



# IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A LIVE  
RADIO PLAY

## STUDY GUIDE

ADAPTED BY **JOE LANDRY**  
DIRECTED BY **DAMON KIELY**

**GAMM**  
EDUCATION

**GAMM**  
theatre

**SEASON 35**  
2019 - 2020

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We thank the following foundations and corporations for their support of PLAY during our 34th Season: The Rhode Island Foundation, The Fain Family Foundation, The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, June Rockwell Levy Foundation, The Mabel T. Woolley Trust, Collette/Alice I Sullivan Foundation, The John Clarke Trust, and the Nordson Corporation Foundation.

This study guide was prepared by Beth Pollard, Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, and Jon Del Sesto

# ACT I

# WELCOME

Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* adapted by Joe Landry. In this guide you will find background information about the play and adaptor, an inside look at our production, as well as activities for your classroom and questions for discussion. We recommend using this study guide before your visit to The Gamm, as well as after to debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will whet students' appetites for the performance and encourage them to question and explore the themes of the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Most student matinees are followed by a talkback with the production team and offer students the opportunity to debrief the performance immediately and ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length but we encourage you to stay and participate in the dynamic discussion. We also offer longer workshops that will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication, as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Below, we have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide.

We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

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# THEATRE AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

## TIP:

*Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.*

## COMMON CORE GUIDE. . . . .

Here is a list of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that align to the information and activities in our guide:

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2]**  
*See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3]**  
*See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4]**  
*See our Activity for the Classroom*

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7]**  
*See examples throughout our study guide.*

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3]**  
*See our Activity for the Classroom*

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. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1]**  
*See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. **[CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2]**  
*See examples throughout our study guide.*

# ACT II

## PLAY & ADAPTOR



### JOE LANDRY

Joe Landry's plays have been produced across the country and internationally, and include *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, *Reefer Madness*, *Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio Play*, *Eve & Co.*, *Beautiful*, *Hollywood Babylon*, and *Numb*. Mr. Landry attended Playwright's Horizons/NYU, founded Second Guess Theatre Company in Connecticut and is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America. He is currently developing new projects for the stage and screen.

### ABOUT "IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY"

This holiday season, the Gamm is presenting a theatrical adaptation of Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Originally produced in black and white in 1946, its initial release didn't turn too many heads, but after five Academy Award nominations, the public certainly took notice. Today, it is heralded as a classic American Christmas staple, depicting wholesome family themes and golden age film aesthetics. The plot follows the life of George Bailey and his plethora of selfless good deeds, through the eyes of an apprentice angel sent on a mission to stop George from taking his own life. In 2006, playwright Joe Landry adapted the classic film to be performed onstage, with a key twist in the storytelling style, in homage to the popularity of radio plays in the 1950's.



# ACT III

# OUR PRODUCTION

DIRECTOR **Damon Kiely**      SET DESIGN **Michael McGarty**      COSTUME DESIGN **Jessie Darrell Jarbadan**      LIGHTING DESIGN **Noah Beauregard**  
MUSIC DESIGN **Charles Cofone**      PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT **Jessica Hill**      STAGE MANAGEMENT **Robin Grady\***

## THE COMPANY

George Bailey      **Tony Estrella\***  
Mary Hatch/Rose Bailey      **Madeleine Lambert\***  
Henry F. Potter/Clarence/others      **Fred Sullivan, Jr.\***  
Harry Bailey/Ernie Bishop/others      **Jeff Church\***  
Violet Bick/Janie Bailey/others      **Lynsey Ford**  
Joseph/Billy Bailey/others      **Richard Noble**  
Announcer/Zuzu Bailey      **Emily Turtle**  
Foley Artist      **DJ Potter**

## CREATIVE TEAM

Assistant Director      **Abigail Dufresne**  
Technical Director      **Max Ramirez**  
Technical Production Supervisor      **DJ Potter**  
Assistant Stage Manager      **Jessica Winward**  
Electricians      **Mike Cline, Alex Landers, Patrick Boutwell**  
Construction Crew      **Justin Carroll, Alex Eizenberg, Karl Orrall**

## TIP:

*Before coming to the theater, discuss with your students the various professions in the theater. It takes more than just actors! When they arrive, ask them to notice evidence of those professions at work.*





# ACT IV

## STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

### TIP:

Assign these questions for homework or in-class writing and then discuss your students' answers before and after the show.

### THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, sound, and music?
3. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
4. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? How does the title relate to the story?

### FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

While adapting any story from the big screen to the small stage can be difficult, *It's a Wonderful Life* comes with its own set of unique challenges as a radio play. Additionally the creative team walks the line between imitating the famous movie with innovating their own version of the story. From a black and white film classic to the visual (and auditory!) performance of a radio play, consider some of the obstacles artistic developers face, and how they choose to tackle them.

### Questions

- What are key differences between theatre productions and films? Consider the environment, interactivity, and aesthetic presentation.
- Why would an artist chose to recreate stories in different forms of presentation?
- What can audiences experience through theatre that they cannot through film (and vice versa)?



## FROM RADIO TO STAGE

Joe Landry chose to adapt *It's a Wonderful Life* into a radio play. Radio plays hit their peak popularity shortly after the release of this movie, during the 1950s, but have not lasted as a prevalent art form in our current time period.

### Questions

- Before seeing this play, consider why the playwright might have chosen to use this unique presentation style.
- What are some ways this might draw audience members in to the story in a new way?
- What is advantageous about a radio play set onstage instead of a radio play that's just in audio form, like a podcast?

## AMERICAN VALUES

In the first read through for this production, director Damon Kiely talked to the team about why the message of *It's a Wonderful Life* remains vital even today. While America has certainly changed since 1946, we still face some of the same questions about what it means to live a worthwhile and noble life. In the wake of World War II, in which many American lives were lost overseas, Frank Capra and the original writers of the film wanted to reframe the importance of individual lives in the wake of all this loss. They focused on the appreciation of family, local good deeds, and kindness above money. Do you think these same values are accurate in defining the American character now?

### Questions

- What do you think are some American values of 2019?
- In your view, what makes a life worthwhile? If you believe in some kind of judgement in the afterlife, what criteria for judgement do you think will be used?
- Why do you think this story has stayed alive in our holiday traditions for 70+ years?



## ACTIVITY FOR THE CLASSROOM

## ACTIVITY: BE A FOLEY ARTIST

All the sound effects used in a radio play are created live by a foley artist and the actors using some very clever techniques with a wide array of objects. While seeing these sounds created, the audience is forced to lean in with their imagination and fill in the gaps between the actions they are seeing and the intended sonic effect. It increases audience engagement and allows them to fill in the blanks themselves.

For this activity, you'll get to be creative in producing some live sound effects, just like The Gamm's foley artist for this production, DJ Potter. Here are some examples of what is used in the show:

- Ice cracking : Corn flakes crushed on baking sheet or bamboo/wood being broken/peeled

- Train station noises: A scrub brush beat or rhythm of CHUFF chuff chuff chuff (Accent on the first of every four beats.)

- Crickets chirp: Run finger nail along edge of pocket comb

Try creating some of these sounds yourself, and choose 2-3 of the following sound effects to come up with your own creative reproductions.

- Cork pop
- Bottle smashing on counter
- A slap in the face
- Running footsteps
- Water under a bridge
- Creaky door
- Coins dropped in a cash box



# ACT VI

# EPILOGUE



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## THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*.

Our Education Department provides classes for students of various grade levels, as well as a month-long Gamm Summer Intensive for summer time theatre fun. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

To book a matinee, contact Drew at [drew@gammtheatre.org](mailto:drew@gammtheatre.org) or 401-723-4266 ext. 112. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach Susie Schutt at 401-723-4266 ext. 121.



COMING SOON

JAN 16 - FEB 9



# ADMISSIONS

BY JOSHUA HARMON | DIRECTED BY BRYN BOICE

Sherri Rosen-Mason, head of the admissions department at a New England prep school, is intent on diversifying the student body. Alongside her husband, the school's headmaster, she's been largely successful. But when the couple's only son sets his sights on an Ivy League university, progressive values and self-interest collide with shocking results. This biting comedy-drama by the author of *Bad Jews* and *Significant Other* explodes the ideals and contradictions of "liberal" white America.

**GET YOUR TICKETS NOW AT [GAMMTHEATRE.ORG](http://GAMMTHEATRE.ORG)**