



## BOOKFILTER'S APRIL PICK OF THE MONTH

MICHAEL GILTZ | APRIL 8, 2019

SHARE  

---

**Every month, BookFilter picks the best new theater book, exclusively for Broadway Direct readers.**

---

### ***Trust Exercise***

By Susan Choi

\$27, Henry Holt and Co.

Published April 9

Novels are like a reverse trust exercise. Instead of falling backward and believing your friends will catch you, a reader falls into a story, trusting the writer to play fair and not waste your time. An author may immediately reassure you with a familiar plotline or fool you into a false sense of security before taking a hard left turn. You think you've been caught, only to realize the net is frayed and there's another story underneath the one you thought you knew. Will that net hold, or is there *another* rude surprise waiting? That's the effect of Pulitzer Prize nominee Susan Choi's latest literary novel, *Trust Exercise*. It's set in the hothouse of a performing arts school, where students Sarah and David fall under the spell of each other and their magnetic teacher, Mr.

Kingsley. It's the Reagan era, and Sarah is the Molly Ringwald character, a poor-ish student with a white-knight boyfriend in David, who is almost embarrassingly wealthy. That difference hardly matters when Mr. Kingsley turns the lights off in the classroom and students crawl over and around each other with uncontained sensual glee. Sarah and David outpace the rest, not by having sex (no great marker in this world) but by the intensity of their unstable attraction/repulsion. Mixed signals aren't the half of it. Each acting lesson — such as sitting knee-to-knee in front of the class while repeating lines to one another — is agonizing for them, but each one serves as delicious entertainment for their oohing and aahing classmates, and irresistible fodder for the quietly manipulative Mr. Kingsley. Despite the young-adult subjects, this isn't the TV show *Fame*, where lessons will be gently learned. It's more intense and damaging than that. The story stays close to the raw, unforgiving, often-crying Sarah ... until halfway through the novel, when the net frays and we fall into an entirely different understanding of what is going on. You don't need a new perspective to know that the trust of the students is being abused, not in some dramatic scandal (though that happens too), but in a simpler, perhaps crueller way. Choi toys with our trust but it pays off in dividends. Certainly fans of theater and serious fiction will relish how frustrating and rewarding and life-changing a drama class can be for adolescents, even if the closest they get to the bright lights of Broadway is a seat in the audience. Trust us.

## **KEEP READING:**



***The Cher Show Cast Album Is On Its Way***



**Mean Girls on Broadway: "I'd Rather Be Me" Official Lyrics & Meaning**





**West End Musicals We Hope Will Come to Broadway**

**SEE ALL NEWS**

**BROADWAY DIRECT**

**Join Our Newsletter**

**General Info**

**Find Shows**

**Broadway Venues**

