

GREAT
LAKES
THEATER

TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE



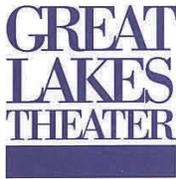
WAIT UNTIL DARK

BY FREDERICK KNOTT

DIRECTED BY JOSEPH HANREDDY

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Winter 2017

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Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater’s production *Wait Until Dark* by Frederick Knott, which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from February 17th through March 12th.

A 1960s Greenwich Village apartment is the scene for a deadly game of cat and mouse when a group of con-men manipulate and terrorize an unsuspecting blind woman to reclaim a mysterious doll. When the doll can’t be found, the situation spirals out of control. With murder afoot and suspense building, the woman deftly decides to “wait until dark,” in an attempt to outwit her assailants. The thrills begin when the lights go out. *Wait Until Dark’s* chilling conclusion is proof positive that what you can’t see can hurt you.

This guide is designed – through essays, discussion questions and classroom activities – to give students both an introduction to, and a point of entry for, a personal exploration of *Wait Until Dark*. We offer special thanks to Madelon Horvath for her outstanding contributions to this guide.

Great Lakes Theater is proud to provide you with the finest in classic theater and the necessary educational resources to support your work in the classroom. We are thrilled that you will be coming to see us and we welcome your input on how best to support your classroom preparation for our work. Please let us know what you think!

Sincerely,

Kelly Schaffer Florian
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A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER



You may or may not have attended a live theater performance before. To increase your enjoyment, it might be helpful to look at the unique qualities of this art form — because it is so different from movies or video.

The live theatrical performance not only involves the actors on the stage; it is meant to involve you, the audience, in ways that film and television cannot. In truth, although you are sitting in an auditorium and the actors are on stage, there is very little separating the audience from the performers. How you react to the play *deeply affects* the actors. Something as seemingly trivial as whispering or unwrapping a candy bar can distract them and disrupt the mood and tone of their performance. Due to the important relationship between actors and audience members, there are certain, perhaps obvious, provisions of live theater we wish to call to your attention.

In the Hanna Theatre, it is important to know that the taking of pictures, either with or without a flash, is strictly prohibited. Also, it is essential that all electronic equipment, including cell phones, music players (even with headphones), alarm watches, etc.,

be completely powered off once you have entered the theatre. Even the glow from a silent cell phone (used for text messaging, or posting social network updates, for example) can be very distracting to fellow audience members, even if you try to mask it under your hand or an article of clothing. Our goal is to provide every person in the audience with the best possible theatrical experience, so we appreciate your respectful cooperation during the performance.

Other differences live theater provides: in film or video, the camera and editing define what we will see. In the theater, however, each of us works as a camera and editor, choosing his or her personal points of focus. And in the Hanna Theatre, you should know that often we do not use microphones. As audience members you'll need to actively listen and "tune in" to the sound of the unamplified human voice.

As for our lighting and scenery, it might surprise you to know that these are not necessarily meant to be realistic. In this production, for example, there are design elements that are abstract or metaphorical.

The theater's ability to focus on human experience — distilled through the dialogue and behavior of people on stage and enhanced by the scenery, costumes, lighting, music and dance — is a centuries-old tradition. Being part of the communal magic when performer and audience connect — whether at a baseball game, music concert or theater performance — cannot be duplicated.

The performance you will see at Great Lakes Theater will happen only once. It is unique and personal. Though this play will be performed more than a dozen times, the performance you see belongs only to you.

We hope you enjoy it, and we'd like you to share your response with us.

GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE



Tom Hanks and fellow company member Bert Goldstein.



The beautifully renovated Hanna Theatre

Since 1962, Great Lakes Theater (GLT) has brought the world's greatest plays to life for all of Cleveland. In 1961, the Lakewood Board of Education president persuaded a Shakespeare troupe, led by Arthur Lithgow, to make Lakewood Civic Auditorium its home. The theater that opened its doors on July 11, 1962 as Great Lakes Shakespeare Festival presented six Shakespeare plays in rotating repertory. In exchange for free rent, the company provided student matinee productions. The repertory was expanded in 1965 to include non-Shakespearean classics as a result of an exchange of productions with Princeton's McCarter Theater. The Company outgrew its original home at Lakewood Civic Auditorium and, in 1982, made the move to the Ohio Theatre in PlayhouseSquare, launching the revitalization of downtown Cleveland's Theatre District.

In 2001 the Company was searching for a new Producing Artistic Director, and the Board sought a candidate with well-established business skills as well as artistic leadership. Charles Fee was selected for his commitment to Shakespeare and his reputation for building Idaho Shakespeare Festival into a highly successful regional theater. GLT recommitted itself to its founding core values: Shakespeare, rotating repertory and an acting company of the highest caliber. During Fee's tenure, the company has been recognized for its artistic excellence, winning the *Northern Ohio Live Magazine Award* for excellence in Theater in 2005 after three years of being a finalist, as well as *The Free Times Reader's Choice Award* for Best Performing Arts Group in 2006, and for eliminating the inherited accumulated net deficit of over one million dollars.

The Company has also been a revolutionary producing model unlike any other in America to create cost efficiency and enhance our artistic product. We now exchange our repertory productions with Idaho Shakespeare Festival (ISF) in Boise, Idaho and Lake Tahoe Shakespeare Festival (LTSF) in Nevada. This deep collaboration between independent producing organizations is a first in American theater. With this visionary model now fully in place, GLT, ISF, and LTSF are able to deepen the artistic quality of the work on our stages, share our production costs, maximize our resources, and provide nearly year-round employment to our resident company of artists.

Now, GLT has entered into a new phase, making the historic Hanna Theatre in Playhouse Square its home. The renovation of the Hanna Theatre, as well as the creation of GLT's first endowment fund, is part of our *Re-Imagine A Classic* Campaign to ensure GLT's future. Our new home in the Hanna features a hydraulically operated thrust stage, a first for this region, and innovative and intimate seating where no seat is farther than eleven rows from the stage. We believe that this extraordinary theater experience will revolutionize the way Northern Ohio experiences classic theater.

Great Lakes Theater is one of only a handful of American theaters that have stayed the course as a classic theater. With a plucky history of bucking economic trends to strive for and nurture the highest artistic quality, it remains a distinctive and significant cultural resource in an extraordinary American city.

FREDERICK KNOTT: THE RELUCTANT WRITER



By Carly Higley, Utah Shakespeare Festival

For someone who received a substantial amount of fame and acclaim for his ingenious and unorthodox plots, Frederick Knott has a remarkably slim list of credits to his name. These plays and screenplays, however, were so successful that they allowed him to thrive in his beloved Manhattan for the last thirty years of his life, adding nothing further to his literary accomplishments (Tom Vallance, “Frederick Knott [<http://www.Independent.co.uk>, 26 December 2002]). As his wife told Douglas Martin of the *New York Times* in a 2002 interview, “He hated writing. He wrote only for the money” (20 December 2002, 15). It is extremely fortunate, then, that he was still in need of finances when he contrived the play and, later movie adaptation, *Dial M for Murder*, or we might not be enjoying *Wait Until Dark* today.

Frederick Knott was born 28 of August 1916 in Hankow, China, the son of well-to-do Quaker missionaries (Elaine Woo, “Frederick Knott, 86” [*Los Angeles Times*, Obituaries, 22 December 2002]). During this time, the foundation was laid for his career with the stage when he and his sister Jean listened to records from Gillbert and Sullivan plays with Knott then staging his own versions in the family garden. At ten years of age his parents sent him back to England for formal education at the Quaker approved schools of Sidcott and Oundle, followed by four years at Cambridge from 1934 to 1938. During this time he played tennis for Cambridge and was by all accounts a gifted competitor. He would have competed at the most prestigious of all tennis tournaments, Wimbledon, had not World War II occurred (Vallance). As it was, he served Britain admirably in the Royal Artillery for the duration of the war (Woo).

After the war, he tried his hand at screenwriting for several years with little success until the simple sound of a gunshot became the muse for a masterpiece (Vallance). Knott later said in an interview: “I was always intrigued with the idea that somebody would plan a crime, and then you see that everything doesn’t turn out right. You can plan a murder in great detail and then put the plan into action and invariably something goes wrong and then you have to improvise, and in the improvisation you trip up and make a very big mistake” (Ronald Bergen, “Frederick Knott: Playwright and screenwriter preoccupied with the question of the perfect crime” [<http://www.TheGuardian.co.uk>, 16 January 2003]).

He spent the following eighteen months confined in a small “chalet” next to his parents’ estate in Sussex, purchased in 1948, doing very little but eating, sleeping, and writing about his idea (Bergen). Indeed, there were many days he spent entirely in pajamas where the only other soul he saw was his mother, when she would drop off meals (Vallance). Apparently, he wasn’t the only one intrigued by the idea of a planned murder gone awry because the success of the result, *Dial M for Murder*, continues to capture audiences over fifty years later. Amazingly, Knott was turned down seven times when he offered it to various producers, including August McLeod who was superbly confident that, “the play as a whole would cause little interest” (Martin). In 1952, just before Knott was about to accept that his screenplay was a failure, the BBC offered to produce it as a ninety-minute “television play.” The production enthralled audiences and caught the eye of a very shrewd producer, Sir Alexander Korda (Martin). Recognizing the big screen potential of the play, he persuaded Knott to sell the rights to him for a paltry £1,000 before selling it in turn to Warner Brothers for

£175,000 (Vallance). However, it was not all disappointment that Knott experienced during this time period. At a party following a Broadway performance, he met his future and lifelong wife, Ann Hillary, who later revealed, “I took one look at Frederick and was absolutely fascinated.” The feeling was mutual and they wed in 1953 (Vallance).

Meanwhile, Warner Brother’s entrusted the rights to *Dial M for Murder* to the skilled hands of Alfred Hitchcock, who entrusted Knott himself to write the screenplay. During the shooting of the movie, Knott stayed with Alfred Hitchcock and his family, and the two similar, scheming minds got along so well that a lasting friendship was formed (Vallance). In 1954 *Dial M for Murder* premiered at the cinema, and a legend was born.

Encouraged by his success, Frederick Knott tried his hand outside the suspense genre with the play, *Mr. Fox of Venice*, but to no avail; His gift was weaving sinister suspense stories, and all future theatrical success fit into that category, most notably the plays *Write Me A Murder* in 1961 and *Wait Until Dark* in 1966 (Bergen). In 1967 *Wait Until Dark* was made into a film starring Audrey Hepburn as a blind woman who destroys the lights in her house, leveling the field as she confronts three intruders (Bergen). The film was tremendously popular, and Audrey Hepburn received an Oscar nod for her performance (Vallance).

Frederick Knott had a mind that was a potential money pot. Maurice Evans, who played the lead in *Dial M for Murder* at Westminster Theatre in 1952, described him as “a particularly meticulous writer. The fascinating web of clues, counterclues, and red herrings that so intrigued theatre audiences is typical of the way his mind works. . . . Every detail of his plot is placed with the deadly accuracy of stroke in a championship tournament (Vallance).

The lucrative potential of his genius plot lines generated a demand for more stories of morbidly fascinating themes, but Knott had no desire to accommodate any request. No amount of money offered could change his mind. Though he had two complete plays already constructed in his head, he could not be induced to ever pen a word of them to paper (Woo). “He was perfectly happy the way things were,” related his wife (Vallance). Knott spent the last three decades of his life with his wife in New York enjoying the fruits of a few strokes of genius and the company of friends until his death on December 17, 2002 (Martin). Mrs. Knott described their life together as “a marriage as perfect as any I can imagine”(Vallance). Frederick Knott is survived by his wife and son, two grandsons, and a legacy of literary intrigue.



Audrey Hepburn in *Wait Until Dark*, 1967.



Richard Crenna & Audrey Hepburn in *Wait Until Dark*, 1967.



Alan Arkin in *Wait Until Dark*, 1967..

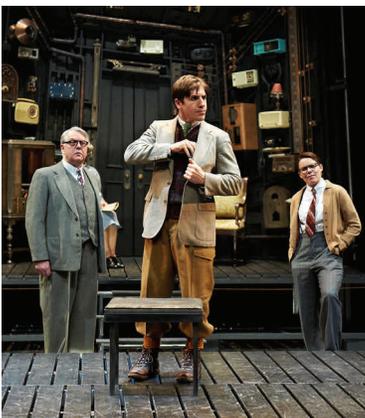
WHY DO WE ENJOY SUSPENSE



And Then There Were None,
Great Lakes Theater, 2016.



Dial "M" for Murder,
Great Lakes Theater, 2015.



The Mousetrap,
Great Lakes Theater, 2012.

By Dr. Jonathan Flombaum, Director of the Visual Thinking Lab at Johns Hopkins University

It has probably happened to you: you come home late one night. The house is dark, and it feels at once familiar yet strangely foreign. Maybe the porch light has gone out, and it is darker than usual. Maybe a trinket seems slightly out of place. Has someone been here? Is someone inside the house now?

When you finally get the lights on, you are overcome with relief—maybe you even left a few things in unusual places in a rush to get to the theatre. Your mind was just playing tricks on you and even the most familiar spaces can seem foreign in the dark. Notice that you don't experience pleasure, though. Excitement, perhaps, but not the positive kind.

So why is the same kind of experience fun when it is vicarious, when you view it in the third-person in a movie, or in a play like *Wait Until Dark*?

According to social psychologists the answer is that suspense in fiction works something like a vaccine. It gets your psychological immune system pumping in a safe and controlled environment, possibly even aggrandizing its forces. As you experience suspense in fiction, you experience stress and even anxiety; but there remains a part of you, indeed a separate part of your brain, that knows you are safe. Cortisol levels in your body rise—as they always do in response to stress. And as they always do, they induce the release: of blood glucose. Usually, those sugars serve to prepare you for fight or flight. In the comfort of your seat, however, they are well, just sugar. They produce a little buzz.

One way that social psychologists have investigated these mechanisms is by modulating the degree to which an audience identifies with a protagonist in suspense. Too little identification, and an audience may not even experience suspense. But too much, and it the experience can cease to be pleasurable. That part of your brain needs to know that you are safe. Modulating identification can be as simple as manipulating distance—how far or near in space to you the action seems to take place. So if you don't like rollercoasters, and are a little afraid of the dark, you may want to sit in the back of the house tonight!

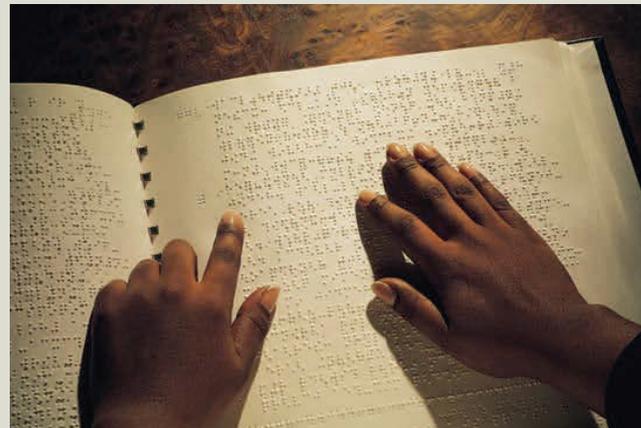
PERSPECTIVES INTO BLINDNESS FROM

*By Dr. Marina Bedny, Director,
Neuroplasticity and Development Lab, Johns
Hopkins University*

In *Wait Until Dark* the blind character Susan Hendrix attempts to get the best of her attackers by facing them in the dark. Because Susan is blind, her senses of hearing and touch are heightened. She is able to navigate better in the dark, giving her an edge over her opponents. Is there truth to the common sense notion that blind people hear and feel better than people who are sighted? Scientists have looked at this question by measuring blind people's perceptual abilities in the laboratory. The answer turns out to be yes and no.

People who are blind are better at some hearing and touch tasks, such as localizing sounds in the horizontal plane. On the other hand they are equal to or sometimes even a little worse than sighted people on other seemingly similar tasks, such as localizing sounds in the vertical plane. When blind people are more successful, they often achieve these benefits by attending more carefully to the non-visual senses. It is not the perception itself that's different but attention to what is perceived.

It is also not always blindness per se that gives the benefit. Blind Braille readers have more acute tactile perception on their Braille-reading finger. Studies using transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS) show that the representations of the Braille-reading finger is expanded in the brains of blind readers. This plasticity and increased acuity comes not from being blind per se but from practicing tactile discrimination through Braille-reading. If you want to have better tactile acuity,



Braille, universally accepted system of writing used by and for blind persons and consisting of a code of 63 characters, each made up of one to six raised dots arranged in a six-position matrix or cell. These Braille characters are embossed in lines on paper and read by passing the fingers lightly over the manuscript. Louis Braille, who was blinded at the age of three, invented the system in 1824 while a student at the Institution Nationale des Jeunes Aveugles (National Institute for Blind Children), Paris.

learn to read Braille! Nor are perceptual benefits found in all people who are blind. Many are specific to those who are blind from birth — both because there is greater brain plasticity during childhood and because congenitally blind individuals have many more years of practice at navigating the world without sight.

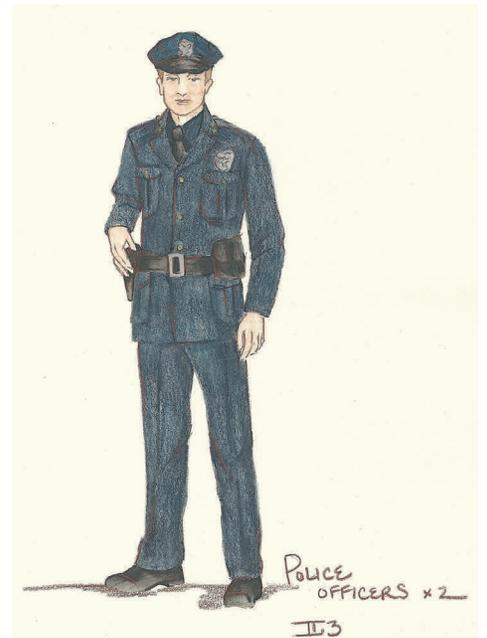
On the whole, scientists have found that blindness tends to improve perception through non-visual senses but it does not give blind people superhero-like abilities, as it did for the comic superhero Daredevil who developed bat-like sonar perception. Human perceptual abilities are defined in part by the structure of our sensory organs and our brains. Something all humans share, whether blind or sighted.

Many thanks to Everyman Theatre (Baltimore, MD) for this essay.

PRELIMINARY COSTUME DESIGN

BY RACHEL LARITZ





PRELIMINARY SCENIC DESIGN RENDERING

BY SCOTT BRADLEY



Dramatis Personae

Mike Talman Nick Steen+ *
Sgt. Carlino David Anthony Smith*
Harry Roat, Jr. Arthur Hanket*
Suzy Hendrix Jodi Dominick*
Sam Hendrix Jonathan Dyrud*
Gloria Elise Pakiela
Police officers Laura Welsh Berg*, Lynn Robert Berg*

+Fight Captain

* Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1 Friday evening
Scene 2 Saturday evening
Scene 3 Twenty minutes later

ACT II

Scene 1 About an hour later
Scene 2 A few minutes later

IF YOU HAVE ONE DAY TO PREPARE YOUR STUDENTS:

THE PLOT. The action of the play revolves around an elaborate attempt by a trio of con men to recover a doll that they believe has come into the possession of Sam Hendrix. The doll, we ultimately discover, contains heroine—a treasure that at least one of the con men is perfectly willing to kill for. When Sam is lured away from the apartment, Susan, his blind wife, is left alone to cope with the conspirators.

With this play you don't want to do much more with the synopsis because it's all about the suspense.

Modern students may need some background on the setting - with a reminder that phones were not portable then - because a lot of the action of the play is with the thieves' communication using the phone booth outside the apartment. They may enjoy this aspect of the production.

- A good discussion might begin with questions about students' favorite TV thriller or mystery.
 - * What makes a good thriller compelling to watch?
 - * Why do we like to be scared?
- This play works with levels of light and dark
 - * The main character is blind and her husband is a photographer
 - * They live in a basement apartment in Greenwich Village, New York.
 - * The fact that the playwright set this story in a basement apartment
- Things for students to watch for as they view the production:
 - * How does Great Lakes Theater use this setting to help build suspense/ underline theme?
 - * How does the actor playing Susy make us believe that she is blind?
 - * What kinds of challenges would this create for the actor?
 - * How does Susy become aware of the "con" the thieves are running? What does she start to notice?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: PRIOR TO ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What elements are needed to create a good mystery? What role does suspense and surprise play in good story telling?
2. What is your favorite TV drama or mystery? What makes it compelling to watch?
3. What are the tell tale qualities of anti-hero? Who is your all-time favorite anti-hero? Why?
4. Who is your favorite detective? What makes them great?
5. Define evil? Who decides what is right and what is wrong? Is morality an innate quality or it something that we are taught? What, if any, are universal moral laws? What role does good and evil play in our understanding of morality? What pushes people to act on their baser instincts? Does everyone possess a dual nature? If so, what determines our core nature and what controls our behavior/actions?
6. Is there such a thing as a “perfect” crime? What does it feel like when a “sure fire” plan to get away with something blows up in your face?
7. What role does deception and betrayal play in your everyday life? When, if ever, is it okay to lie or misrepresent the truth? What is the worst lie you ever told? How did you get caught?
8. Have you ever been so overcome with a powerful emotion, such as jealousy or ambition, that it affected your behavior or relationship with others? What does it feel like to be out of control? What does it take to rein in or mask those feelings? When — if ever — is it appropriate to express or act upon our so called “dark side?”
9. Define ambition. What drives you? Have you ever stepped over the line of what you thought was right or moral to get what you wanted? What feelings surfaced after that questionable act? Was obtaining your desire worth the cost? Explain your answer.
10. What motivation keeps you from straying into the realms of deception, lies and betrayal — a personal moral code, societal or religious guideposts, guilt, the fear of getting caught or the threat of parental, personal or legal consequences?
11. What makes you a good or a bad liar? Who in your life is the most gullible and believes just about any story you tell? Who never fails to sniff out the truth? What is the worst lie you have ever told? How did you get caught? What were the consequences?
12. Have you ever amended an action or ended a relationship because you knew that you were hurting or betraying someone you loved or cared about? In order to redeem yourself and repair trust, is it necessary to confess and own up to your actions or is it best to let what is unknown remain unknown? Explain your answer.
13. What does it take for you to truly trust someone? When are your suspicions ignited? Once betrayed, is it possible to rebuild trust? How? What does it take for you to truly forgive and move forward?

-
14. Do you think there is a recipe for success when creating a commercially successful play or film? What formulas have you noted that Hollywood and Broadway producers use again and again?
 15. What do you imagine it takes to produce a suspenseful thriller on stage? What makes you jump out of your seat? What clues do you look for when watching a mystery? What does it take for you to personally lose yourself in the story and journey of the characters? Is this type of transcendence more difficult at a live performance? Why? How does the experience of witnessing live performance differ from going to the movies or sitting in front of the TV?
 16. How would your life change if you suddenly lost your sight in an accident?
 17. What scares you? What scared you when you were a child? Are there any fears that you have that you cannot explain? Is there an instinctual benefit to fear?
 18. How have electronic devices, such as computers and smart phones, enhanced or harmed person-to-person communication? As you watch this play, think about how Susy's life as a blind person might be different today due to modern technology?

OHIO'S NEW LEARNING STANDARDS

APPLICABLE TO DRAMA & DRAMA ACTIVITIES

Under "Reading Standards for Literature"

Grades 9-10 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

Grades 11-12 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

Under "Integration of Knowledge and Ideas"

Grades 9-10 Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*).

Grades 11-12 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text. (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist.)

Under Speaking & Listening Skills: "Comprehension and Collaboration"

1. Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
2. Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

MORE HOW AND LESS WHAT

A theater review is not a book review, you do not need to summarize what happens. Provide the necessary background so the reader knows the name of the play and the basics of what kind of play it is, and then move into your commentary. You do not need to explain WHAT the play is, instead write about HOW successfully it was presented.

THE ACTOR NOT THE CHARACTER

You can hate the decisions a character makes, but how well did the ACTOR perform the role? Was their behavior appropriate to the part as written? Feel free to share your opinions, comparing or contrasting their work with other actors with whom you are familiar.

WHAT IS DIRECTION?

Maybe you have heard of a “director” in theater or film, but do you know what they do? It is not a director’s job to tell the actors how to say every line, but they are the person responsible for creating the general mood and concept for the production. What was your impression of the production as a whole? Was it too funny for a serious play? Or not amusing enough for a comic play? Use words to reflect back to the director how successful the production is as a whole.

DON’T FORGET THE DESIGN

The set you see and the sound design you hear are also unique to this one production of this play. Describe what you see and hear, but also be sure to make clear how successful these designs are to telling the story of the play.

IN CONCLUSION ...

While it is not necessary to give a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” your concluding sentence should summarize your impression of the production as a whole.

THEATER REVIEWS IN THE NEW MEDIA

Reviews in news websites may be 1000 words, they may be as brief as 300 words. Can you write a one-page review? Can you write a 100 word review, to post on Facebook? Do you think you could create a 140-character review that sums up the production for posting on Twitter?

A sample review written by a student follows this page.

— *David Hansen, Education Outreach Associate*

A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

“Gambit”: More Poetry Than History — Mark Wood

If Aristotle was correct when he said that poetry “is a higher thing than history,” then “Royal Gambit,” which opened Friday night at Pentacle Theater, is, I suppose, on the right track.

For those who were expecting a representational treatment of the life of England’s Henry VIII, “Royal Gambit” was a shock, if not a disappointment. Those who sought poetry got it, although of a very dogmatic and simplistic sort.

This unusual, highly presentational play by Hermann Gressieker, directed by Ed Classen, is an indictment of modern man as a ruthless opportunist. The Tudor king is a representative of a rationalizing, shifty society which has become “superior to the highest” while “wallowing in the depths.”

As Henry uses the banners of “reason” and “humanism” to obtain then dispose of his six wives, so modern man uses them for his own pleasure and glorification, uses them to wage war in the name of peace, to hate in the name of love.

Such is the grim theme pleasingly presented by a company of seven actors, who performed their roles energetically, if unevenly. The presentational acting style employed here is difficult to perfect. It should be theatrical, yet believable; aimed at the head, yet acceptable to the heart.

Louise Larsen was a standout as Catherine of Aragon, Largely because she utilized this presentational approach and was not afraid of open theatricality. Her flamboyant stage presence, which needed to be toned down in her recent role in “Last of the Red Hot Lovers,” found full vent here.

Henry's fourth wife, Anne of Cleves, was portrayed by Gale Rieder, who quickly became an audience favorite. Her thick accent was letter-perfect and her direct humor was a welcome contrast to the bitter satire of the rest of the play.

The other four actresses—Kathy Stratton, Marcia Engblom, Polly Bond and Patricia Sloan—each had their exceptional moments. However, they generally seemed tied to more conventional, representational acting styles.

Ron Fox was superb in the role of Henry. Tuxedoed, leering with the look of a demonic marionette, the vacant stare of a deranged orator, Fox dominated the stage fully, commanding both in voice and stage presence.

The technical elements of the play were more than adequate. Musical accompaniment was appropriately sparse and simple.

At one point the play, King Henry roared, “In my realm I decide what constitutes tragedy!” Ironically, Gressieker strips modern man not only of his possibilities as a tragic figure worthy of any sympathies at all. In the final moments of the play, Catherine of Aragon announces the death of modern man and the birth of a new era. It is a scene of great hope, but it is not as profound as her earlier pronouncement to her husband that “the ways of the world are not so cut and dried!”

For my own part, I wish that “Royal Gambit’s” statement were not so cut and dried. By making man out to be such a simple monster the play defeats its own purposes and turns poetry into scathing dogma, which is probably even less interesting than, say, history.

<http://faculty.chemeketa.edu/jrupert3/eng105/Annrev.html>

ACTIVITIES

BLIND WALK

The protagonist of this play is blind due to an accident that occurred a year ago. Discuss this aspect of the character. What limitations would we have if we were blind? Would we be stronger or more vulnerable?

If you have time, a fun way to get students to connect with Susy would be to play the game below:

Working in pairs, one partner wears a blindfold; the other leads the blindfolded person around the classroom and outside if possible. Explain to the leader that he/she is responsible for the partner's safety. It's important that they take the exercise seriously in that regard. The leader may not touch the person being led; guiding must be accomplished by using only vocal direction. Encourage the blindfolded actor to use the senses of smell, touch, taste, and hearing to explore the environment. After a few minutes, have the actors switch roles – then discuss their experiences. Connect this with Susy's challenges in the play – both as a character, and as the actor who will portray her.

Themes to watch for in the play:

1. Being “in the dark” is sometimes used as a metaphor for lacking knowledge or judgment. Why does knowledge equal power? How does understanding people and situations as clearly as possible serve us?
2. As students think ahead about this play, you might want to have them watch for ways the thieves try to trick Susy – and how she knows when they are doing that. Who is really “in the dark?”

WRITING PROMPTS/JOURNAL ENTRIES

WRITING/RESEARCH

- Watch the 1967 film of *Wait Until Dark* starring Audrey Hepburn and compare the impact of the story and characters as told through the medium of live performance vs. cinema.
- Research the film genre known as film noir. What are the primary defining characteristics of this type of filmmaking? How does fear play a vital role in establishing the noir tone?
- Protagonist vs antagonist

The protagonist is the main character, the antagonist opposes him/her. This play contains clear examples of these two character types for students to understand how they work in dramatic literature. What obstacles does our protagonist have to overcome?

As the protagonists in our own lives, how do we respond when obstacles are placed in our paths? What aspects of our nature are revealed when we struggle to overcome adversity?

In classical story structure, which has its origins in ancient Greek drama, the main character, or protagonist, is opposed by the antagonist, which can be a person, a group of people or an institution. As the antagonist creates obstacles the protagonist must overcome, tension arises around who will triumph. The plot usually climaxes in a final encounter, then is resolved, often leaving the protagonist profoundly changed. Robert McKee, an expert says, "True character is revealed in the choices a human being makes under pressure – the greater the pressure, the deeper the revelation. . . ." How is Susy changed by the encounter she has with the thieves in *Wait Until Dark*? Is there a larger theme here dealing with people with disabilities and how we "see" them – or is this simply one woman's scary story? Support your ideas with evidence from the play or from other sources.

- Compare/contrast the changes in Susy with the changes of a classic character in drama such as Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*, Hamlet in *Hamlet* or Oedipus in *Oedipus Rex*. How does Susy fit in with these great dramatic characters? Are her challenges and triumphs more or less significant? Why / why not?

GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES

Given circumstances – or what has happened before the play begins—is a term that was first invented by Stanislavski and has become a staple for modern actors working on creating their characters. It's the "who" "what" "where" and "why" that the character must know as the play begins. Look for the given circumstances of this play as you begin to watch the production.

1. Ask students to think about where they currently are (a classroom, a studio, a rehearsal stage) and then give some thought to why they are there.
2. Give students this writing assignment: "Think about yourself and write a paragraph about your current

given circumstances—Who are you? Where are you right now and why are you here? How are you feeling or behaving? Ask students to place the most emphasis on the why and the how aspects of this written reflection. (Note: You may choose to have students identify themselves by name or you can leave that part of the “who” out of the writing.)

3. Give students 15 to 20 minutes of silent writing time.
4. Call time and ask students to place whatever they have written—even if they do not feel it is complete—on a table or chair or rehearsal box located somewhere in the room, preferably in a central location.
5. Instruct all students to walk slowly in a circle around the object holding the pieces of paper. Then, whenever they feel the impulse to, they should take one of the papers (not their own, of course).
6. Once all students have a paper, ask them to familiarize themselves with what’s written on it—Read it carefully, absorb it, think about the words and the ideas.
7. After giving students 5 or so minutes, explain that each student will read the words on the paper aloud to the group as if auditioning for a part. They are to treat the words as if they are a monologue and deliver a cold reading. Tell students: “Read it aloud as if this is YOUR story. Make us believe you mean it.”
8. One at a time, when a student is ready, have each deliver the words on the chosen paper. Remind them to remain conversational and speak as if the words were their own.
9. Reflection: After all the students have shared their readings, discuss what it was like to deliver someone else’s words as if they were your own. Liken this experience to what actors must do with lines of dialogue in a published script. Discuss whether and how this activity increased students’ understanding of Given Circumstances and how actors would use them in their character work.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION: AFTER ATTENDING THE PERFORMANCE

1. What were your favorite aspects of this production? How did the visual elements — the set, costume and lighting design — aid in the telling of this classic thriller? What actor do you believe had the most fully realized characterization? What was it about his or her performance that drew you in?
2. *Wait Until Dark* has many surprising plot twists. What surprised you the most? Why do we like to be scared? Was there a moment in the play when you screamed or were startled? When did it occur? What role does shock and surprise play in the creation of a good mystery? How did those moments of shock aid in your enjoyment of GLT’s current production?
3. There is an old saying, “*the devil is in the details.*” How did playwright Frederick Knott use this adage to his advantage in shaping this story? How did the production and/or actor choices highlight some of those details?
4. The play was written in the early 1960s. How does the era of the piece influence the way you understand and think about the characters and their relationships? How did the actors present themselves differently? How would you define the “style” of the piece? Think of other period pieces – movies and/or television shows – that depict a certain time in history (*i.e. Mad Men, The Tudors, That 70’s Show, Pride and Prejudice, Shakespeare in Love*). Other than costumes, how do the actions of the performers shape our understanding of a particular era? What struck you about performers in the GLT production?
5. How did the actor portraying Susy make you believe she could not see?
6. How did the actors portraying the con artists create a sense of danger?
7. Why does Gloria deny that she is wearing glasses?
8. Why does the playwright make Sam a photographer?
9. Why does Gloria steal the doll?
10. Why doesn’t Susy just give Roat the doll?
11. What is the major difference between Mike and Roat?
12. What was the most surprising moment in the production? Describe in detail.
13. How would you describe Susy’s experience as a protagonist? What obstacles did she face? How did she attempt to overcome them?
14. What were the climax and resolution of the play?
15. What is the meaning of the title of the play? To whom is it addressed?

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16. How did the technical aspects (scenery, lighting, and props) contribute to the sense of suspense in the play?
 17. How would you describe in 2-3 sentences what the play is about, without giving the plot away?
 18. Plays have a set of “given circumstance” – or what has happened before the play begins. What are the given circumstances of this play?
 19. Discuss some of the nuances of the idea of darkness and light in the play. How does darkness work for Susy? How does Sam’s job as a photographer contrast with Susy’s blindness? How does this contrast in their lives highlight thematic elements in the play?
 20. As the protagonists in our own lives, how do we respond when obstacles are placed in our paths? What aspects of our nature are revealed when we struggle to overcome adversity?
 21. Why do we enjoy being scared? What is the element of fun in a horror lm, an amusement park ride, a haunted house?
 22. What is different about thrillers on stage and the movies? In what ways did GLT’s current production engage your modern sensibilities? *Wait Until Dark* was made into a movie in 1967. It was directed by the Terence Young and starred Audrey Hepburn. Do you think the script is worthy of a remake? If you were a Hollywood producer, who would you cast in the main roles? If you were given the task of contemporizing the script, what changes would you make?

This teacher guide was compiled by Madelon Horvath, with additional original material by Jodi Kirk.

Sources Include:

Utah Shakespeare Festival, Cedar Center, UT
Everyman Theater, Baltimore, MD
Arkansas Repertory Theatre, Little Rock, AR
Geffen Playhouse, Los Angeles, CA
The Public Theatre, Lewiston, ME

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ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER



Charles Fee, Producing Artistic Director

The mission of Great Lakes Theater, through its main stage productions and its education programs, is to bring the pleasure, power and relevance of classic theater to the widest possible audience.

Since the company's inception in 1962, programming has been rooted in Shakespeare, but the company's commitment to great plays spans the breadth of all cultures, forms of theater and time periods including the 20th century, and provides for the occasional mounting of new works that complement the classical repertoire.

Classic theater holds the capacity to illuminate truth and enduring values, celebrate and challenge human nature and actions, revel in eloquent language, preserve the traditions of diverse cultures and generate communal spirit. On its mainstage and through its education program, the company seeks to create visceral, immediate experiences for participants, asserting theater's historic role as a vehicle for advancing the common good, and helping people make the most joyful and meaningful connections between classic plays and their own lives. This Cleveland theater company wishes to share such vibrant experiences with people across all age groups, creeds, racial and ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds.

The company's commitment to classic theater is magnified in the educational programs (for both adults and students) that surround its productions. Great Lakes Theater has a strong presence in area schools, offering an annual series of student matinees and, for over 30 years, an acclaimed school residency program led by teams of specially trained actor-teachers.

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