

43rd Labrador Creative Arts Festival: Transformation

Jens Haven Memorial School
Nain

Asiangulu kisiani piusigijait: Changing Your Perspective

Synopsis: A group of students, Inuit and non-Indigenous, gather in Nain for a special symposium/exchange that is focused on cultural sharing. Three non-Indigenous students visit Nain to gain a better understanding of Inuit culture.

Characters:

Mary 16 years old; from Nain; she is of mixed ancestry but is a beneficiary of the NG; she feels mistreated and misunderstood by both cultures

Margaret 15; from Nain; outgoing and funny but can be serious too; passionate about her culture

Francesca. 15; from Newfoundland; non-Indigenous youth who is interested in learning more about Inuit culture and building the relationship between cultures

James. 17; non-Indigenous; forced to attend the gathering as a way to address his intolerance (Guidance counsellor thought he'd benefit from the experience)

Sheri. 15; from Marystown; a positive, cheerful girl who is excited for the experience

Actors:	Novalee Webb	Mary
	Samantha Saksagiak	Margaret
	Lauren Pilgrim	Francesca
	Dione Kohlmeister	Sheri
	Jimmy Karpik	James

Tech: Colby Holwell

Scene 1 : *The youth visitors approach the plane, on the way to Nain. Two are excited. James is obviously stressed.*

(At the airport in Goose Bay, waiting to head to Nunatsiavut for a youth cultural exchange for to promote reconciliation. Sheri, Francesca and James are in the line up waiting to board.)

Voice (offstage): Announcing the security call for FLight 961 for Nunatsiavut. Passengers prepare for boarding at Gate 3. .

James (nervously looks out the doors at the plane): Gee, that plane looks so small. That can't be our flight, is it?

Francesca: I don't care how small it is. I'm excited to go. I can't wait to get there!

Sheri: Ok, guys, enough talking (they move through the line and make their way towards the plane). Let's try to get good seats.

James (looks at his boarding pass): What? Don't we have assigned seats?

Francesca: No, I'm guessing the plane is too small for that. Looks like it's first come, first served. It is a Twin Otter, not a 747.

Sheri: I'm sure it'll be fine. Come on, it's all a part of the adventure. Wanna try to sit by each other?

Francesca: Sure! I call the window seat.

James: No thanks, I'd rather sit by myself.

The girls look at each other and shrug their shoulders, then board the plane.

Once he boards, James realizes how cramped it's going to be.

James: I guess there's no chance of sitting by myself.

Francesca: How long is the flight?

Sheri: The pilot says 1 hour and twenty minutes to Nain.

Francesca: Let's buckle up and enjoy the ride.

Sheri: I hope it's a nice, smooth ride. You Ok ,James?

James is ignoring them. He puts in his earbuds and stares out the window. He's restless, trying to get comfortable. The girls look out the window , admiring the scenery.

Scene 2: *Mary and Margaret prepare for the exchange.*

Mary and Margaret are centre stage. A photo of Nain is projected on the screen behind them.

Narrator/ Mary: It's not easy to change people's opinions, is it? Some people are just too close-minded and others are just too ignorant. They just don't understand. I'm a bit nervous. What if the people coming for the Youth Exchange are all negative and judgey?

Narrator/ Margaret: Hopefully they won't be like that, but if they are, we have to educate them - show them that their stereotypes and judgements are wrong. That's what this project is all about. We have to come together, listen to each other, share our stories and develop respect for each other. That's why we created this youth exchange for reconciliation. We want to build that relationship, build the future we want...together.

Mary: You're probably right. It's just not a simple fix though. We have to head to the airstrip soon and pick up our guests. That would be a bad first impression...leaving them waiting down there all alone.

Margaret: Yeah, come on. Let's go. (she turns to face and address the audience) We're so happy to have you all with us for the conference and exchange. Listen to our stories, hear our truth, hope for change...as we move forward together.

Scene 3:

The girls exit stage right. The visitors enter, dragging luggage from the plane to the terminal. Then Mary and Margaret re-enter, greeting them.

Margaret: Atelihai. Welcome to Nain! Good flight awa?

The other girls and Jimmy look at each other, confused.

Sheri: Hi! We had a great flight. The scenery is spectacular.

Mary: That's why we call it Nunatsiavut...our beautiful land.

Francesca: It was awesome, wasn't it, James?

James (visibly angry): That was the most horrible flight I've ever been on. The plane was too crowded and hot. I couldn't take my backpack with me. I hope my stuff isn't busted up. I'm starving...I can't believe there wasn't even a flight attendant. And no snacks!

Margaret: Come on, we have snacks up at JS. That's the community centre where we're going to have the meetings and discussions for the exchange.

Sheri: Is it far? I really need to use the bathroom. I knew I shouldn't have had that Pepsi before the flight.

James: Yeah, how could I forget there was no bathroom on the plane? Not acceptable.

Francesca: Well, we're here now. Chalk it all up to experience and we'll know better for next time.

Mary :Come on guys, we'll take care of everything at JS and get you sorted out with your billets.

Sheri: Is there a taxi?

Margaret: No. we're the taxi. We came down on our Hondas. I can take you and Francesca and James can ride with Mary.

Francesca: Sounds like fun!

Mary: It's not going to be joy ride. But maybe later we can go out for a ride on the trails or something.

James: Where are your helmets?

Margaret: We don't use helmets.

James: I should have known.

Sheri: Can we go now? I really need to go to the bathroom.

Margaret: I'll try not go over too many bumps.

(They laugh and get aboard the Hondas to head up to their meetings. James does not look happy.)

Scene 4: *At the JS for meetings. Blocks are arranged in a semi-circle/arc for the discussions.*

Margaret: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you for deciding to participate in our first Youth Cultural Exchange for Reconciliation. We have to acknowledge the past but we also have to think about the future we want to build.

Mary: Margaret and I will be your youth facilitators during the conference. We'll be leading these discussion sessions and we also have some cultural activities planned. We hope that you'll enjoy your visit and understand us a little better.

Margaret: Our discussions might bring up some serious, sensitive topics. We will have counsellors and support on hand from DHSD and from LG Health.

Mary: The point of these sessions is to get your issues out in the open. Ask the difficult questions. Share your views, even if they're different from ours.

Margaret: We want everyone to feel comfortable enough to be honest and safe enough to speak their truth. That's a first step toward healing.

Francesca: Where do we even start?

Sheri: Is there a list of topics for us to talk about?

Margaret: We didn't create a formal list because we weren't sure what you wanted to learn about.

Mary: We have so much to share with you ...about our language, our culture, our home... I just hope we have time for all of it.

Margaret: James. You're not saying much. Maybe you'd like to start. What would you like to learn about? Our food, traditional skills, hunting, our language, our values?

James: I don't think I should have come here. I really don't know much about this place and the people at all...except what I've heard from other people and what I've seen and read in the media.

Margaret: That's honest, anyway. Sadly, most of what ends up on the news about us is negative.

Mary: Well, why don't we start there? With the negative stereotypes that some people seem to have about us.

Sheri: Uh, Ok. I'm confused. You said "us". Are you Inuit, Mary?

Mary: Yes, I am Inuit. Some people refer to us as Kablunaniguit. That means that my ancestors are both Inuit and non-Inuit. But I just happen to have blonde hair and blue eyes.

Francesca: Do you get bullied or picked on because of that?

Mary: Sometimes. There are some kids at school who tease me and some adults who ask me who I am, or if I'm from here. But it's the same when I go out to Newfoundland. There's a few people who make fun of my Nain slang and ask dumb questions like, "Do you live in igloos?"

Margaret: That's what we want to change...we want to educate people so they won't need to ask silly questions like that.

James: So, do you live in igloos? In winter, I mean.

Margaret: Nah, it's too cold and it's way too hard to watch Netflix or play Fortnite in an igloo. The TV screen keeps fogging up. (She laughs.)

Mary: (giggles) Margaret likes to tease. She tries to make you believe. But seriously, knowing how to make an igloo is an important skill to have. It can save your life if you're caught out on the land in a storm. Some people might use them for hunting but that's rare now.

Margaret: It's too bad that we had to schedule your trip for fall. We don't have much snow yet, so there's no igloos to be seen. You'll have to come back later on.

Sheri: I'd like to do that. Maybe we could sleep in an igloo.

Francesca: That would be cool. Literally. (She laughs.)

Mary: Is there anything else you're curious about?

The visitors pause, pondering the question, wondering what to ask.

Francesca: There's something I've wondered about.

Margaret: Go ahead. Don't be shy.

Francesca: Why do you speak English so well? I thought we'd have a hard time understanding you.

Sheri: Yeah, I was hoping that we might learn some Inuktitut while we're here.

Mary: Inuktitut is not spoken as much as it could be. There's lots of reasons for that though.

Margaret: Right now we don't even have enough Inuktitut teachers in our 4-12 school. Those teachers who were fluent have retired and it seems to be hard to find replacements.

James: So your own people don't want to teach you your language? Why? They don't get paid enough?

Mary: It's much more complicated than that. Our elders are the main ones who speak Inuktitut. There are lots of other people who are passionate about the language, but it's not easy to learn.

James: Maybe if you tried.

Margaret: Inuktitut is a complex language. It's not just about learning a few vocab words. Do you learn French in school?

They all nod.

Margaret: Was that easy to learn? Are you fluent? Maybe you even had French Immersion all through school. We don't have those options for learning Inuktitut.

James: Couldn't your families teach you?

Mary: Like I just said, it's not as easy as that. For generations, our ancestors have been taught that their language was wrong. That they had to learn English.

Sheri: Why?

Margaret: First it was the Moravians and then residential schools, or boarding schools...or just even regular schools. They weren't allowed to speak Inuktitut. They had to learn English. They'd be punished for speaking their own language.

Francesca: That's not right. How unfair.

Mary: Exactly. It certainly didn't make them want to teach us, to put us at risk for suffering like they did.

James: But if your language was important to them, they would have.

Margaret: Language is important. It's who we are. Some people were determined to keep that alive and wouldn't let missionaries or teachers or anyone beat that out of them. But we can't blame those who didn't share their language with us.

James: Why not? It's their fault you don't speak it today.

Mary: There was a lot of stigma attached to speaking Inuktitut.

Margaret: That's something we have to let go of. We can't just blame them and be angry. We need to accept that and move on. That's why I'm trying my best to learn as much Inuktitut as I can. I participate in the Inuktitut Speak Off every year. I'm proud to share my language that way. Maybe I'll inspire other young people to do the same thing.

Sheri: That's awesome! You could teach people to speak Inuktitut. Maybe you'll be an Inuktitut teacher yourself.

Margaret: Maybe. But I'm aiming to be the President of the Nunatsiavut Government.

Francesca: Go for it! It's great to see young people here have such high goals.

Mary: Why do you say that?

James: I guess she's thinking about that media image again - we hear about high drop out rates, poverty, poverty insecurity, TB outbreaks and the high rates of suicide. Those facts must make it challenging to live here.

Mary: There are challenges here, like there are everywhere. Maybe because we live in such a small place, so isolated from everyone else it seems like a bigger problem.

Margaret: And the reality of our history has added to that challenge. A hundred years ago, the Spanish Flu epidemic almost wiped us all out. Then came relocation and residential schools. We've been through a lot.

Sheri: I know families that were relocated on the island too. Whole communities were abandoned.

James: But there's a difference. They don't have these social issues.

Francesca: We don't know that though. Maybe they do.

Mary: There's more to relocation than moving homes. Our ancestors lost their traditional hunting grounds. They were moved into small, substandard houses. There was little chance of work. Those conditions contributed to the social issues you mentioned.

Margaret: And those conditions lasted for decades. Sure it's still going on today. We have a housing crisis. Some houses have ten or more people in a three bedroom house.

James appears more and more agitated.

Mary: Does that answer your question James?

James: Not really. I feel like I'm being blamed for relocation, for residential schools, for every bad thing that has happened to your people. I had nothing to do with it. It's not my fault. It makes me angry, especially when you get free money from the government.

Margaret: Free money? What do you mean?

James: You don't pay taxes do you?

Mary: Oh, yes. We pay taxes. Just come down to Northern with us later and see how much we pay for stuff. And there's sale tax on top of that. We pay income tax too.

Margaret: We do get funding for post-secondary education. But that's because of everything that was taken from us - our land, our homes, our hunting and fishing grounds, our language, our culture.

James: It frustrates me that I have to pay my own way for university or get a student loan but you can go for free. And how many of you actually take advantage of that?

Francesca: James, you can't blame them. Why are you angry with them?

Mary: There are more and more of us going to university and college, getting the training we need to find good jobs. The people who came before us were abused by people in power and didn't often get the opportunities we have today.

Sheri: I think this is another big part of what you and Margaret mentioned at the beginning. We need to acknowledge the past and find a way forward.

Margaret: Yeah, as traumatic as it has been, we Inuit have survived whatever challenge has come our way. We are resourceful and resilient. It's hard sometimes to think about moving forward, because sometimes it feels like we are forgetting the past. But that's not what we're doing. We need to learn from it. All of us do.

Mary: James, you have to accept what happened in the past. You might not have relocated us or sent us to residential schools or abused us, but your attitude is keeping those problems alive. You don't seem open to learning about us.

James: I don't know what you want me to say. It was my ancestors who did all that, not me. It feels like you want me to carry that blame.

Sheri: Do you really feel like that?

Francesca: Do you feel guilty?

Margaret: We're not trying to make anyone feel guilty. How about feeling some empathy? And really trying to understand what it is like to live with intergenerational trauma. My anansiak and atatsiak went to boarding school. They were ripped away from their families and spent their nights crying themselves to sleep. Other kids bullied them - beat them up. Some of the adults there abused them or turned a blind eye to other students who assaulted them. They were beaten if they spoke Inuktitut. When they did come home, they didn't really fit in because they'd lost a lot of their culture. They'd lost a lot of their language. How do you think that made them feel? It's affected them and the rest of us - for our whole lives.

Sheri: I'm glad that you shared that Margaret. I don't think I realized how awful it was.

James: Bad things happen to other people too. You can't dwell on it. You have to move on.

Mary: That's why we're here, meeting like this. Having an exchange of ideas, an exchange of cultures. It's not as simple as moving on.

James: I still don't think you should keep blaming white people for everything.

Francesca: Nobody's blaming us.

There's another pause. The others look at James.

James: I'm sorry that it happened to your people, to your family. I never knew what happened in residential schools.

Margaret: Thank you, James. It's been a long day. We've touched on some difficult subjects. I think we should go home and get some rest. Tomorrow we have an outing planned. That will be a nice break from the seriousness of today's sessions.

(Everyone gets ready to leave - says goodbye.)

Lights fade out. Fade in.

Scene 5: *Exchange participants are at the dock, preparing to go off seal hunting for the day. Some blocks will be used to create the "boat" in the centre of the stage.*

Mary: Ok, everyone. Let's load our supplies into the boat.

Margaret directs the others to put the supplies on board.

Sheri: What are we going to do? Go fishing?

Margaret: There's no char around right now. Might find a few rock cod but we're not going fishing.

As they load things on board, James seems to be annoyed.

James: Do we really need all of this stuff? How long are we going for? A week?

Mary: It helps to be prepared. We don't want you guys to be cold or hungry. And we might need all this if the weather gets bad or if something happens while we're gone off.

Francesca: Gone off? Off what?

Margaret: That's what we say when we're going hunting or fishing. We're "going off".

Francesca: Oh, cool. I'm learning some Nain slang.

James: Is there going to be enough room for us? How are we all going to sit comfortably in there?

Mary: We all might not be comfortable. It's not really a pleasure cruise. Someone might be lucky and have to sit on the grub box.

Margaret: Don't worry, we'll be fine.

*They all get on board the boat. They have to rearrange things to find seats.
Actors freeze when Mary addresses the audience.*

Narrator/Mary: It was a beautiful day out in boat. The girls were amazed at the scenery and the wildlife they saw along the way- black bears on shore and grumpuses and seals in the water. My brother slowed the boat when he spied a small seal ahead.

Margaret: Look over there, see that black spot on the water?

Sheri: What is that?

Mary: It's a seal.

Francesca: How cute!

As the "boat" nears the seal, Margaret takes out a gun.

Margaret: Mary, pass me the bullets.

James: What the hell are you doing with that gun?

Margaret: We're going to get that seal.

Margaret aims at the seal. The visitors are horrified.

Francesca: I can't look.

Mary: Don't look then, if you're going to be upset.

Margaret takes her shot and kills the seal. Mary helps hook the seal into the boat.

Sheri: Oh my God! Look at all the blood! You shot it in the head.

Mary: Good shot, Margaret! You're a great hunter.

James: You killed that poor, innocent seal.

Margaret: Thank you. We're going to eat it and use every part of it. It's how we survive - how our people have survived for thousands of years.

Francesca: It's hard for me to look at. I'm not used to this. I don't go hunting back home.

James: No, we're civilized. We buy our meat at the supermarket.

Mary: Yes, slaughter houses are so humane. You're upset about this but you don't worry about cows, chickens and pigs that are killed for your food.

James: It's not the same thing.

Francesca: Maybe it's just because we see our meat all packaged up nice and neat. We don't see how the animals die.

Sheri: I've gone hunting with my Dad - rabbits, grouse and moose, but I haven't been seal hunting before.

Margaret: Oh, if I'd known that I would have let you shoot it.

Sheri: That's Ok. I don't want to kill anything. I just go with my Dad. I've never shot a gun.

Margaret: Most kids here go hunting and have their own guns. You teach them young so they'll know how to provide for themselves and for the family.

Mary: Yes, it's something that's honoured and celebrated...someone's first kill. You'd give it to your godmother or a family member.

Sheri: What are you going to do with this seal? Give it away?

Margaret: It's not my first seal. I got my first one when I was ten. We'll make good use of this one, that's for sure.

Actors freeze, except Mary, who addresses the audience.

Narrator/Mary: Everyone enjoyed the boat ride home. It was such a nice peaceful day on the water. Our visitors kept stealing glances at the seal Margaret shot, feeling sorry for it and wondering how they would bring themselves to eat it. Little did they know the surprises that we had in store for them.

Actors pantomime boat landing. They unload boat and drag seal over to the beach to be skinned. Margaret takes the lead.

James: Are you going to gut it right here in front of us?

Mary: She's going to skin it first. This seal has a nice pelt. It'll make some beautiful mitts or maybe kamet - seal skin boots.

Margaret: Yeah, lots of work though. We skin it, clean it, stretch it and dry it before we can make anything with it.

Margaret mimes skinning the seal.

Francesca: I don't think I can watch.

Sheri: Yeah, I don't want to see the guts.

Mary: The intestines are my favourite.

James: Disgusting! You're going to eat them?

Mary: Not right now. We have to braid them and boil them first. Mmmmm...

Margaret starts to cut the seal's eyeball.

Margaret: I've got a treat for you. Seal eyes! My favourite! (She pops the eye in her mouth.)

The visitors are shocked. Some gag. Others shudder or look away.

Margaret: Don't worry. There's another one if any of you want to try.

Francesca: Is it safe to eat?

Mary: Yes, of course.

Sheri: I think I'll try a piece.

Margaret: Go big or go home.

Mary: Go on, I dare you.

James: That's just disgusting. I don't want to see that. If I try seal meat, I want it to be cooked.

Sheri: It's all part of the experience, right? Ok. I'll try it.

Margaret: We'll cook up some seal meat and doughboys for supper. You'll all get a taste.

Francesca: Thanks for the day. I'll never forget this.

James: Neither will I.

Actors mime picking their supplies and heading home.

Scene 6:

The actors are preparing for the next outing, a night hike. Mary and Margaret will be leading them to Morhardt, a hill overlooking Nain. Sheri, James and Francesca are getting their gear ready when Mary and Margaret arrive to pick them up.

Narrator/Margaret (addresses the audience): It's the last night of the exchange. Mary and I decided that a night hike would be a nice way to end the sessions. We'll see a bit of the town, maybe some wildlife, and if we're lucky, the Northern lights.

Mary: Hey guys, ready to go?

Margaret: Why do you guys have so much stuff? You don't need all this. We're just going for a walk around town. We'll take the foot bridge and go over across and head up to Morhardt for a fantastic view .

Mary: Yeah, take your cameras or phones. You might get some breathtaking pics.

They all head off on the hike.

Francesca: Is it safe to walk around at night? It's getting dark already.

Margaret: We're fine. If we do come across any drunks we'll avoid them. Are you afraid of getting jumped? There's five of us. Nobody will try anything.

Francesca: I certainly hope they don't.

James: Is there a lot of crime here?

Mary: I don't know the statistics, but look around you. There's kids still out playing, people are out walking. If it was that dangerous we'd all be locked up in our houses, afraid to come out.

Sheri: I'm more afraid of those wolves. Please tell me they're dogs and not a pack of wolves.

Margaret: Yeah, they're dogs. There's no wolves around here yet.

James: Yet?

Margaret: Sometimes there are wolves around town. They follow the caribou and other prey.

Francesca: I hope my battery's charged up. Sounds like there could be some great photo ops.

Sheri: You seem so calm and relaxed about it all.

Mary: This is our home. We recognize the challenges but we also learn how to deal with them.

Sheri: Is it worth it?

Margaret: Definitely. You'll see.

They walk around the stage, "hiking".

James (hunches his back and painfully sighs) : My back is killing me! How much longer is this going to be? It better be worth it. (*He takes out a walking stick.*)

Mary: Isn't this better than walking on all that pavement and cement in the city?

James: No. At least it's flat.

Francesca: Now, James, don't forget about all the potholes we have.

Sheri: And sometimes the sidewalks are in poor shape too.

Margaret: We watch the news too. Big breaking story. A car got a flat tire on the Outer Ring Road. (*She laughs.*)

Francesca: It is getting a lot darker. There aren't many street lights over here. How much longer?

Sheri: Yeah, I'm enjoying the exploration but I'm not looking forward to being mauled by a bear or chased by anyone.

Mary: There's no need to be scared. We are almost guaranteed to be safe.

James: Almost? That's reassuring.

Margaret: We're just going up this steep hill and we'll climb to the top. Got your flashlights?

The group trudges to the top of the hill (mimes actions).

Narrator/Margaret: We finally made it safely to the top of Morhardt. There wasn't a wolf or a fox or a bear or any interference. We could see all the lights of Nain city.

The group take selfies and other photos with the town as a backdrop.

Mary: Ah, perfect! Look over there guys.

Francesca: What's that?

James: Bears? Wolves? Just kidding.

Margaret: It's the atsanit - northern lights - aurora borealis.

Sheri: Air Borealis? Our flight was nice but not as beautiful as that. *(laughs)*

The group takes more pics. Lots of ooohs and aaahhhhs.

Mary: Make sure you don't whistle. They might decapitate you. *(laughs)*.

Francesca and Sheri squeal and jump in fear.

James: Yeah, right. I don't believe that. (He whistles.) See, I still have my head. Nonsense.

Francesca: Aren't you scared?

Sheri: I wouldn't test my luck.

Margaret: Come on guys. It's only the Northern Lights, they won't actually decapitate you. But if you keep whistling, you might see them dance.

The group whistles softly and watches as the lights dance across the sky.

Mary: People say they are the spirits of our ancestors.

Francesca: I've never seen anything more beautiful and captivating.

Sheri: Same here! It's a lovely night. Too bad it has to end.

Margaret: Yeah, I know. It'll be hard to say goodbye to you all tomorrow.

Mary: But we have our trip to look forward to - the second part of the exchange, remember, when we go out to St. John's to experience your life.

(James is off to himself, staring up at the sky. Margaret walks over to him.)

James: It's awe-inspiring. Overwhelming.

Margaret: Yes, the northern lights are a sight to behold.

James: It's not just the Northern Lights. It's this whole trip. I think it's opened my eyes a lot.

Sheri: Going to try seal eyes then?

James (laughs): My eyes haven't been opened enough for that.

Margaret: I think we've made some strides. There's still a long way to go, but we have to keep trying.

Mary: Mission accomplished.

All group members join together, arms around each other.

Mary: We'll move forward...

All: Together.

