

Six Degrees of Separation

by John Guare

Studio Theater

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Synopsis:

Inspired by a true story, the play follows the trail of a young black con man, Paul, who insinuates himself into the lives of a wealthy New York couple, Ouisa and Flan Kittredge, claiming he knows their son at college. Paul tells them he is the son of actor Sidney Poitier, and that he has just been mugged and all his money is gone. Captivated by Paul's intelligence and his fascinating conversation (and the possibility of appearing in a new Sidney Poitier movie), the Kittredges invite him to stay overnight. But in the morning they discover him in bed with a young male hustler from the streets, and the picture begins to change. After kicking him out, Ouisa and Flan discover that friends of theirs have had a similar run-in with the brash con artist. Intrigued, they turn detective and piece together the connections that gave Paul access to their lives. Meanwhile, Paul's cons unexpectedly lead him into darker territory and his lies begin to catch up with him. As the final events of the play unfold Ouisa suddenly finds herself caring for Paul, feeling that he gave them far more than he took and that her once idyllic life was not what it seemed to be.

Characters:

Ouisa Kittredge—Female, 40's

Louisa Kittredge is a rich, attractive, middle-aged woman. She lives with her husband in an Upper East Side apartment in Manhattan. As the play opens, Ouisa is characterised by superficial traits: she is a good hostess, a quick conversationalist, and a dramatic storyteller. However, she also is the character most affected by the meeting with Paul. The experience leads to growth and her spiritual rebirth. Ouisa gives voice to the play's title, that there are "Six degrees of separation. Between us and everybody else on this planet." This allows her to recognise the potential for a sincere connection between herself and Paul despite their vastly different backgrounds. Although in the end she does forsake him to the heartless bureaucracy of the police department, her meeting with Paul leads to an inner transformation and a new way of looking at the world around her. She no longer values anecdotal experience but yearns for true experience, which indicates her desire to forge deeper relationships with others. She comes to realise that while her life has been filled with interesting experiences it has no inherent meaning of its own.

Flanders Kittredge—Male, 40's

Flan is an attractive, middle-aged art dealer. His business is the discreet buying and selling of expensive works of art. Flan got into the art business out of a sincere love for art, but by the play's opening, he has lost this idealism. The passion he once felt for art has been supplanted by the great sums of money it can earn for him. He recognises that some of the people to whom he sells great works of art value them not for their beauty, but for their social cachet. Like his wife, Flan is drawn to Paul, but unlike his wife, when he learns the truth, he detaches from Paul. Even though he acknowledges the service Paul provided in obtaining the two million dollars from Geoffrey, he continues to refer to Paul as a "crook" and wants little to do with him.

Paul (Paul Poitier-Kittredge)—Male, playable African American, 20's

Very little is known about Paul's true identity. He claims to be the son of Sidney Poitier as well as a Harvard classmate of the Kittredges' children. In reality, he became aware of the Kittredge children, and others in their social milieu, when he met Trent Conway with whom he had attended high school. Paul used this young man to learn how to comport himself in upper-class society and also to learn enough details to pass himself off as belonging in the Kittredges' world. Though Paul is not really an actor's son, he is a good actor himself. He easily convinces the Kittredges of his false identity; and his affability is a crucial determinant in Geoffrey's decision to invest the money in the Cézanne painting. His articulate

and intelligent conversation belies his background. Paul is equally adept working himself into the good graces of Rick and Elizabeth, a young couple who have moved to the city from Utah to become actors. Paul's experience with the couple, and his seduction of Rick, teach him that his self-centered actions and lies can have devastating results on others. At Ouisa's urging, he turns himself into the police, but he maintains his hope of becoming a better man in the future — the man he pretended to be.

Geoffrey—Male, 40's

Geoffrey is a liberal South African billionaire. He is an acquaintance of the Kittredges and is at their home when Paul arrives. Geoffrey is charmed by Paul, and his apparent relationship to Sidney Poitier. He enjoys the evening so much that he gives Flan the money for the painting.

Kitty and Larkin—Male, Female, 40's

Friends of the Kittredges who share a shockingly similar experience with the Kittredges. They too extend their hospitality to Paul and are deceived by his charm, initially believing that Paul saved their lives from a "burglar" until the Kittredges told them otherwise.

Ben – Male, 20's

Kitty and Larkin's son.

Dr. Fine – Male, 40's – 50's

Another victim of Paul's scam. Dr. Fine gives Paul the keys to his apartment when Paul mentions knowing his son Doug from college, hoping this act of hospitality will aid the strained relationship between Dr. Fine and Doug, his son from an ended marriage. Doug rebukes his father for falling for the scam, driving him further away.

Doug – Male, 20's

Dr. Fine's son.

Rick—Male, 20's

Rick has moved to New York from Utah with his girlfriend Elizabeth. They want to become actors. The couple met Paul in the park and believe his story about being Flan's ostracised son. When Paul needs money, Rick secretly withdraws it from his and Elizabeth's account. Rick and Paul dance together at the Rainbow Room and then have sex in a hansom carriage in Central Park. Devastated by what he has done — betraying Elizabeth's confidence and having sex with a man — Rick commits suicide by jumping out a window.

Elizabeth—Female, 20's

Elizabeth moved to New York from Utah with her boyfriend Rick. They want to become actors. They befriend Paul in the park and believe his story about being Flan's ostracised son. When Paul asks them for money, Elizabeth refuses but later learns of Rick's deceit. After Rick kills himself, Elizabeth presses charges of theft against Paul. She believes that he has taken everything from her.

Trent Conway—Male 20's

Attended the same boarding school as the Kittredge children. Trent met Paul at MIT. Over the course of their three month affair, Trent told Paul about the wealthy New York families that he knew, leading to Paul's con game.

Talbott (Tess) Kittredge – Female, 20's

The Kittredge's daughter.

Woodrow (Woody) Kittredge – Male, 20's

The Kittredge's son.

Hustler – Male, 20's – 30's

The man found with Paul when his lie is uncovered.

Police Officer – Male, any age

Detective – Male, any age