

# AUDIENCE ENRICHMENT GUIDE DRAFT

## *MRS. KRISHNAN'S PARTY*

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

How To Use This Guide .....	2
The Role of The Audience.....	2
Introduction .....	3
Content Advisory.....	3
Themes .....	3
Curriculum Connections.....	3
Character Overview.....	6
Plot Synopsis .....	7
About The Show .....	9
The Festival of Onam .....	9
Cultural Elements Present in <i>Mrs. Krishnan's Party</i> .....	9
Marigold Flower Garlands.....	9
Hand Mudras .....	10
Classroom Engagement.....	11
Pre-Show .....	11
Post-Show .....	12
References .....	13

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Set the stage for a powerful and entertaining live theatre experience! The Grand Theatre's 2025-26 Season Audience Enrichment Guides are designed to enrich and provide context for educators and students to engage more deeply with the production, both before and after visiting the Grand Theatre.

Each guide contains a range of material such as:

- Background information on the play and artists involved
- Plot synopsis, character lists, themes, curriculum connections
- Exciting insights specific to each production
- Classroom activities and reflection questions to guide discussions

## THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Live theatre requires an audience, so everyone has an important role to play! As we welcome you to the Grand Theatre, here are some **theatre etiquette tips** to remember:

- Before the performance:
  - Please **arrive early**, enabling enough time to find your school's assigned seats.
  - We are a **scent-free environment** that **values respectful behaviour**.
  - **Avoid bringing backpacks/large bulky items** as they will need to remain in the lobby and can not come with you to your seat (due to emergency exit regulations).
  - While there is no dress code, we respectfully ask that **hats are removed**.
  - *Have an open mind and let the performance surprise you!*
- During the performance:
  - Please **turn off your cell phone**/electronic devices. Vibrations, sounds, and screen light during the performance is very distracting for the performers and other audience members.
  - Please remember that **only bottled water** is allowed in the theatre; **no food** during the show.
  - **Using cameras or recording devices during a performance is never permitted.**
  - When the lights dim, that's your cue to stop talking and turn your attention to the stage to enjoy the show.
  - If you **must leave your seat**, wait for an **appropriate break** in the show and quietly head towards the closest exit. An usher will help you.
  - Clap, cheer, laugh, and **feel!** **Make sure your reactions are respectful to those on stage and around you in the audience.** Theatre is LIVE, so remember *you can be seen and heard!*
- After the performance:
  - **Remain in your seats** until your teacher/chaperone instructs you to leave. Exit the theatre in an orderly fashion. Please **take all belongings and any garbage with you.**
  - Take a moment to reflect: What new ideas or perspectives are you leaving with?
  - Theatre is meant to be shared! Tell someone about your experience!

## ***MRS KRISHNAN'S PARTY***

Welcome to the colourful, vibrant world of Mrs. Krishnan where the food is simmering, the music is flowing, and mouthwatering aromas fill the air. She waits for the arrival of her son to make the Onam celebration complete. But her plans take an unexpected turn, and we are all now a part of the festivities.

Dive into an immersive theatre experience as the Auburn Stage transforms into a lively back room of a corner store, complete with spontaneous dancing, live cooking, and a heartfelt reflection of the immigrant experience. It's a party like no other! The New Zealand Herald calls it "a joyful, highly theatrical celebration."

**Running Time:** 75 minutes, with no intermission

**Age recommendation:** 8+

### **Content Advisory**

This play contains themes of loss. Production elements include flashing lights. This play relies heavily on audience interaction and participation. You can participate as much or as little as you are comfortable with. Food is cooked and served during the production, containing ingredients including lentils, tomato, garlic, spices.

Full recipe: <https://indianink.co.nz/recipe-the-dahl-in-mrs-krishnans-party/>

### **Themes**

- Community and Belonging
- Kindness and Compassion
- Identity and Self-Discovery
- Grief and Loss
- Loneliness and Isolation

### **Curriculum Connections**

#### **The Arts**

- Dance, Grade 1-8
  - o A2, A3
- Dance, Grade 9 (ATC1O)  
Dance, Grade 10 (ATC2O)  
Dance, Grade 11 (ATC3M/ACT3O)  
Dance, Grade 12 (ATC4M/ATC4E)
  - o B1, B2, B3, C2
- Drama, Grade 1-8
  - o B2, B3

- Drama, Grade 9 (ADA1O)  
Drama, Grade 10 (ADA2O)  
Drama, Grade 11 (ADA3M/ADA3O)  
Drama, Grade 12 (ADA4M/ADA4E)
  - o B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3
- Exploring and Creating in the Arts, Grade 11 (AEA3O)  
Exploring and Creating in the Arts, Grade 12 (AEA4O)
  - o A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3
- Music, Grade 1-8
  - o C2, C3
- Music, Grade 9 (AMU1O)  
Music, Grade 10 (AMU2O)  
Music, Grade 11 (AMU3M/AMU3O)  
Music, Grade 12 (AMU4M/AMU4E)
  - o B1, B2, B3, B4, C2, C3
- Visual Arts, Grade 1-8
  - o D2, D3
- Visual Arts, Grade 9 (AVI1O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 10 (AVI2O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 11 (AVI3M/AVI3O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 12 (AVI4M/AVI4E)
  - o B1, B2, B3, C2, C3

### **Canadian and World Studies**

- History - Origins and Citizenship: The History of a Canadian Ethnic Group, Grade 11 (CHE3O)
  - o B3, C1, C3, D1, D2, D3, E1, E2, E3

### **Classical Studies and International Languages**

- Classical Studies – Classical Civilization, Grade 12 (LVV4U)
  - o B4, D4

### **English**

- English, Grade 9 (ENL1W)
  - o A1, A3, B1, C1, C2, C3, D1, D2)
- English, Grade 10 (ENG2D/ENG2P)  
English, Grade 11 (ENG3U/ENG3C/ENG3E)  
English, Grade 12 (ENG4U/ENG4C/ENG4E)

- A1 Listening to Understand: A1.1-9; A2 Speaking to Communicate: A2.4-7; A3 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: A3.2; B1 Reading for Meaning: B1.2, B1.5-8; B2 Understanding Form and Style: B2.2-3; B3 Reading with Fluency: B3.2-3; B4 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: B4.2; C1 Developing and Organizing Content: C1.3; C2 Using Knowledge of Form and Style: C2.1-3; D1 Understanding Media Texts: D1.1-6; D2 Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: D2.1-2
- Presentation and Speaking Skills, Grade 11 (EPS3O)
  - A1 Identifying Elements of Effective Presentations: A1.1-5; A2 Assessing Presentations: A2.1-5
- The Writer's Craft, Grade 12 (EWC4U/EWC4C)
  - A1 Writing, Writers, and the Writing Life: A1.1-6; B1 Exploring Ideas, Forms and Styles: B1.1

### **English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development**

- English as a Second Language, ESL Level 1 (ESLAO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 2, (ESLBO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 3, (ESLCO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 4, (ESLDO)
  - A1 Developing Listening Comprehension: A1.1-2; Socio-cultural Competence and Media Literacy; D4 Developing Media Knowledge and Skills: D4.1-2

### **Social Sciences and Humanities**

- Equity Studies - World Cultures, Grade 12 (HSC4M)
  - A1, B1, B2, C1, C3
- Family Studies - Food and Culture, Grade 11 (HFC3M)
  - A1, B3, C3, D1, D2, D3
- World Religions - World Religions and Belief Traditions: Perspectives, Issues, and Challenges, Grade 11 (HRT3M)
  - A1, F1, F2
- World Religions and Belief Traditions in Daily Life, Grade 11 (HRF3O)
  - A1, B1, D1

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW



**“Mrs. Krishnan”** - A widowed South Indian matriarch who migrated to New Zealand and has been running her own convenience store for over 20 years. While she is reserved, her warm and loving nature accommodates unexpected guests at an impromptu party.

**Kalyani Nagarajan** – Performing the role of ‘Mrs. Krishnan’, Kalyani is a graduate of the New Zealand Drama School. She is a player for New Zealand’s top improv companies and is currently in development writing her first television show, *The Drama Department*, and a feature film, *Revenge*.

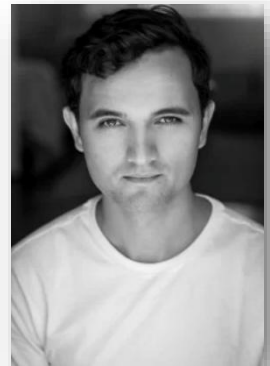
*Kalyani has a British-trained Indian accent. She uses extreme facial expressions to accentuate Mrs. Krishnan’s mugging by retracting her lips to better reveal her toothy grin.*



**“James”** – A New Zealand college student who rents a room in Mrs. Krishnan’s building and doubles as ‘DJ Jimmy J’. Dressed as King Mahabali, James throws a party in Mrs. Krishnan’s convenience store, eager to bring people together and share the celebration of Onam.

**Justin Te Honihana Pokaihau Rogers** – Playing the character ‘James,’ Justin graduated from Toi Whakaari: New Zealand Drama School. He has featured in various productions including *The Cherry Orchard* and *Beauty and the Beast* and voiced for Disney in Te Reo for the *Lion King*, *Frozen*, *Coco* and *Encanto*.

*Justin and Kalyani trained in the same drama school – Kalyani encouraged him to audition for Mrs. Krishnan’s Party and he has been with the show since its 2019 premiere!*



### Secondary Characters (Spoken about, but not seen)

**Apu** – Mrs. Krishnan’s architect son, who lives abroad.

**Gobi** – Mrs. Krishnan’s late husband.

**Aaron** – Mrs. Krishnan’s mystery man.

## PLOT SYNOPSIS

### Scene 1

James welcomes the audience into the backroom of Mrs. Krishnan's Dairy which he has decorated to celebrate the South Indian harvest festival of Onam. As James begins to explain the significance of Onam he is interrupted by the shop bell. His landlady, Mrs. Krishnan, enters the backroom, livid to find unexpected guests in her convenience store. However, she quickly embraces celebrating Onam with the guests gathered and allows James to proceed with his party.

### Scene 2

When Mrs. Krishnan leaves, James takes on a DJ persona and voices his philosophy of personal freedom building to a crescendo of pulsating music and bringing the audience to their feet. He recounts his gap year spent in Kerala, Southern India where he experienced his first Onam and encountered the legend of King Mahabali: who he is dressed up as. When Mrs. Krishnan returns to the shop, she picks at his version of the story of Onam. A phone call from Aaron interrupts their quarrelling and Mrs. Krishnan answers, hinting at an intimacy with this mystery man on the other end of the line. After James' failed pursuit of uncovering Aaron's identity, Mrs. Krishnan decides to treat the guests to a feast of Indian delicacy: rice and dahl.

### Scene 3

As James heads out to borrow a rice cooker, Mrs. Krishnan busies herself preparing the dhal with the audience's help. While cooking, Mrs. Krishnan confides about James' background, revealing that he failed his first year at University when he was staying in a hostel and has been sent to her with the hope that he'll work harder under her watchful eye. She shares her pride in her son, Apu's, achievements: an architect in a good firm but he always makes time to spend Onam with her. Her thoughts drift to selling the shop and going back to India. James catches these words as he returns with a large rice cooker. He wants to know what Apu thinks about Mrs. Krishnan selling the shop, who is evidently unaware of Mrs. Krishnan's decision.

### Scene 4

James, in charge of preparing the rice, gets distracted and puts on some ambient music. He dances through the room and waxes on about his gift for controlling atmosphere and getting people to connect. It's what he loves about Onam—connection. When Mrs. Krishnan returns to the shop, she discovers that the rice is untouched which spoils her mood. The shop bell ringing is Mrs. Krishnan's final straw and sends her off, leaving her phone behind. When Mrs. Krishnan's phone rings with a call from Aaron, James answers it, and discovers that Aaron is coming over. Mrs. Krishnan returns and this news throws her into a panic, interrupted by a text from Apu - he's stuck at work and won't be able to come to Onam. Mrs. Krishnan frantically tries to ring her son and leaves a succession of messages each more desperate and despairing. Finally, James intervenes and takes the phone from her.

### Scene 5

Frustrated that her son has to work so hard, Mrs. Krishnan goes to her kitchen bench and angrily chops onions. She turns on the radio and Aretha Franklin sings “Say a Little Prayer.” For Mrs. Krishnan, this song is a visceral memory of her late husband, Gobi. She flicks the music off and distracts herself with the story of King Mahabali, which she brings to life by puppeteering kitchen utensils. Mrs. Krishnan is reminded of her and Gobi’s dream of working hard, giving their son a good education and saving enough to go back to India to live like a King and Queen. James reminds Mrs. Krishnan of her success with the Dairy – something her husband would be proud of, something she did without a University education. This brings her to the realization that she can’t sell the Dairy. She decides to close the shop early, and before drifting upstairs, Mrs. Krishnan leaves James’ with instructions on preparing the dhal.

### Scene 6

James is relieved to have his living arrangements back in order and is determined to make Onam perfect. As James prepares the meal, he answers a call from Apu on Mrs. Krishnan’s phone. Sounds of a dance party and muffled voices come through the speakers and it dawns on James that Apu isn’t at work but at a party. He decides to keep this information to himself. While finalizing the dhal, James rummages for salt and white pepper to add as per Mrs. Krishnan’s instructions.

Mrs. Krishnan appears at the top of the stairs resplendent in a red sari. She mesmerises the audience with a burst of classical Indian dancing telling the story of Onam. Her attention is then diverted to the dhal and she reverently picks up a tin on the bench with her husband’s ashes. Realising that he has mistaken the ashes for white pepper, James listens with horror as Mrs. Krishnan reflects on how she had always meant to take the tin back to India but how the time never seemed right. When James confesses his irreversible fault, Mrs. Krishnan reels from disbelief to revulsion to anger. She calls James an idiot and compares him to Apu, hitting a nerve and motivating James to tell Mrs. Krishnan the truth of where Apu really is - leaving her floored. Emotion run high as they both hurl accusations, building to James confessing he has been kicked out of university. The fight builds to Mrs. Krishnan declaring James’ whole premise of happiness is nonsense. She strips him of his costume, asserting his whole problem is pretending to be something he is not. They both soften, and Mrs. Krishnan symbolically gifts James with a new shirt intended for her son. Inspired to create her own happiness, Mrs. Krishnan cheekily invites Aaron to the Onam celebration.

Mrs. Krishnan climbs on top of the dining table and surveys her kingdom. She tells the audience the final part of the Onam story. She begins to dance, reverently at first and then with abandon. James joins in. They both feel free in this moment and all in attendance share in their joy.

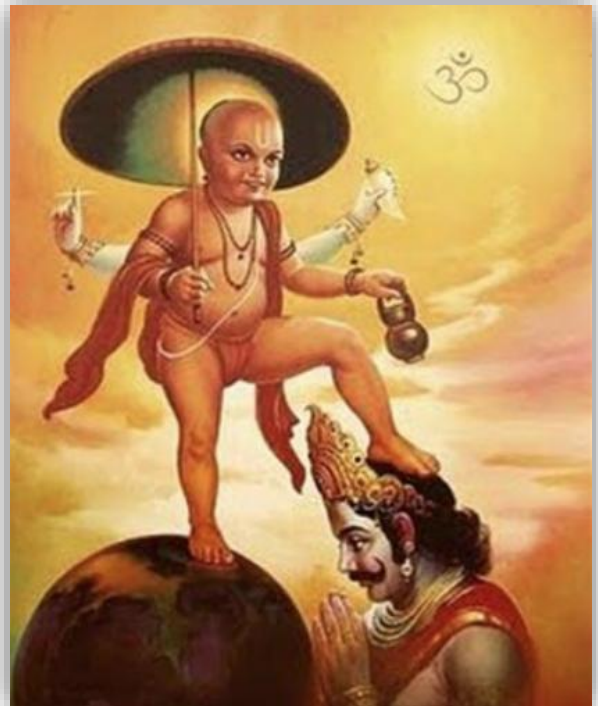


## ABOUT THE SHOW

### The Festival of Onam

The festival of Onam is celebrated throughout the state of Kerala on the Malabar Coast of India. In Kerala, Onam is marked by happiness, excitement and enjoyment and is celebrated by everyone irrespective of religion. Onam is a celebration inspired by mythology as well as old agricultural practices. It is known as the 'harvest festival' as it falls during the month of Chingam (August / September) - a time of the year when a good harvest has been gathered all over Kerala, resulting in plenitude and happiness.

According to the myth, King Mahabali was a generous and virtuous ruler who once ruled Kerala. He was also an asura - a member of the demon clan - who were the enemies of devas (gods of the Heaven). During King Mahabali's rule, the kingdom became so prosperous that devas felt jealous, so they sent Lord Vishnu in his Vamana Avatar (a Brahmin boy). Upon seeing the poor Brahmin boy, Mahabali asked what he desired. The boy responded that he needed land which could be measured in three steps. Mahabali granted the boy's wish. Lord Vishnu, in his disguise, began to grow in size, covering the entire universe with the first two steps. Mahabali then realized that it was no ordinary boy before him but Lord Vishnu himself. Seeing that there was no more land left, the king bowed before the boy, offering his head for the next step. Satisfied by the king's devotion, Lord Vishnu blessed Mahabali and sent him to the netherworld, with permission to visit his subjects once per year.



*Lord Vishnu as Vamana placing his third step on King Mahabali's head*

Annually, during the 10 days of Onam, the people of Kerala eagerly await their beloved king.

### Cultural Elements Present in Mrs. Krishnan's Party



*Display of Marigold Flower Garlands*

#### **Marigold Flower Garlands**

Marigold flower garlands, part of the show's decoration, are commonly used in religious ceremonies, festivals, and celebrations, and are also offered in worship to Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi.

## Hand Mudras

Mudras are symbolic hand gestures used in Indian classical dance forms, particularly in Bharatanatyam. The word "mudra" comes from Sanskrit, meaning "seal" or "gesture." These gestures are not mere ornamentation but an essential aspect of Bharatanatyam that contributes to its storytelling power. A single hand can convey a range of meanings, from devotion and power to love and sorrow, all depending on the form of the mudra.

In Bharatanatyam, mudras act as a visual language that complements the dance's rhythmic movements and facial expressions, known as "abhinaya." Together, they enhance the emotional and spiritual depth of the performance. Whether it's a single-handed gesture or a more complex two-handed one, mudras serve to communicate stories from Hindu mythology, nature, and daily life.

Below are a few examples of single hand mudras and their significance:

### Pataka (Pah-tah-kah)



The open palm is held outward facing, the four fingers and thumb are held close together. Used to express opening/closing of door, beginning of dance, flowing river water, saying "no", clouds, forest, taking oath, cutting, wind, horse, take rest, enter into a narrow road, blessing, moonlight, sunlight, slap, touching, rain

### TriPataka (Tree-pah-tah-ka)



The palm face is held outwards. The thumb, first and second and little finger are kept straight. The third finger is bent into the palm. Used to express crown, tree, lamp, applying "tikka", fire flames, turning around, Indra's, thunderstorms, vajra weapon, pigeon arrow, writing a letter

### ArdhaPataka (Ar-dah-pah-tah-ka)



In this Single Hand Mudras, the hand is rested with the palm facing outwards. The first and second fingers are extended straight and the third and the little finger are bent into the palm. Used to express riverbank, flag, leaves, a saw, a tower, a knife, horn, saying "both", writing on a board

### KartariMukh (Kar-tar-e-moo-kah-ha)



The hand is raised with the palm facing outwards. The 1st, 2nd and little fingers are extended straight up, the 3rd finger is bent into the palm and the thumb is placed to touch the tip at the 3rd finger. Used to express separation between a women and man, opposite directions, falling, corner of eyes, death, electricity

### Hausasya (Hahm-sah-sya)



The palm is raised facing outward and very slightly hallowed. The little finger is extended straight. The 3rd finger is also extended but is bent slightly and the 1st and 2nd fingers are bent forward to touch the thumb at the tips. Used to express act of painting, wick of lamp, tie a knot, blessings

### HansaPakshya (Hahm-sah-puk-sha)



In this Single Hand Mudras, the palm is raised facing outward and very slightly hallowed. The finger is extended straight and the other 3 fingers are bent forward, while the thumb bends over to touch the center of the 2nd finger on the inside. Used to express climbing, making bridge, making marks with the nail, to cover, number six

### Kangul (Khan-gu-lah)



The palm is raised facing outwards and all but the little finger touch at the tip. The little finger is bent inward and touches the base of the thumb. Used to express grapefruit, bells and big bells, small bangles, bird, beetle nut, child's chest, white water lily, coconut

### AlaPadma (Al-ah-pud-ma)



The palm is faced upwards and hallowed. All the fingers are spread out and bent to form a petal led circle. Used to express bloomed lotus, fruit, circular movement, separation from beloved, yearning for beloved, mirror, full moon, beauty, half knot, village, anger, lake, bird, to praise, height, to ask what, why and where

*Keep an eye out - does Mrs. Krishnan use any of these mudras during the*

## CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

**Pre-Show** - Whether you have a few minutes or a whole class period, here are a few ways to thoughtfully engage with the themes, history and characters of *Mrs. Krishnan's Party* before watching the production.

### *If You Have 15 Minutes: Think-Pair-Share*

Question: What does being a “host” mean to you? What makes someone feel truly welcomed?

- **Think:** Reflect and jot down your thoughts.
- **Pair:** Share with a partner. What do you agree on? What surprised you?
- **Share:** Share key takeaways with the class

### *If You Have 30 Minutes: Party Planner*

- **Brainstorm:** Imagine you are planning a party to celebrate something important to you. What food, music, clothing, traditions, people and decorations might be involved?
- **Create:** Create a To-Do list of all the important tasks you would accomplish before hosting your party. This could include elements such as set a menu, customize a playlist, or plan the guest list and send invitations.
- **Share:** Together as a class combine unique elements from each student's party to create one massive celebration. What will you eat? What games or activities are planned? Who is invited? Discuss: What do these details say about culture and personality?

### *If You Have 1 Hour: Storefront Storytelling*

- **Prompt:** What kinds of stories happen in a corner store? Consider what encounters, overheard conversations, conflicts, and daily rituals take place in common spaces.
- **Create:** In small groups, write and rehearse a 2-3-minute scene set in a corner store. Characters can include shopkeepers, regular customers, delivery drivers, etc. Be sure to feature a conflict or problem that needs solving to raise the stakes of your scene.
- **Share:** Groups perform their scenes. As a class, reflect and discuss: How do everyday places become meaningful spaces?

**Post-Show** - Having watched *Mrs. Krishnan's Party*, take time to dive deeper using these questions and activities to deepen your understanding of the story's message depending on your timeframe.

### ***If You Have 15 Minutes: Think-Pair-Share***

**Question:** How do simple, everyday acts, like offering a meal or listening, become powerful in this story?

- **Think:** Reflect and jot down your thoughts.
- **Pair:** Share with a partner. What do you agree on? What surprised you?
- **Share:** Share key takeaways with the class

### ***If You Have 30 Minutes: Theme Collage***

- **Identify:** Glance through the list of themes provided on page 3. Can you add any additional themes? Choose one theme you would like to unpack further in this activity.
- **Create:** Use visual elements such as photographs, drawings, colours, or digital images to make a collage representing your theme.
- **Reflect:** Observe your own collage while reflecting on the emotions it inspires.

### ***If You Have 1 Hour: Surprise Guest***

- **Set-up:** Gather suggestions from the class for what type of party is about to happen. One student volunteers to play the Host – they leave the room. Three performers serve as the Surprise Guests and ask the audience, "Who am I?" The audience comes up with a character for each of them to play. Encourage the students to generate creative suggestions; the more outlandish the better.
- **Improv:** Once the Guests have been established, the Host returns and the improv game begins. The Host pantomimes getting ready for the party, as each guest subsequently "knocks" on the door. The Host lets each guest inside and has a brief interaction as the scene unfolds. The Guests should offer discreet clues that become more and more obvious for the Host to guess their identity. Once identified, that Guest creates a reason to exit, leaving the host with more time to uncover remaining Guests' characters.
- **Share:** After one or multiple party scenes, reflect as a class:
  - *What tensions or connections were created?*
  - *How was the scene improved by an accommodating Host(s) as opposed to an unwelcoming host?*

## REFERENCES

Kerala Tourism: Onam Festival

<https://www.keralatourism.org/onam-festival>

Kerala Tourism: Legend of Mahabali

<https://www.keralatourism.org/onam/history/mahabali-legend>

Dr. D. Y. Patil Vidyapeeth, Pune: Bharatanatyam Mudras

<https://liberalarts.dpu.edu.in/blogs/bharatanatyam-mudras-meaning-role>

Indian Dance School: Single Hand Mudras

<https://www.gaurijog.com/single-hand-mudras/>

## CONTACT US

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If you have any questions about this Audience Enrichment Guide or Education at the Grand Theatre, please reach out to ...

Breanne Ritchie

Director of Education &  
Community Engagement



519-672-9030 ext. 224



[britchie@grandtheatre.com](mailto:britchie@grandtheatre.com)

Visit our website for future events and  
information!



We look forward to seeing you!

