

**GREAT  
LAKES  
THEATER**

**TEACHER PREPARATION GUIDE**

# **WITNESS**

**FOR  
THE PROSECUTION**



By **AGATHA CHRISTIE**

Directed by **CHARLES FEE**

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Cleveland's Classic Company  
at Playhouse Square

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The mission of Great Lakes Theater,  
through its mainstage productions  
and its educational programming,  
is to bring the pleasure, power and  
relevance of classic theater to  
the widest possible audience.

Winter 2019

Dear Educator,

Thank you for your student matinee ticket order to Great Lakes Theater's production *Witness for the Prosecution*, which will be performed in the beautiful Hanna Theatre at Playhouse Square from February 15th through March 10th.

The stakes are high as Leonard Vole is accused of murdering a widow to inherit her wealth. Can this defendant convince the jury, and you, of his innocence and escape the hangman's noose despite shocking courtroom testimony and impassioned gallery outbursts? Witness as Leonard and his lawyers struggle to untangle the truth in a whodunit suspense-thriller that will keep you guessing until the gavel's last echo...and beyond.

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 *Witness for the Prosecution*. We offer special thanks to retired teacher 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,

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## A NOTE TO STUDENTS: WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATER

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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.

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,

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.

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# GLT: OUR HISTORY, OUR FUTURE

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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 Playhouse Square, 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.

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# PLAYNOTES BY MARGARET LYNCH

“ She took a gamble on writing for the stage, and it was her work on the stage—along with film and television adaptations of her work—that catapulted her from best-selling author to worldwide phenomenon. ”



Agatha Christie (1890-1976)

In the waning months of 1952, British crime writer Agatha Christie was faced with a challenge. The so-called “Queen of Crime” could have been basking in the runaway success of her play, *The Mousetrap*, which debuted in October of 1952. Of course, she couldn’t have known then that *The Mousetrap* would go on to become the longest continuously running play in London’s West End, where it passed the 27,000 performance mark in September 2018. But *The Mousetrap* was already a hit. Never one to rest on her laurels, Agatha Christie needed another stunner to top the last.

Rifling through her own short stories and novels for source material for her next play, as she did for most of the 16 stage scripts that she wrote, she began to mull over a short story that she had first dashed off quickly in 1925 under the title “Traitor Hand.” The story had

stuck with her; she had changed its title, to *Witness for the Prosecution*, and included it in several subsequent short story collections. Then inspiration struck while she was traveling in early 1953: she suddenly saw how to transform a modest short story into a bolder, dramatic work.

So much had changed since the story made its first appearance in a cheap “pulp” magazine. The world itself had changed greatly. Between 1925 and 1952, the grim deprivations and sacrifices of World War II had shifted the outlook of the writer’s native country. But many shifts had also taken place in Christie’s personal life and in her own outlook as a writer.

In 1925, Agatha Christie was married to the man that she thought was the love of her life. She was comfortable financially. She had been writing detective fiction but was essentially an amateur, not yet the consummate professional that she would become. But by 1953, she had lost her first husband to another woman, faced the terror of financial ruin, learned to survive and thrive as a full-time writer, and married a second husband whose work as an archaeologist took her to exotic corners of the world.

Agatha Christie had the veneer of an upper middle class housewife in 1925: she had a daughter and a house, she traveled and entertained, but she also dabbled in writing on the side. Underneath the surface, she was always less conventional than she might have seemed. She was born Agatha Miller in 1890, the youngest—by many years—of three children. Her father was an American-born stockbroker; her mother had been raised by



Agatha Christie as a child, undated.



Agatha Christie's mother, Clarissa Boehmer Miller, in the garb of a medium.



Ashfield House, Agatha Christie's beloved childhood home in Torquay, Devon, England.



Agatha and Archibald Christie.



Agatha Christie, with her only daughter, Rosalind.

a wealthy aunt. The family enjoyed an upper middle class life in a large country house, Ashfield, in Torquay, a seaside resort town in Devon, England. But her father was careless with money, despite his profession, and when he died in 1901, the 11-year-old Agatha and her mother Clarissa were forced to cling together precariously among relatives and in rented rooms, only returning intermittently to the grand house that stoked the imaginative longings of both mother and child. A voracious and home-schooled reader, Agatha was already churning out poems and short stories as a young girl. Her early stories often revolved around spiritualists and paranormal events; her mother had a reputation among family and friends as a psychic.

On the eve of WWI, Agatha married a dashing soldier named Archibald Christie who almost immediately went off to war. Like many young women of the day, Agatha served as a nurse during the war, but she also did a stint in a pharmacy (as she would again during World War II), where she first learned about the properties of the poisons that some of her criminal characters would deploy. She wrote her first novel during the War, in 1916. *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, whose publication was delayed until 1920, introduced the Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who would recur in many of her stories. She was still publishing short stories in weekly magazines but she was beginning to hit a more ambitious stride as a writer. Working throughout 1925 on a book that would be published a year later, she produced what has been described as a “breakthrough” novel. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* deftly wielded an

unreliable narrator and the multiple twists and turns that would become her hallmark as a crime writer.

But then everything fell apart. Her beloved mother died in April of 1926. In December, her husband confessed that he had been having an affair and asked for a divorce. Depressed and panicked, Christie “staged” her own 11-day disappearance. To this day, it is debated how much she planned, how much she improvised, and for what purpose. But the question of whether she had committed suicide or been murdered by her estranged husband gripped the British public. When she was found alive, she lost both her husband and the regard of the public, who turned against her as a manipulative attention seeker.

In the end, she won the public back by writing her way out. She wrote with a feverish urgency, and a more profound sense of human betrayal. Though she herself began to tire of detective Hercule Poirot—“an egocentric creep,” she later called him—readers enjoyed her clever creation, and she gave them more of him. Poirot would ultimately anchor 33 of her 73 crime novels and 54 of her more than 100 short stories. She also introduced a shrewd spinster more to her own liking, Miss Jane Marple.

As Christie regained financial stability, she traveled to the Middle East, visiting ancient sites in Iraq where she met the archaeologist who would become her second husband, Max Mallowan. Out of those travels, she spun *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), *Death on the Nile* (1937), and other fan favorites. She took a gamble on writing for the stage, and it was her work on the stage—along with film and television adaptations of her work—that catapulted her from best-selling author to worldwide phenomenon. Showing the business sense that her father had lacked, she also took control of her income and copyrights by forming the Agatha Christie Settlement Trust. By relentlessly honing her craft, she gained the financial security she yearned for—and the abiding legacy she earned.

**MRS. CHRISTIE FOUND AT HARROGATE**  
**Dramatic Re-union With Husband in Famous Hydro.**  
**“HER MEMORY GONE”**  
**How Missing Novelist Spent Time While Police and Public Looked for Her**

Mrs. Christie, the missing inventor of detective stories, was traced last night to the Hydro, Harrogate, by her husband, Colonel Christie.

In an interview after a dramatic meeting between the pair, Colonel Christie told the *DAILY HERALD* that his wife had suffered from the “most complete loss of memory.” She did not even recognize him, he added.

**“She does not know why she is here.”**  
**—Col. Christie**

News headlines of the day went along with the story that the family concocted to cover their embarrassment at Christie’s disappearance: that she had developed amnesia and didn’t know how she got to Yorkshire or why.

Agatha Christie joined her second husband, archaeologist Max Mallowan, on many of his digs. Here they are in Tell Halaf, in Syria, in the 1930s.

Greenway Estate was one of several houses that Agatha Christie owned at the time of her death.



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# WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

## THROUGH THE AGES

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- Agatha Christie enjoyed taking part in amateur theatricals as both a child and an adult. Unhappy with a 1928 stage adaptation of *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, under the title *Alibi*, she decided to try her own hand at playwriting and produced an original script, *Black Coffee*, in 1930. In the 1940s, she began developing theatrical adaptations of her own earlier short stories and novels, conquering the stage with such hits as *And Then There Were None* (1943), *Murder on the Nile* (1945), *The Mousetrap* (1952), and *Witness for the Prosecution* (1953). Even playwright Noël Coward was forced to concede, "Much as it pains me I really must congratulate you."
- *Witness for the Prosecution* made a strong showing on stage in London and took Broadway by storm. The "property" wasn't encumbered as *The Mousetrap* was, so a film adaptation was quickly in the offing. Given the box-office success of the 1945 film version of *And Then There Were None*, the project attracted top-flight talent. Billy Wilder directed, and Tyrone Power, Marlene Dietrich, and Charles Laughton headed the cast for the 1957 film



The original West End cast of *The Mousetrap* included Richard Attenborough as Detective Sergeant Trotter. Attenborough and his wife, Sheila Sims, who was also in the cast, took a 10% profit participation in the production. "It proved to be the wisest business decision I've ever made," he would later say.



Marlene Dietrich and Tyrone Power in the 1957 film version of *Witness for the Prosecution*.

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version of *Witness for the Prosecution*. Power, who had made a career of swashbuckling heroes, was cast against type as the drifter Leonard Vole, and, at 43, was older than Christie’s script specified. Dietrich, at 55, reprised the European “femme fatale” type that she had introduced 27 years earlier in *The Blue Angel*. Their on-screen chemistry sizzled nonetheless and contributed to Agatha Christie’s growing fame.



- *The Mousetrap* originated in a radio play broadcast in 1947 under the title *Three Blind Mice*. Christie gave the rights to the play to her grandson as a birthday present and stipulated that, outside the West End production, the play could only have one other production in the United Kingdom in any given year and that no film adaptation could be made until six months after the West End production closed—which hasn’t happened yet!

Guest director Drew Barr thought “inside the box” for the theater’s 2012 production of *The Mousetrap*—enclosing the action within a box-like structure that conveyed a sense of confinement and oppression as well as subtly alluded to the well-crafted structure of the play itself.

- Great Lakes Theater chose *The Mousetrap* for its first foray into the theatrical work of Agatha Christie during the 2011-2012 season, following up during the 2015-2016 season with *And Then There Were None*. Both productions are among the theater’s all-time top ten in attendance.



Agatha Christie relied on one of her characteristic devices in *And Then There Were None*—gathering all the murder suspects in one room—and upped the number of suspects to 10. In Director Charles Fee’s 2016 production, an expansive and artfully composed living room provided an apt playing field for the cagy crime writer’s and virtuosic craft.

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# FROM PAGE TO STAGE

 BY MARGARET LYNCH

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Great Lakes Theater’s producing artistic director Charles Fee is at the helm for the theater’s production of *Witness for the Prosecution*. The fact that Agatha Christie’s work has resonated so strongly with so many people for so long gives Fee an added sense of responsibility. In a season that includes work by Jane Austen and Agatha Christie, he notes that each author has been touted as the third best seller worldwide after Shakespeare and the Bible. “They can’t both be,” he laughs. But he argues that Christie’s impact is pervasive, especially if you count the many adaptations for stage, film and television, the “biopics,” the fan fiction, the films of fan fiction, and even the ever-popular television series, *Murder, She Wrote*. “Agatha Christie was as strong a playwright as she was a novelist,” Fee asserts. “She wrote first-rate genre plays.”

When Fee first considered producing the play, its large cast size was a potential stumbling block. With a repertory that’s centered in Shakespeare and often includes large-scale musicals, Great Lakes Theater is used to fielding casts of 16 or more. But the original production of *Witness for the Prosecution* had at least 30 actors onstage, most in non-speaking roles. Fee knew, however, that he could rely on the acting company’s versatility. With an assist from costume designer Esther Haberlen, several actors would readily enjoy the challenge of playing more than one role. Fee also realized that he could accomplish the sense of a crowded courtroom with the help of the theater’s own audiences. The theater’s recent productions of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* had audience seating onstage in an Elizabethan playhouse setting. In a courtroom drama, where lawyers and witnesses appeal to the jury, and the justice system itself is the adversary, audience seating in the jury box and the observer’s galley provided a potent solution.

Another casting issue arose. The play makes much of the “otherness” of Leonard Vole’s European-born wife, Romaine, and the plot exploits prejudice toward “the other.” Casting choices offered an opportunity to explore the kinds of “otherness” that could have been operative in London in the 1950s but at the same time might be relevant to the topic of “the other” in American society today.



Angela Lansbury in *Murder, She Wrote*.



Research for Romaine Vole.



“Demobilization Suits” were issued to returning WWII veterans in 1946.

The world of the production is firmly anchored in 1952 London. England wasn't yet experiencing the post-war boom that was propelling America at that time. Instead, post-war austerity still held sway. Costume designer Esther Haberlen uses a muted gray tartan and tweed color palette to convey the stolid forbearance of the English middle class of the early 1950s. Romaine Vole's cosmopolitan clothing is all the more striking, reinforcing her outsider status. Haberlen distinguishes subtly between the more conservative, 1940s style clothing that the older characters would still have worn and the slightly more adventurous fashion choices of the younger generation. In post-war England, Leonard Vole's pin-striped suit would have been recognized as one of the mass-produced “demobilization” suits that were issued to returning veterans of World War II. Without this knowledge, but within the world of this production, Vole's well-worn, ill-fitting suit will still “read” as slightly out-of-date for a young man.

Director Fee challenged scenic designer Gage Williams to approximate London's Old Bailey Court as it might have looked in 1952. Williams had to recreate the hierarchical placement of judge, barristers, witnesses, defendant, and jury within a typical British courtroom while creating a space that was dramatic and provided for audience sightlines. With the audience-as-jury onstage at all times, the courtroom scene cannot change, but Williams is able to draw on the Hanna Theatre's lighting resources and its hydraulic lifts to provide playing spaces outside the courtroom.

The setting in 1952 London suggested another dramatic opportunity. That was the year that a thick, oppressive fog hung over the city of London for several days in December—just the sinister setting for a murder mystery!



Nelson's Column on Trafalgar Square during London's “Great Fog” of 1952.



Photo of the interior of the Old Bailey Courthouse.



Agatha Christie at the height of her career.

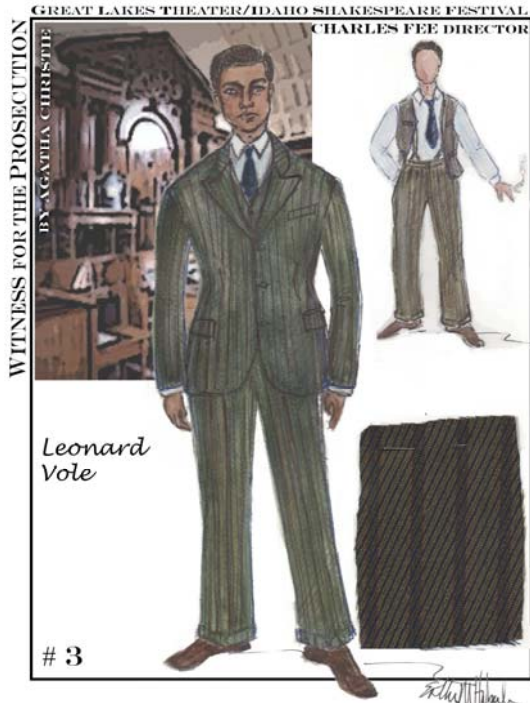
## Dramatis Personae

Greta.....	Laura Welsh Berg*
Carter.....	M.A. Taylor*
Mr. Mayhew.....	Lynn Robert Berg*
Leonard Vole.....	Taha Mandviwala*
Sir Wilfrid Robarts, Q.C.....	Aled Davies*
Inspector Hearne.....	Alex Syiek*
Romaine Vole.....	Jodi Dominick*
Clerk of the Court / Court Usher.....	Andy Nagraj*
Mr. Justice Wainwright.....	David Anthony Smith*
Mr. Myers, Q.C.....	Nick Steen*
Court Stenographer.....	Liz Krane
Warder.....	Peter Ribar
Policemen.....	Ben Kemper, Daniel Telford
Dr. Wyatt.....	M.A. Taylor*
Janet MacKenzie.....	Jillian Kates*
Ms. Clegg.....	Laura Welsh Berg*
The Other Woman.....	Claire Soulier
Barristers.....	Mitchell Blair, Phil Florian, Eugene Stromberg, Tom Wang
Ensemble.....	Ben Kemper, Liz Krane, Peter Ribar, Claire Soulier, Daniel Telford

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

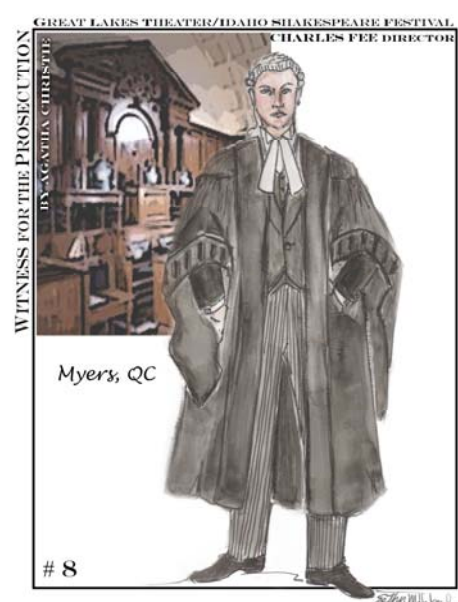
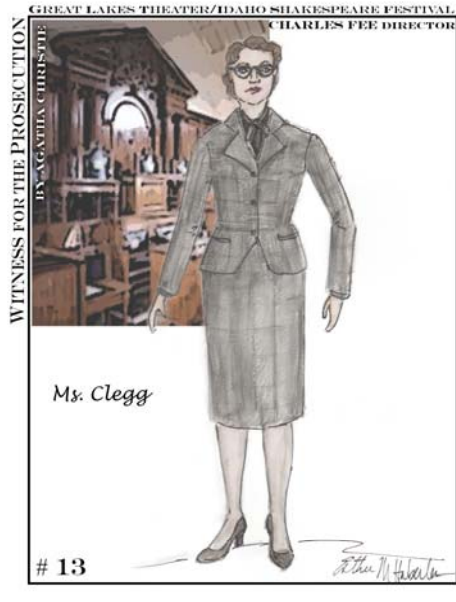
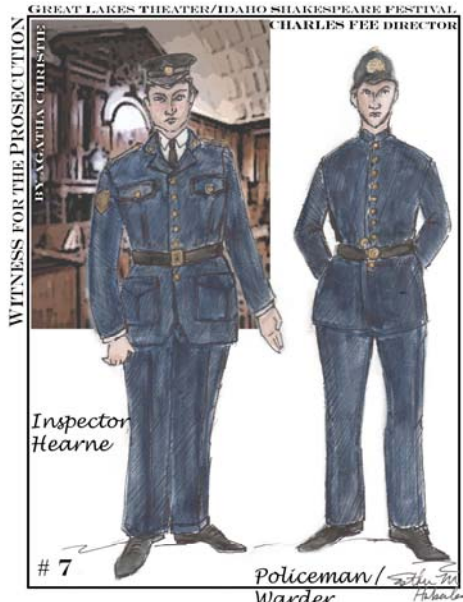
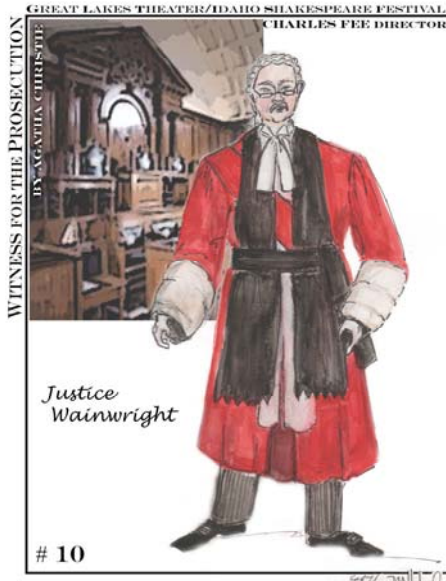
# COSTUME INSPIRATION & DESIGN

BY ESTHER HABERLEN



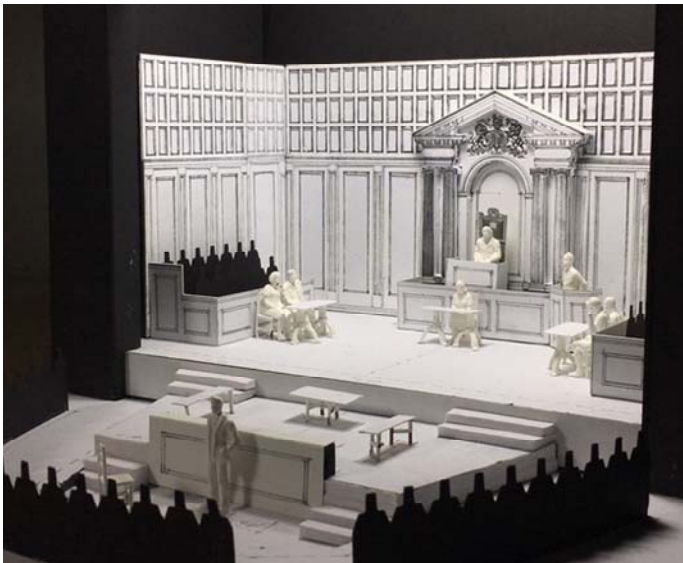
Romaine Vole Research

Esther Haberen 2019



# SCENIC INSPIRATION & DESIGN

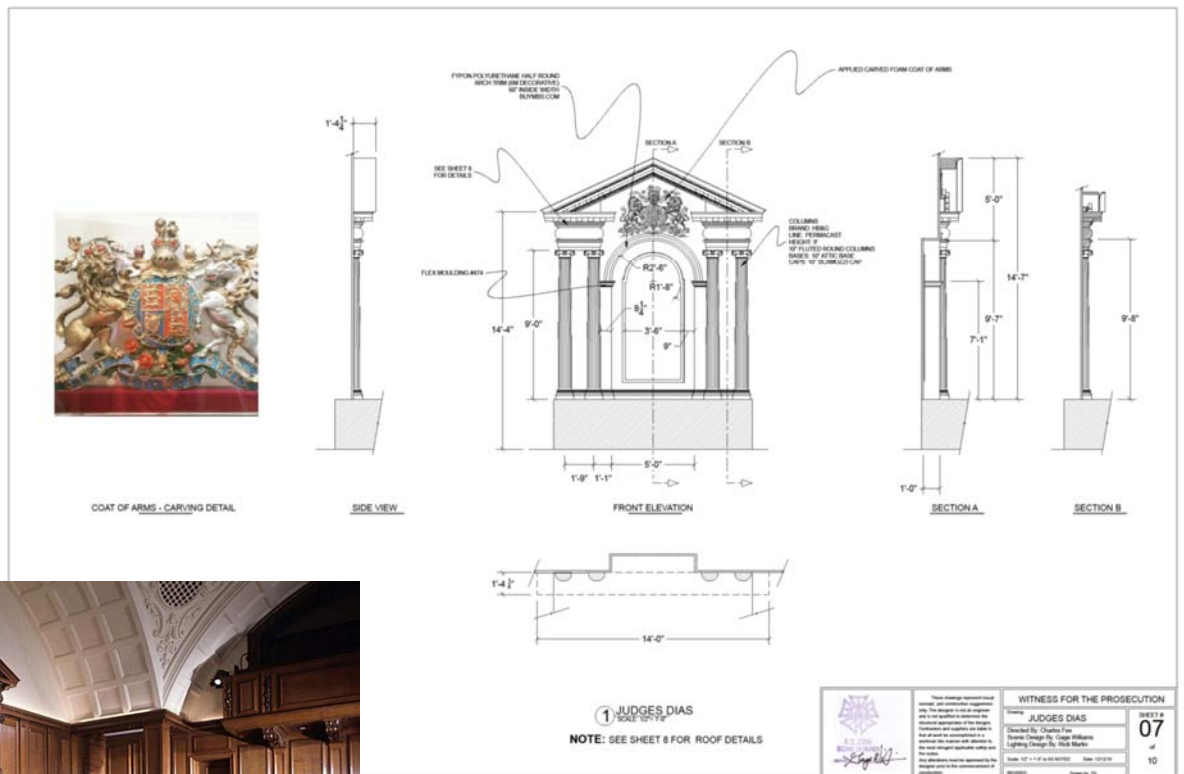
BY GAGE WILLIAMS



Original white model.



Photo of the scenic model.



Research photo.



Drawings of the judges' dais.



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# IF YOU HAVE ONLY ONE DAY TO PREPARE

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1. Give a very brief biography of Agatha Christie's life and work.

Agatha Christie (September 25, 1890 – January 12, 1976) was an English crime writer of novels, short stories and plays. She is best remembered for her 80 detective novels and her successful London West End theatre plays. Her works, particularly those featuring detectives Hercule Poirot and Miss Jane Marple gave her the title the 'Queen of Crime' and made her one of the most important, influential and innovative writers in the development of the genre. Students can see some of these famous detectives in PBS series on TV if they are so inclined.

Almost all of Agatha Christie's books are whodunits, focusing on the English middle and upper classes. Christie worked as a nurse during WWI, and learned about pharmaceuticals. Her knowledge of poisons and potions was put to use in many of her novels, as agents of murder. Agatha Christie wrote *Witness for the Prosecution* as a short story published in 1925 – between WWI and WWII. It premiered onstage in London in 1953.

After you enjoy the production visit [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Witness\\_for\\_the\\_Prosecution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Witness_for_the_Prosecution) to find out how the story originally ended.

In 1971, Queen Elizabeth II awarded Christie the title of Dame Commander of the British Empire. Agatha Christie's outstanding career spanned more than five decades. To find out more about her life and work, visit her official web site at [www.agathachristie.com](http://www.agathachristie.com).

2. One of the more famous Agatha Christie plays, *Witness for the Prosecution*, was produced as a movie in 1957 by famous director Billy Wilder, with Tyrone Power as Vole, Marlene Dietrich as Romaine, and Charles Laughton as Sir Wilfrid. The movie was nominated for several Academy Awards. There is also a 2017 movie that received a 100% and 74% on Rotten Tomatoes. Both movies took liberties with the script, making changes to characters or events, but not of the basic elements of the story.
3. Discuss: Irony as a key element of this play. Have your students be on the lookout for examples of this in the production.
  - Irony is the incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result.
  - Dramatic irony is the incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in the play.

For fun: play a song for students that deals with irony or ironic situations.

Possible titles are:

“Fortunate Son” – Creedence Clearwater Revival

“You're so Vain “– Carly Simon

“No One is to Blame” – Howard Jones

“Cold as Ice” – Foreigner

“Richard Cory” – Simon and Garfunkel (also a poem by Edward Arlington Robinson)

4. A bit about British law, wigs, and robes: British courts are not based on a Constitution. The fundamentals are broadly similar to the U.S. but laws are set using the common or case law system, in which past court

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judgments are the interpreters for what is and is not legal. It's driven by precedent and various acts of parliament, some of which go all the way back to Magna Carta in 1215.

**Solicitor:** In British courts a “solicitor” works with clients on a broad spectrum of legal matters, offering advice and drafting legal documents. Usually they do not represent the client in court. That is the job of the “barrister.”

**Barrister:** the courtroom expert, the litigator. They're the people in the short wigs and robes who do the verbal fencing and cross-examinations in front of the jury.

**The judge:** the person in the long wig and more ornate robes is the judge (sometimes called the Queen's counsel). He or she represents the whole British legal system.

**Juries** are randomly selected. There is no selection/agreement by the lawyers. If a resident is aged between 18 & 70, he/she is eligible to serve on a jury and is expected to do so if at all possible.

5. Go over the list of characters and a brief description so that students will be familiar with them in advance.

**Characters** (in order of appearance):

Sir Wilfrid—barrister, senior defense attorney

Greta—Sir Wilfrid's typist, described as an “adenoidal” girl with a good opinion of herself

Carter—chief clerk for Sir Wilfrid

Leonard Vole—accused of the murder of Emily French; a likeable friendly young man – about 27 years old

Mr. Mayhew—solicitor, working with Leonard Vole; typical middle-aged solicitor; shrewd, dry and rather precise in manner

Emily French—murdered older rich woman, befriended by Leonard Vole

Detective Inspector Hearne—in charge of the investigation into French's murder

Romaine Heilger/Vole—wife of Leonard Vole, a “foreigner”

Justice Wainwright—judge in the trial

Judge's clerk and other members of the court/ jury

Cockney woman—brings letters incriminating Romaine

7. Play a fun theater game to introduce the idea of “whodunnit” (see game options on next page).

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# PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

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## **MURDERER**

Have the students sit on the floor in a circle with their eyes closed. Tap one person on the head. This person is the “murderer.” Once the murderer is picked, the students open their eyes and try to discover who the murderer is without being “killed.”

The murderer kills victims by winking at them.

When winked at, a victim silently counts to three, makes a disgusting noise, and dies.

If an actor in the circle thinks she knows who the murderer is, she closes her eyes and raises her hand. As soon as three actors think they know who the murderer is, ask them to identify the murderer. If they are wrong they are permanently out of the exercise.

Discussion: Students need to be relatively quiet and focused. Discussion can include ideas about how participants have to avoid letting others know who the “murderer” is by making sure to count to three before “dying.” It’s also important for students to be very observant in order to discover a relatively subtle movement within the group.

## **IN EVERYONE’S LIFE**

Have one student go in front of the room. Ask that person a question that elicits a memory or emotional response. For example:

1. “In everyone’s life there’s been a time they’ve been caught in a lie. What was your lie?”
2. “In everyone’s life, there’s been a time they’ve disappointed a friend (parent) (teacher). What was that time for you?”
3. “In everyone’s life there’s been a time they’ve had a wonderful surprise. What was your surprise?”
4. “In everyone’s life there’s been an embarrassing moment. What was your embarrassing moment?”

The actor can either respond truthfully or make something up, but either way must answer immediately.

Students can discuss responses, particularly looking at students who chose to tell actual incidents and “lies.” Was there anything that gave this away? How did you feel listening to these emotional stories, telling a lie vs a truthful story?

## THE ART OF COSTUME DESIGN

The clothing we wear in our everyday lives often communicates information to others about who we are. In the theatre, clothes send us signals similar to those in everyday life; however, there are significant differences between the costumes of everyday life and those in the theatre. Similar information is communicated about the wearer's sex, status and occupation but on stage this information is larger because every element in the theatre is featured. Also, on stage, costumes must meet other requirements not normally expected in daily life.

Stage costumes:

- help establish the tone and style of a play.
- indicate the historical period and setting of a play.
- show the status, occupations and personalities of the characters in the play.
- indicate the relationships among the characters.
- may reinforce the significance of individual characters or the theme of the play.
- meet the needs of individual performers in terms of freedom of movement and quick changes.
- should be consistent with other visual elements and the directorial vision of the production.

Students may be interested in trying their hands at designing and sketching a costume for one or more of the characters in *Witness for the Prosecution* based on the following information and their own research and imaginations. Note that not all of the characters are included.

The play is set in the late 1920's in Sir Wilfrid's offices and the courtroom. How can costumes help tell the story of these characters?

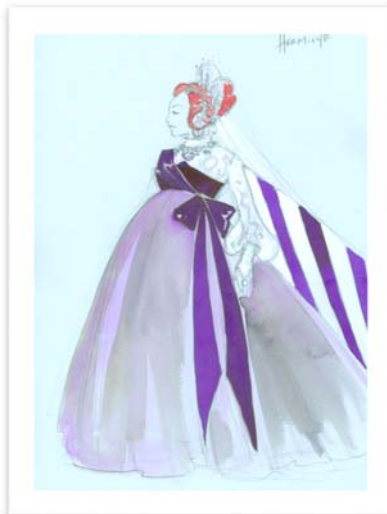
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

## Sample Costume Renderings



Petruchio from GLT's 2011 production of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Costume design by Alex Jaeger.

Hermione from GLT's 2012 production of *The Winter's Tale*. Costume design by Sara Tosetti.



Cosette from GLT's 2014 production of *Les Misérables*. Costume design by Esther Haberlen.



The Wolf from GLT's 2008 production of *Into The Woods*. Costume design by Charlotte Yetman.



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# POST SHOW DISCUSSION/ACTIVITIES

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## CHARACTER EXAMINATION

Were you surprised by the ending of *Witness for the Prosecution*? Had you suspected Leonard Vole all along? Why/why not? How did you feel about Romaine at the beginning? Did you suspect she was the cockney woman? Sir Wilfrid says he will represent her as defense attorney. Do you think her actions were justified?

## IRONY IN THE PLAY

How did the ending of the play exhibit the use of irony?

## REALISM IN THE STORY: COURTROOM DRAMA VS ACTUAL TRIAL

Most of us really enjoy watching an occasional courtroom drama, and our view of actual courtroom proceedings are often based on this. How is an actual trial different from the courtroom dramas we see on TV? Talk to a trial lawyer and ask them about this. What really happens in a criminal trial and is it actually fair?

## ACTING EXERCISE (IMPROV)

There is much information given in the play *Witness for the Prosecution* that we hear about but never see on stage. In order to study their characters, actors sometimes do “improv” work with these kinds of scenes. Below are some suggestions for two-person scenes, not in the play, that students might enjoy writing and reading aloud.

- Leonard Vole meeting Emily French for the first time.
- Emily French telling Janet McKenzie that she is changing her will.
- Janet McKenzie coming home to find Emily’s body in the living room
- Leonard coming home to his wife after the murder
- Leonard and his girlfriend planning their trip
- Sir Wilfrid reacting to the situation after Romaine stabs Leonard

## WITH A PARTNER OR SMALL GROUP RESEARCH ONE OF THE QUESTIONS BELOW:

1. Find an example of someone who has been incarcerated (fairly or unfairly). How did their sentence compare with other people who had committed the same crime? What kind of lawyer / legal representation did they have?
2. How many people are incarcerated for something they didn’t do? What kind of representation did they have?
3. How much does it cost to keep someone in jail for a year? How much does college cost for a year’s

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tuition?

4. Listen to the podcast “Serial” about Cleveland’s jails/justice system. Write a one page response or create your own podcast showing what you think of the justice system.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.A Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.B Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

## **10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

by Jillian V. Roberts, Oxford University Press

1. The components of criminal justice include police, prosecution, judiciary, prisons, probation, and parole.
2. The criminal justice system has multiple and often conflicting objectives: the interests of the victim have to be balanced with the due process rights of the defendant, the broader public interest, as well as considerations of cost effectiveness.
3. Preventing crime is at least as important as punishing offenders. The three kinds of situational crime prevention, like robbing a bank, involve increasing the effort that offenders must spend to commit a crime, increasing the risk of detection and reducing the rewards gained by criminal behavior, for example by lowering the amount of cash held in a facility.
4. The key principles that guide the practice of criminal justice in Western nations include that criminal prosecution should remain a last resort, that criminal justice interventions should be the minimal response necessary (i.e. if a warning is sufficient, don’t send the offender to prison), and that the severity of the sentence should increase as the crime becomes more serious.
5. Of all crimes, only about 10 per cent are reported to the police. Reasons for that include that the crime was not that serious, it is felt that the police can’t do anything about it or that the victim is worried of not being believed.
6. There are several different ways to punish an offender: financial penalties, community-based punishment (i.e. imprisonment), community service, a curfew, and a residence requirement, among others.
7. A suspended prison term is especially effective with young or first time offenders as the mere threat of punishment is often sufficient.
8. The judicial response to crime varies greatly from one society to another, even though the crime rates are similar. In Holland, for example, imprisonments account for about 7 per cent of all sentences imposed, whereas in the US about 70 per cent of sentences involve custody.
9. We expect our prisons to punish *and* to rehabilitate – we want offenders to come out as better people. But even if offenders had a change of mind after getting out of prison, their criminal record sticks with them forever and their employment prospects are greatly diminished, worsening the chances to lead a fulfilled life.
10. In England, it costs about £38,000 (\$60,000) per year to house one prisoner. For this reason alone it is important to ensure that no-one is sent to prison unless it is absolutely necessary.

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# VOCABULARY

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1. mutual— (adj) having the same feelings one for the other (mutual enemies); joint (to their mutual advantage. “That would appear to be mutual.”
2. irritate— (v) to provoke impatience, anger or displeasure. “You irritate him because you hardly ever let him finish a sentence.”
3. advocate— (n) one who pleads the cause of another; one who defends or maintains a cause; (v) to support or argue for a cause. “But he’s a very able advocate. . .”
4. acquaintance— (n) familiarity, the state of being acquainted; person whom one knows but is not particularly close to. “Tell me how it was you came to make Miss French’s acquaintance.”
5. parcels— (n) a package; a tract or plot of land. “I saw an old lady crossing the road carrying a lot of parcels.”
6. coincidence— (n) the occurrence of events that happen at the same time by accident but seem to have some connection. “By an extraordinary coincidence, two days later I happened to be sitting behind her in the theater.”
7. curlish— (adj) a lack of civility or graciousness; intractable. “It seemed rather churlish to refuse her offer.”
8. impression— (n) a trait, characteristic or feature resulting from some influence. “Did you deliberately give her that impression?”
9. probity— (n) adherence to highest principles and ideals; uprightness. “We can make a feature of your probity and honesty.”
10. motive— (n) something that causes a person to act. “. . . you had no motive for murder.”
11. swindled— (v) to obtain money by fraud or deceit. “. . . if you swindled the woman in any way. . .”
12. adequate— (adj) sufficient; enough. “It supplies you with a very adequate motive for murder.”
13. probable— (adj) supported by evidence; likely to be or become true or real. “It seems probable that they’ve had a man watching you.”
14. warrant— (n) a document giving authority to do something; (v) to declare or maintain with certainty. “I have here a warrant for your arrest.”
15. credulous— (adj) ready to believe especially on slight or uncertain evidence. “And we’re probably three credulous fools. . .”
16. fortitude— (n) strength of mind that enables a person to encounter danger or adversity. “I see you have great fortitude.”
17. straightforward— (adj) free from evasiveness or obscurity. “We’re going to look at things in a sensible and straightforward manner.”
18. congenial— (adj) pleasant, agreeable, sociable. “She found your husband’s companionship congenial to her.”
19. hypocrite— (n) a person who puts on a false appearance of virtue or religion. “What hypocrites you are in this country.”
20. alibi— (n) the plea of having been elsewhere at the time of the commission of an act. “Mr. Vole tells me that he has absolute alibi for that time.”

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# WRITING PROMPTS

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1. Write your own letter to the editor expressing your views on justice, the justice system, or capital punishment. State your claim and support it with logical reasoning and relevant evidence. Address claims and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

2. You know that funny feeling in the bottom of your stomach when you've done something wrong, like plagiarized an essay or spent all afternoon playing Fortnite instead of studying for Calculus? Does Leonard Vole seem to feel any guilt for what he's done? Where do we draw the line when we consider people's honesty and integrity? Write an essay about honesty in a person's life. Is this an important part of our character? Why? How do we judge honesty in ourselves and others?

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1.D Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

3. Write a Review! We would love to know what your students thought of our production of *Witness for the Prosecution*. Please encourage them to write and send us copies of their play reviews. Before students write their reviews, talk about the role of a critic, perhaps giving an example from a local newspaper. Remind students that the point of a review is not merely to describe the play and tell the story, but to offer opinions on the production. You may wish to direct students to page 28 or offer the following as a guideline for student play reviews.

Some play and film reviews offer a rating in the form of a number of stars (\*), with one star representing a weak rating and five stars representing a perfect one. Assign your review of *Witness for the Prosecution* the number of stars you think it merits.

Write a headline for your review that sums up your thoughts and feelings about the production. In your opening statement, state your expectations before you attended the performance and whether or not they were met. Follow with comments on some or all of the following play elements:

- style, story and themes of the play
- conflicts in the play
- direction
- acting
- scenic design
- costume design
- make-up design (if applicable)
- lighting and sound



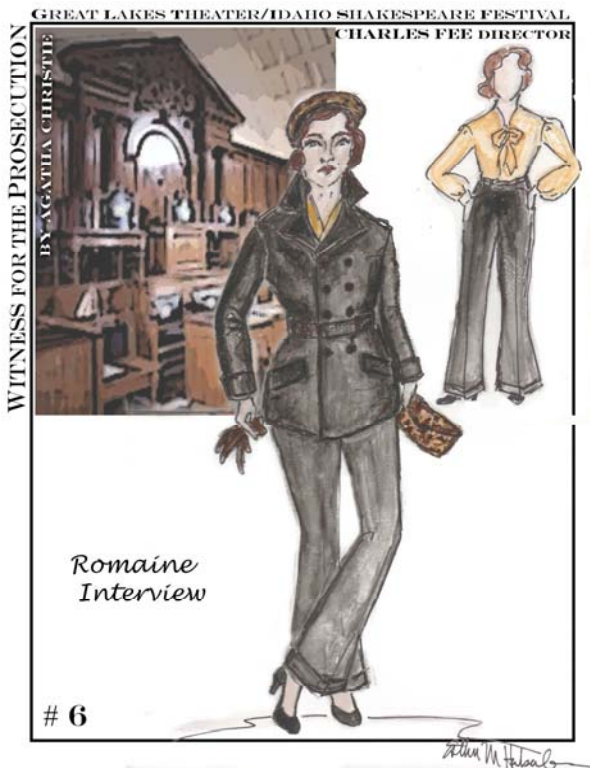
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# QUIZ

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- Who is the chief defense attorney (barrister)?
  - Mr. Carter
  - Sir Wilfrid
  - Mr. Mayhew
  - Mr. Myers
- Who is Leonard Vole?
  - an innocent bystander
  - a cab driver
  - a detective
  - the accused murderer
- How does Greta react to Leonard Vole?
  - She thinks he's very nice
  - She thinks he's ugly
  - She is afraid of him
  - She brings him tea
- How did the accused meet the victim?
  - They shared a cab
  - He helped her cross the street
  - He brought groceries to her house
  - He was a hired servant
- Who is Janet McKenzie?
  - the victim's companion / housekeeper
  - a librarian
  - Leonard Vole's good friend
  - the accused murderer
- How would you describe Emily French?
  - a sophisticated rich woman
  - a determined prosecutor
  - a lonely cat lady
  - a friend of the court
- What is a "red flag" in the case?
  - the victim had changed her will to give the accused all her money
  - the broken glass indicated that no robbery was apparent
  - the victim was brutally stabbed
  - both a and b
- What do we find out about Leonard's wife?
  - she was rich
  - she was married to someone else
  - she was in love with someone else
  - she was not home when he arrived

9. How is Janet McKenzie's testimony questionable?
- she was hard of hearing
  - she hated cats
  - she was jealous that the new will did not include her
  - both a & c
10. How did the blood get on the killer's cuffs?
- during the murder
  - he cut himself trying to slice ham
  - his wife put it there
  - there was no blood on the killer's cuffs
11. What did the cockney woman bring to the defense attorneys.
- information about Emily French's will
  - incriminating letters from Leonard Vole's wife
  - a bribe



### Answer Key

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 8. B  |
| 2. D | 9. D  |
| 3. A | 10. B |
| 4. B | 11. B |
| 5. A |       |
| 6. C |       |
| 7. D |       |

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# A BRIEF GLOSSARY OF THEATER TERMS

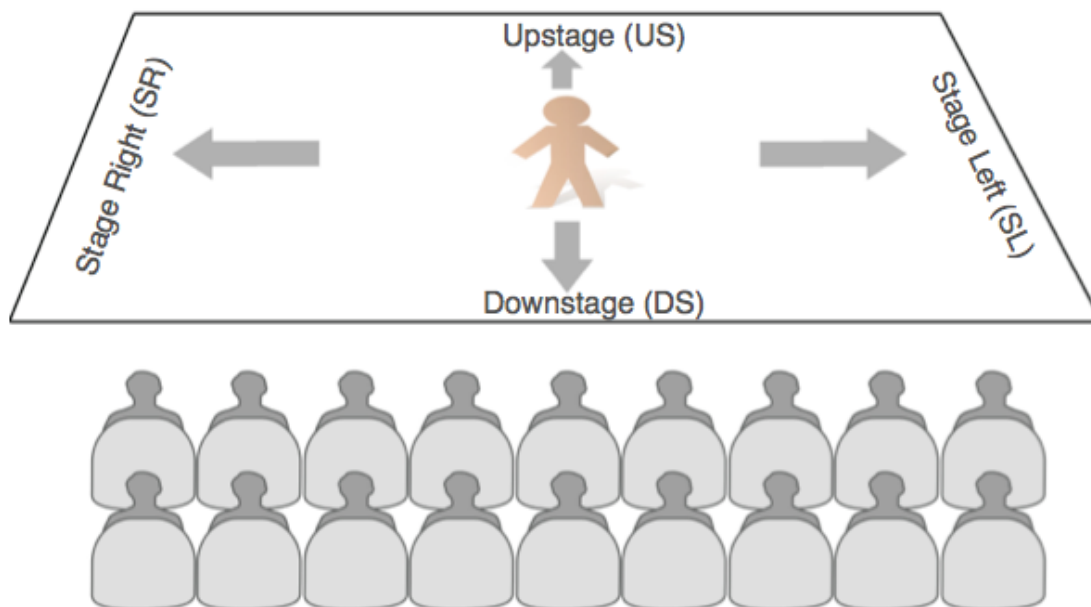
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<b>Apron</b>	The part of the stage in front of the curtain
<b>Auditorium or House</b>	Where the audience sits
<b>Beam Spread</b>	The area a single light covers
<b>Blackout</b>	Turning off all the lights in the theatre at once
<b>Board</b>	The control center for lights, sound, or both
<b>Book (The)</b>	A copy of the script containing all notes and blocking
<b>Box Office</b>	Where the audience buys tickets
<b>Box Set</b>	A set in a proscenium with three walls
<b>Call</b>	The time certain members of the production need to be at the theatre
<b>Cheat</b>	When an actor takes a realistic action and modifies it for the audience to see
<b>Cloth</b>	Scenery painted on fabric
<b>Cue</b>	A line or action that immediately leads to another action by the actor (for them to speak) designer or stage manager (to change the lights or sound)
<b>Curtain Call</b>	The bows at the end of the show
<b>Dimmer</b>	Equipment that controls the brightness of a light
<b>Director</b>	The creative head of a production. They create a vision for the show and work with actors, designers, and crew to bring that vision to life
<b>Flat</b>	A frame covered with canvas, cardboard, or some other light material which is then painted as part of the set
<b>Floodlight</b>	A light that has a wide unfocused beam covering most of the stage
<b>Fly</b>	A system used to raise set backgrounds, set pieces, or potentially actors
<b>Follow-spot</b>	A spotlight that can follow an actor as they move across around the stage
<b>Footlights</b>	Floodlights on the floor at the front of the stage.
<b>Gel</b>	A piece of plastic placed over the light to change its color
<b>Greenroom</b>	A room where the company can relax, eat, or potentially watch the show if a TV and a camera has been rigged
<b>Notes</b>	The director's notes on the performance or rehearsal
<b>Pit</b>	An area between the stage and the audience where an orchestra can sit (typically below audience level)
<b>Producer</b>	The person responsible for all logistical and financial aspects of a production (as opposed to the creative head, the director).
<b>Properties or Props</b>	Items used by actors in a show (such as swords, plates, watches, etc.)
<b>Proscenium</b>	A type of stage defined by a proscenium arch. Proscenium theatres typically

distinctly separate the audience and stage by a window (defined by the proscenium arch). The stage typically will not go far past the proscenium arch (the Ohio Theatre, for example).

<b>Raked Stage</b>	A stage that is angled (upstage is the top of the hill and downstage the bottom) so that the audience can see the action more clearly
<b>Set</b>	The scenery used in a scene or throughout the play
<b>Set Dressing</b>	Parts of the set that don't serve a practical function but make the set look realistic.
<b>Spotlight</b>	A type of light that is focused so that it can light a very specific area
<b>Strike</b>	Taking apart and removing a set from the theatre
<b>Thrust</b>	A stage that goes beyond the proscenium arch so that the audience is sitting on three sides of the set - in front, and on either side (the Hanna Theatre, for example).
<b>Tracks</b>	The rails on which curtains (tabs) run.
<b>Trap</b>	A hole in the stage covered by a door where actors or set pieces can exit or enter
<b>Understudy</b>	An actor who learns all of the lines and blocking of another actor (typically one of the actors in a lead role) who can perform in case the main actor cannot go on
<b>Upstage</b>	The rear of the stage
<b>Wings</b>	The sides of the stage typically blocked off by curtains where actors and crew can stand and wait for their cues

## STAGE DIRECTIONS



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# HOW TO WRITE A REVIEW

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## 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 disapprove of 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 sounds 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 in 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.

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# A SAMPLE REVIEW WRITTEN BY A STUDENT

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## **"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>*

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# ABOUT GREAT LAKES THEATER

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## **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.

1501 Euclid Avenue, Suite 300 • Cleveland, Ohio 44115 • Tel. (216) 241-5490

[greatlaketheater.org](http://greatlaketheater.org)