why not?
- Using the conventions of Realism and Opera, create this moment for an audience. Why might Miller have placed this moment at the end of Part 1 after the plot developments (recitatives) demonstrating Bader Ginsburg’s achievements?

## Activity 3

Part 2 of Miller’s script involves the exploration of Barack Obama’s request to Bader Ginsburg to resign her position due to her age and the looming election in which Trump and Hilary Clinton are in a race for the American Presidency.

In groups of 4 – 5, explore the following scenes in which President Obama and Bader Ginsburg grapple with the prospect of a Republican nominee to the Supreme Court, should Bader Ginsburg die if Trump is elected to office. Each group might explore the perspective of either Obama or Bader Ginsburg. Each group could, from the vantage point of 2013 think of 5 reasons why their chosen character is correct, justifying their thoughts with reasons from the historical period:

- 2013, Monday 1 July, Washington DC (pgs. 39 – 42)
- 2013, Monday 1 July, Washington DC (pgs. 43 – 45)

#### Activity 4

Using the expertise of the group generated in the activity above, create a Conscience Alley exercise where an actor takes on the role of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The rest of the group, based on their work in exercise 3, forms 2 lines and becomes Bader Ginsburg's conscience, advising her on the question:

Should RBG resign before the 2016 election?

#### Activity 5

Using the Conscience Alley exercise above, and the decision taken by the class, discuss the impact of the activity through the lens of a contemporary audience.

How does Suzie Miller's use of dramatic irony impact on our understanding of the tragedy that unfolded after Trump's 2016 Presidential victory?



# American Identity

## Activity 1

Working in groups of 2 – 3 students.

- a. Use the following scenes from *RBG: Of Many, One* to create frozen images of America. Ask each group to create six images including three of the 1970s and three of contemporary America.
  - Scene: 1970s It Begins... pg. 25
  - Scene: 2016 pg. 50
- b. Move between the images, beginning with one from the 1970s, immediately contrasted with one from 2016. As each group presents their images to the class, ask the audience to offer adjectives that describe each. Place each adjective on the white board under the headings 1970s and 2016.
- c. Once this process has been completed, discuss the following questions as a class:
  - What does *RBG: Of Many, One* appear to be suggesting about America's trajectory over the previous fifty years?
  - What reasons might be given by the class for this trajectory?

## Activity 2

Exploring *RBG: Of Many, One* as an American tragedy. An opera is a dramatic performance set to music in which all the dialogue is sung. Serious opera (opera seria) uses recitatives to drive the narrative, using in rhythms more akin to speech. Deep emotion is communicated through an aria, in which the musical skills of the singer are foregrounded and used to communicate the character's feelings.

Using the images generated in the activity, create an original opera that is a lament for the America that has disappeared. Or each group could create an original opera that is a call for measured rule of law, reason, equality, and human rights in contemporary America.

## Activity 3 – Discussion Question

Does the final image of RBG suggest that America, as it was known and what it stood for, has gone?

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Rehearsal images are courtesy of Prudence Upton

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