



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

**CHRISTEL DEHAAN**

STUDENT MATINEE PROGRAM

at the Indiana Repertory Theatre



STUDY GUIDE FOR

*FRIDA ... A SELF PORTRAIT*

WRITTEN AND PERFORMED BY VANESSA SEVERO

March 12 - April 7, 2024 | Upperstage Theatre



# FRIDA ... A SELF-PORTRAIT

written & performed by Vanessa Severo



## Content Spotlight

*Frida ... A Self-Portrait* contains:

Profanity, descriptions of severe injuries and chronic pain, self medication, mentions of sex, and some sexually suggestive scenes.

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Iconic Mexican painter Frida Kahlo was a woman who lived boldly, loved wildly, and painted prolifically in order to see herself and the world around her more clearly. With stunning stagecraft and irresistible charm, Brazilian writer and performer Vanessa Severo unearths powerful common ground between herself and Frida, inviting us to experience the artist's vibrant, tumultuous life and rare genius.

**Recommended for students in grades 8-12**

*The performance will last approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes, with no intermission.*

## INSIDE

Synopsis.....	3
Interview with the Playwright.....	4
Director's Note.....	6
La Casa Azul.....	7
Frida Kahlo.....	8
Tehuana.....	10
Frida's Family.....	11
Diego Rivera.....	12
Frida Kahlo, Polio, & Disability.....	13
Art & Artists.....	14
Spanish Glossary.....	16
German Glossary.....	17
Opioids.....	18
Indiana Academic Standards.....	19
Discussion Questions.....	21
Resources.....	22
Writing Prompts.....	23
Activities.....	24
Text Glossary.....	25
Going to the Theatre.....	26
Arrival & Parking.....	27

## THE STORY OF FRIDA ... A SELF PORTRAIT



*Frida ... A Self Portrait* is written and performed by Vanessa Severo. The play does not follow a chronology of Frida's life, but rather flows back and forth over a range of topics, including Vanessa's own life.

As the play begins, Vanessa introduces herself and then becomes Frida Kahlo, at her Mexico City home, la Casa Azul, talking with an interviewer. She shows him her paintings and encourages him to explore the house. Walking is very difficult for Frida. She has had 30 operations in her life. Periodically during the play, she will be struck with debilitating pain, and she will give herself a morphine injection.

Frida remembers back to her childhood: her bout with polio, and how her father encouraged physical activity to help her become stronger. Vanessa then steps in and talks about her own childhood, and the congenital disorder that resulted in her own left hand not fully forming.

She remembers a young surgeon who wanted to perform an experimental surgery on her, and how she felt about that.

Another memory takes us back to 1925, when Frida was seriously injured in a bus crash. We meet a doctor who assesses the extent of her injuries for a group of medical students. Frida compares the impact of this bus accident on her life with that of her husband, famous Mexican muralist Diego Rivera.

Frida recalls meeting Diego in 1928: she is looking to be his student or painting assistant, while he intends her to be a model. At first she emphatically refuses, but after acknowledging the fire within her, he convinces her that his portrait of her will help her learn about herself, and she agrees to sit for him. Frida falls in love with Diego, marries him, and suffers through several difficult pregnancies that do not last to full term. After she discovers him in bed with her sister, Cristina, Frida divorces him.

At this moment of vulnerability, Frida discusses the act of really looking at someone, really seeing them. Vanessa discusses looking at photos of Frida and how what she has seen has made her feel closer to the painter. Vanessa relates her challenging relationship with her mother, in some ways similar to Frida's relationship with her own mother.

Frida questions why she remarried Diego. She compares the life and work of a female artist with those of male artists. Vanessa describes her first visit to la Casa Azul. How, despite seeing so many intimate details of Frida's life on display, the artist's true heart seemed to be hidden. And how Frida seemed to be encouraging Vanessa to paint her own story.

# PLAYWRIGHT VANESSA SEVERO

***In 2019, when Kansas City Repertory Theatre produced *Frida ... A Self Portrait*, the theatre's Interim Director of New Works, Lisa Rothe (who has directed IRT productions of James Still's *Interpreting William* and *Amber Waves*), discussed the play with playwright Vanessa Severo.***

**LISA ROTHE:** When did you first become excited by *Frida Kahlo*? And what was it that sparked your excitement?

**VANESSA SEVERO:** My interest in *Frida Kahlo* began around 2011 when my good friend told me he saw *Frida Kahlo* in me. This very statement made me curious, and I began researching her. The more I learned about *Frida Kahlo*, the more I felt I was seen and understood, and the world became a less lonely place. I became excited about the possibility of telling her story, because here was a woman that was seemingly unafraid of any challenge, and that spoke to me on all creative levels.

**LISA:** How did her work and life connect to you as an artist?

**VANESSA:** *Frida* was pretty much the first woman to do selfies; but instead of finding the right angle and filter for her face, *Frida* instead painted herself and her situations unapologetically. This is the very reason her art still connects to all of us today. *Frida* is celebrating authenticity in marriage, politics, infidelities, pain, and loss, and we can see that and understand it in our own lives, as an artist, as a human.

**LISA:** You have been working on this play for several years. What is it like to carve out a story over time?

**VANESSA:** Working on this play for five years has really given me the gift of growth. When I first presented *Frida ... A Self Portrait* at the Living Room Theatre in 2014, I was limited in my knowledge of her. What I knew about *Frida* was from what I read. Since then, I have traveled to Mexico City, spent time in *Frida's* house—La Casa Azul—and talked to the locals there about their experience and connection to her. The funny thing that happened in the last five years that I did not anticipate was, I have changed: my writing, my thoughts, and my connection to *Frida* have deepened.

**LISA:** How is it to build your performance of *Frida* physically as you are in the process of writing it?

**VANESSA:** Learning to embody *Frida* presented a challenge that changed the way this story needed to be told. In learning to live in *Frida's* skin, I realized I was learning to live in my own. I had to be 100% honest with all elements of this story, and as a result, it has become “our” story.

**LISA:** What does sharing the imagined voice of *Frida* give to others?

**VANESSA:** What we leave behind can sometimes supersede who we truly were. Sharing an imagined voice of *Frida Kahlo*, I feel, gives us the chance to see that she was a living, breathing person ... just like us.

**LISA:** How does *Frida's* continued self-examination through self portraiture offer a window for the viewer to consider her position in the world? And by extension, the world of the viewer?

**VANESSA:** We all share some aspect of *Kahlo's* life. When we look at her paintings, we feel she is talking directly to us. You might be a wife, a mistress, bisexual, your partner may have cheated on you, you might have disabilities, or struggling with addiction. Whatever your experience, there is an element of *Frida's* story you can relate to.

**LISA:** How has this experience surprised you along the way?

**VANESSA:** On this journey to find *Frida*, I was surprised that in order to tell her story I had to tell mine. This was something that surprised me, and I fought with internally. Then I realized my journey to find *Frida* was one of the most integral parts of the story, and ultimately, I was painting *Vanessa ... a self portrait*.



## VANESSA SEVERO | PLAYWRIGHT & ACTOR

Vanessa is a Round 11 recipient of the Theatre Communications Group's Fox Foundation Actor Fellowships (2017), as well as the Carlsbad, California, Artist in Residency (2022). Vanessa is certified in Suzuki Method and Viewpoints under the instruction of Ellen Lauren, SITI company. She is the playwright and actor of *Frida ... A Self Portrait* (2020 Kilroys List). Other works include *Dracula* in collaboration with Joanie Schultz (world premiere at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, 2024) and *Rubik* (world premiere, Spinning Tree Theatre, 2024). [VanessaSevero.com](http://VanessaSevero.com)

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# NOT DISAPPEARING

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BY JOANIE SCHULTZ, DIRECTOR



Women disappear. We have to search hard to find women in our history books, the literary canon, classical music, art history, and the history of drama, where women are footnotes, if there at all. Their work was “amateur” (because they weren’t allowed to be professional) and was neither respected nor documented. And therefore, they disappear.

Frida Kahlo, obfuscated by her “genius” husband for most of her life, was too feisty to allow herself to disappear. She wasn’t a “nice” woman or a “good girl.” She made herself seen. She forced herself to look at herself. She studied and painted and saw herself “as she truly is.” Frida reached a level of realness with herself, both inside and out, that few women had documented before her. She showed the world her truth, her vulnerability, and her humanity. That was a revolutionary act.

We are drawn to self-portraits, memoirs, and other forms of autobiography because they make us feel seen and not so alone. This becomes even more important when history tries to make some of us disappear. Women, people of color, people with disabilities, queer people, and trans people across the world look at Frida’s self-portraits and see themselves because they recognize the pain

she articulates so well in her work. Frida has given the world a gift by being so authentically herself. She is all of us, and we can see that we exist because **she** existed. She gives us permission to value ourselves, our lives, our pain, our thoughts, and our feelings just as she did.

*Frida ... A Self Portrait* is a self portrait of both the historical figure and the performer Vanessa Severo. An actor expresses themselves by interpreting others. As an actor, what better way to create a self-portrait than to perform someone else? This self-portrait—which is as beautiful and honest as Frida was—is created with the paints of an actor’s toolbox: language, characters, accents, movement, puppetry, and creative play. In this highly theatrical world on stage, we witness a conversation Vanessa has been having with Frida for years. As the piece unfolds, there are moments when the lines become blurred between the actor and the character. What we are left with is pure Frida **and** pure Vanessa, both searching to be seen and understood, reaching a hand out to all the other “strange” people in the world through their honest expression of self. Not disappearing ... and urging us not to disappear.

# LA CASA AZUL



La Casa Azul is the house where Frida Kahlo was born, raised, lived for most of her life, and died. The house was built in 1904 in the Colonia del Carmen area of the Coyoacán borough of Mexico City, long considered an intellectual and artistic neighborhood. It stands out for its cobalt-blue walls, giving it the name La Casa Azul (The Blue House).

Like most of the other structures in the area, the house is built around a central courtyard with garden space, a tradition since colonial times. It is quite large at 8600 square feet. It originally had French-style decorative features, but later it was renovated to create the cleaner, Modernist façade seen today. The building has two floors with various bedrooms, studio space, and a large kitchen and dining room. The entrance hall is decorated with natural stone mosaics by folk art sculptor Mardonio Magaña (c. 1865-1947).

Since 1958, la Casa Azul has served as a museum dedicated to Frida Kahlo's life and work. One of Mexico City's most-visited museums, it demonstrates the lifestyle of well-off Mexican bohemian artists and intellectuals during the first half of the 20th century. The house today looks much as it did in 1951, decorated with Mexican folk art, Kahlo's personal art collection, a large collection of pre-Hispanic artifacts, traditional

Mexican cookware, linens, personal mementos such as photographs, postcards and letters, and works by José María Velasco, Paul Klee, and Diego Rivera.



# FRIDA KAHLO (1907- 1954)



Frida Kahlo was one of Mexico's greatest artists. Surrealist André Breton described her work as "a ribbon around a bomb."

Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón was born in 1907 in Mexico City. Her father was a German photographer who immigrated to Mexico; her mother was indigenous Mexican and Spanish. Frida was the third of four daughters growing up in the family home, la Casa Azul (the Blue House).

At the age of six, Kahlo was struck with polio, affecting her right leg and foot. She was bedridden for nine months, and it left her with a lifelong limp. Her father encouraged her to recover through sports: swimming, soccer, wrestling. She was always close to her father, and as a girl assisted him in his photography studio, where she developed a sharp eye for detail.

Young Kahlo was interested in science, and at 15 she was one of only a few female students at the

elite Escuela Nacional Preparatoria, planning to study medicine. As a student, she first met Diego Rivera, who was painting a mural for the school auditorium.

In 1925 Kahlo was seriously injured in a bus accident. She was in a full body cast for three months. To pass the time, she studied the Old Masters, and she started painting. She completed her first self-portrait the following year. Of the 143 paintings she would create in her lifetime, 55 would be self-portraits. She once said, "I paint myself because I am often alone, and I am the subject I know best."

In 1927 Kahlo joined the Mexican Communist Party, where the following year she encountered Rivera once again. They married in 1929. He was 21 years her senior and already had two common-law wives. For the first few years of their marriage, the couple traveled extensively as Rivera moved around Mexico and the United States painting his famous murals. Desperate for a child despite her severely injured pelvis, Kahlo endured three difficult pregnancies, none of which went to full term.

The couple eventually settled in Mexico City, in separate but adjoining houses and studios connected by a bridge. Theirs was a tumultuous relationship. Both had fiery temperaments, and both had numerous affairs. Kahlo was openly bisexual. Diego tolerated her affairs with women, but was jealous of her affairs with men. Kahlo was outraged by Diego's affair with her younger sister, Cristina.

In 1938 Kahlo met famed surrealist André Breton, who encouraged her work. She had an exhibition in New York City in 1938, selling about half of the 25 paintings on display and receiving two commissions, including one from Clare Booth Luce. In 1939 Breton took Kahlo to Paris, where she became friends with Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Piet Mondrian, Marcel Duchamp, and other famous artists. Her Paris exhibition was not as successful as the one in New York, but the Louvre acquired one of her paintings, making her the first Mexican artist in its collection.

Kahlo and Rivera divorced in 1939, but the next year they remarried and moved into Casa Azul, Kahlo's childhood home. In 1942 Kahlo was one of the founding members of the Seminario de Cultura



Mexicana, an important cultural forum created by presidential decree. In 1943 she was appointed professor of painting at Le Esperelda, the Mexican Education Ministry's School of Fine Arts.

As her health continued to decline, Kahlo turned to alcohol and drugs for relief. She suffered through many surgeries and prolonged hospital stays. In 1950 she developed gangrene in her right foot and was bedridden for nine months. In 1953 her right leg was amputated at the knee. That same year she had a solo exhibition in Mexico City. She arrived at the opening in an ambulance and greeted attendees from a four-poster bed in the gallery.

Despite poor health and depression, Kahlo remained politically active, participating in a demonstration just two weeks before her death. In 1954 she died at Casa Azul. The official cause was a pulmonary embolism, but some suspected she died from an overdose that may or may not have been accidental. In 1958 Casa Azul was opened to the public as a museum of Kahlo's life and art. After years of relative obscurity, she was rediscovered by feminists in the 1970s, and since then her paintings have received growing acclaim.

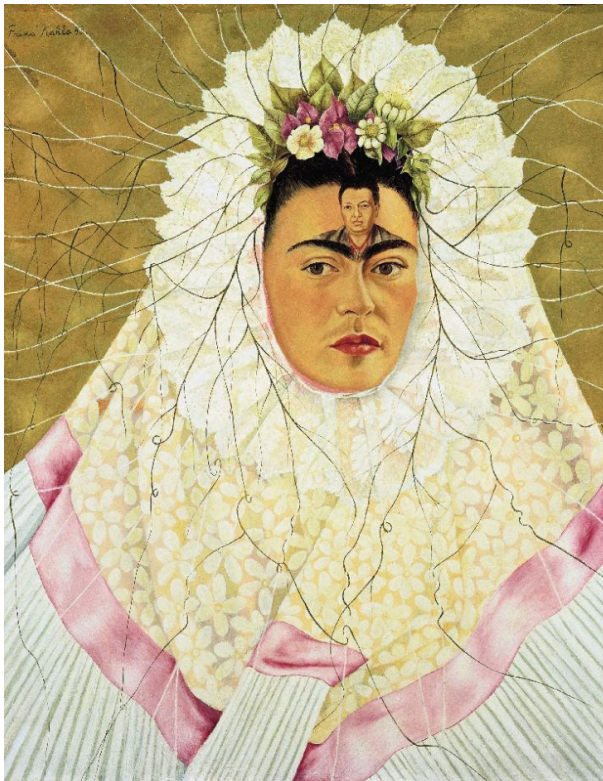
Frida Kahlo's work was inspired by Mexico's natural beauty, native artifacts, and popular culture. She explored gender, identity, race, class, and postcolonialism using a naïve folk-art style. Her work is strongly autobiographical and often features her own experience of chronic pain. Today she is one of the best-known artists of the 20th century.



Bottom Left: Tree of Hope by Frida Kahlo, 1946. Top Right: The Two Fridas by Frida Kahlo, 1939. Bottom Right: When Kahlo's leg was amputated in 1953, she designed this prosthetic leg with embroidered red lace-up boots and a bell attached.

# TEHUANA

The Tehuana dress originated among indigenous Zapotec women on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, a stretch of land bordered by the Atlantic Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean. The Tehuana dress consists of a loose-fitting upper garment, elaborately embroidered, and a long, full, colorful skirt. Floral prints are prominent, and the dress is often worn with a headdress of flowers and/or starched lace. The traditional Tehuana dress took on a new meaning during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). With popular uprisings targeting the racial caste system and emphasizing Mexico's indigenous roots, the dress spoke to both the diversity and unity of the country, becoming an emblem of national and cultural identity. Frida Kahlo often wore Tehuana dresses, not only as a political statement about women and independence but also because she wanted people to see her, not her disability. The Tehuana dress hid her injured right leg and back brace, and the headpiece drew attention to her face rather than her body.



# FRIDA KAHLO'S FAMILY



**Matilde Calderón de Kahlo (1874-1932)** | Kahlo's mother was indigenous Mexican and Spanish. Kahlo often remarked that her mother did not love her father, and this may have been the case. Matilde grieved her whole life for her first love, who she saw commit suicide. It is often remarked that the mother-daughter relationship was strained, but Kahlo mourned deeply when her mother died in 1932.

**Guillermo Kahlo (1871-1941)** | Kahlo's father was a German photographer who immigrated to Mexico. Because he photographed important architectural works, churches, streets, and landmarks, as well as Mexican industries and companies, his work is valued not only for its artistic value but also its historical importance. Kahlo was always close to her father, and as a girl assisted him in his photography studio, where she developed a sharp eye for detail.



**Cristina Kahlo y Calderón (1908-1964)** | Kahlo had four sisters. Cristina, the youngest, was 11 months younger than Frida. The two were very close for many years. Kahlo featured Christina in several paintings. Diego Rivera, Kahlo's husband, who had an affair with Christina, considered her one of his favorite subjects, and included her image in many works. The two sisters were estranged for a time, but eventually reconciled.

# DIEGO RIVERA (1886-1957)

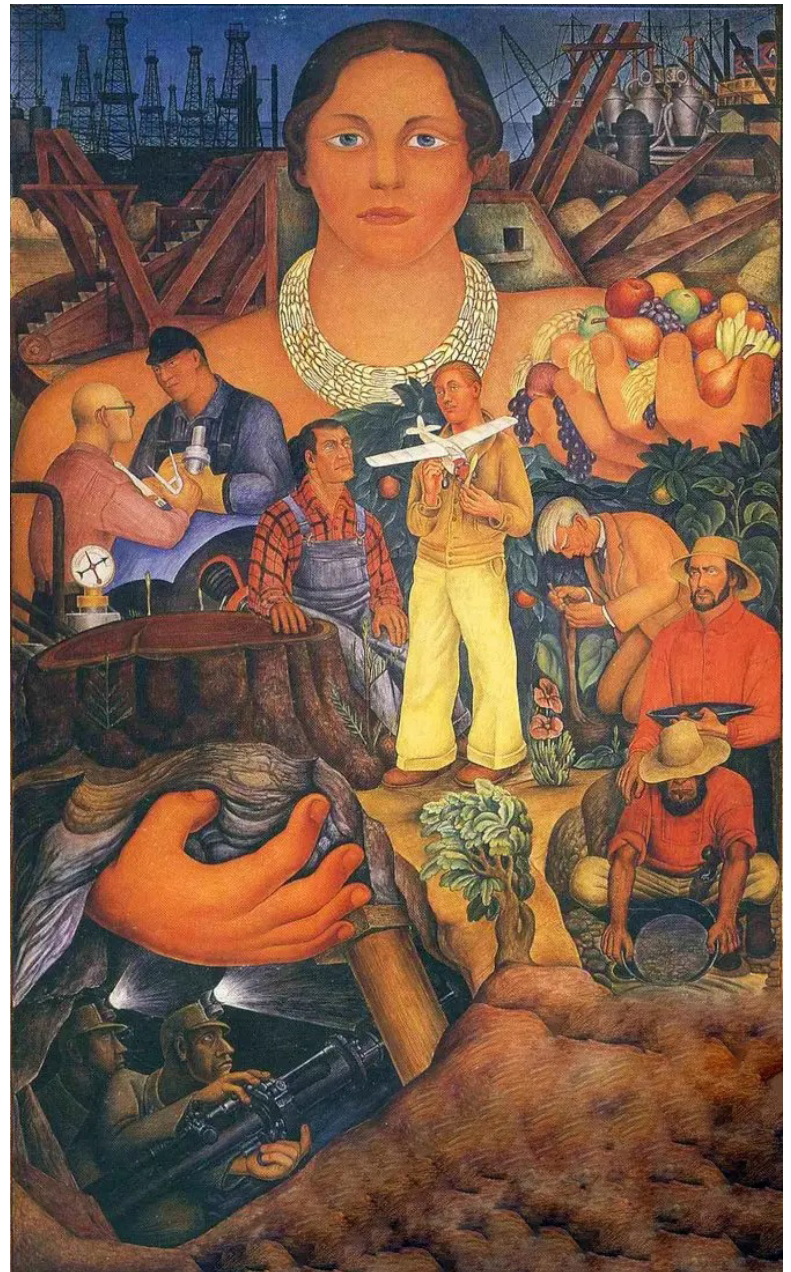


Frida Kahlo married painter Diego Rivera in 1929. Born in Guanajuato, Mexico, he started drawing on the walls of the house at the age of three. His parents installed chalkboards and canvas on the walls to encourage him. From the age of ten, Rivera studied art at the Academy of San Carlos in Mexico City. The governor of Veracruz sponsored him to go to Europe, where he studied in Spain and Paris. Early in his career, he dabbled in Cubism and Post-Impressionism, but he soon developed his own unique style. A trip through Italy piqued his interest in Renaissance frescoes.

Returning to Mexico in 1921, Rivera participated in the founding of the Revolutionary Union of Technical Workers, Painters, and Sculptors. In 1922 he joined the Mexican Communist Party. Over the next 30 years, he painted numerous frescoes across Mexico and the United States, helping establish the mural movement in international art. His work featured large figures with simplified lines and rich colors. Many of his murals depict miners, farmers, industrial laborers, and peasants.

Rivera was married four times. Kahlo was his third wife. They had a volatile relationship, divorcing once and remarrying within a year. Rivera died in 1957, two years after Kahlo's death.

The government of Mexico has declared Rivera's works to be *monumentos históricos*. His 1931 painting *The Rivals* sold in 2018 for \$9.76 million and holds the record for the highest price at auction for a work by a Latin American artist.



# — FRIDA KAHLO, POLIO, & DISABILITY —



In 1913, when she was around six years old, Frida Kahlo contracted polio, which at the time didn't have treatments and left her with physical disabilities. The virus did damage to her right leg and foot. Poliomyelitis is an acute viral infection spread from person to person by ingesting contaminated food or water. The virus enters the central nervous system, leading to muscle weakness and acute paralysis, most often involving the legs. Polio was one of the most dreaded childhood diseases of the 20th century. Epidemics left thousands of children and adults paralyzed. Vaccines developed by Jonas Salk in 1952 and Albert Sabin in 1962 reduced the global number of polio cases per year from many hundreds of thousands to around a thousand.

In 1925, when Kahlo was 18 years old, she was involved in a bus accident that left her with

numerous injuries, including a broken spine, a broken pelvis, and a pierced abdomen. She spent much of the following year in a full-body cast, suffering with severe pain—pain that would plague her intermittently for the rest of her life. From that point forward, walking was a serious challenge—on the days when she could walk at all.



Read this article about Kahlo's experience of disability and how it impacted her life and art.



Here is a lesson plan for the Indiana History Center's *You Are There 1955: Ending Polio*, a 2013 exhibit that focused on Eli Lilly and Company and Jonas Salk's polio vaccine.

# ART & ARTISTS

*Frida discusses various art styles and artists during the play:*



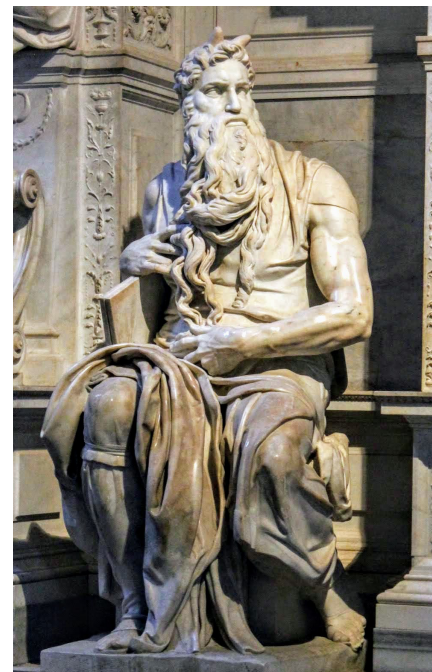
**Albert Bierstadt (1830–1902)** was a German-American painter best known for lavish, sweeping, luminous landscapes of the American West.



**Cubism** is an early-20th century avant-garde art movement that revolutionized European painting & sculpture, inspiring related artistic movements in music, literature, & architecture. In Cubist works of art, the subjects are analyzed, broken up, & reassembled in an abstract form: instead of depicting objects from a single perspective, the artist depicts the subject from multiple perspectives to represent the subject in a greater context. Cubism has been considered the most influential art movement of the 20th century.



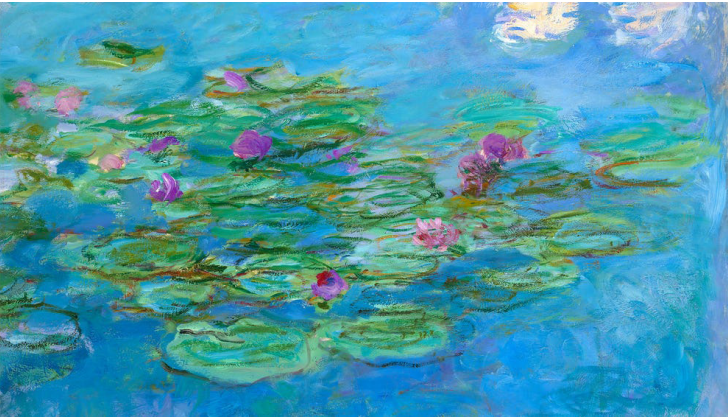
**Henri Matisse (1869–1954)** was a French painter, printmaker, sculptor, and collagist. He is commonly regarded, along with Pablo Picasso, as one of the most revolutionary artists of the twentieth century.



**Michaelangelo (1475–1564)** was an Italian sculptor, painter, and architect, the archetypal Renaissance man. He was lauded by contemporary biographers as the most accomplished artist of his era.



**Mona Lisa** | Leonardo da Vinci painted the *Mona Lisa* around 1503-1506. It is considered to be the most famous painting in the world. The subject's enigmatic smile has long been a subject of speculation.



**Claude Monet (1840-1926)** was a French painter, a founder of Impressionist painting. He often painted the same scene many times in order to capture the changing of light and the passing of the seasons.



**Pablo Picasso (1881-1973)** was a Spanish painter, sculptor, printmaker, ceramicist, and theatre designer who spent most of his adult life in France. Exceptionally prolific throughout the course of his long life, he achieved universal renown and an immense fortune for his revolutionary artistic accomplishments. He is one of the most influential and best-known figures in 20th century art.



**Surrealism** is a cultural movement that developed in Europe in the aftermath of World War I, in which artists depicted unnerving, illogical scenes and tried to express the unconscious mind. According to leader André Breton, a French writer and poet, the movement's goal was to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality," or surrealism. In works of painting, writing, theatre, filmmaking, photography, and other media, Surrealism features the element of surprise, unexpected juxtapositions, and non sequitur. While many have labeled Kahlo's work as Surrealist, she herself denied this analysis.



**Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)** was a Dutch Post-Impressionist painter who is among the most famous and influential figures in the history of Western art. His paintings are characterized by bold, symbolic colors and dramatic, impulsive, and highly expressive brushwork.

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# SPANISH GLOSSARY

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*Frida Kahlo was a native Mexican. She speaks many Spanish words in the play.*

<b>abuela</b> grandmother	<b>dislocado</b> dislocated	<b>izquierdo</b> left	<b>pequeña</b> little one	one
<b>accents</b> accents	<b>dos</b> two	<b>levánten</b> lift	<b>por favor</b> please	<b>ven</b> come
<b>ahora</b> now	<b>drecha</b> leg	<b>listo</b> ready	<b>pregunta</b> question	<b>verdad</b> truth
<b>aplastado</b> crushed	<b>entendido</b> understand	<b>lugares</b> places	<b>qué</b> What	<b>vida</b> life
<b>aquí</b> here	<b>entonces</b> so	<b>Mamita</b> Mommy	<b>rojos</b> red	
<b>avancen</b> move forward	<b>escriba</b> write	<b>Mande?</b> What?	<b>rota</b> broken	
<b>ayúdenme</b> help me	<b>escúchame</b> listen to me	<b>mierda</b> shit	<b>sacarlo</b> get it out	
<b>baño</b> bathroom	<b>Español</b> Spanish	<b>mi, mio</b> my	<b>señor</b> sir	
<b>bien</b> good	<b>estudiantes</b> students	<b>mira</b> look	<b>señorita</b> miss	
<b>boca</b> mouth	<b>estúpido</b> stupid	<b>muy</b> very	<b>si</b> yes	
<b>bonita</b> pretty	<b>flores</b> flowers	<b>momento</b> moment	<b>tenemos</b> have to	
<b>cállense</b> shut	<b>fracturado</b> fractured	<b>órale</b> oral	<b>tenias</b> had	
<b>cerveza</b> beer	<b>fracturas</b> fractures	<b>Pápi, papito</b> Daddy	<b>tercera</b> third	
<b>clavicula</b> clavicle	<b>fuera</b> out	<b>Pardóname.</b> Pardon me.	<b>tres</b> three	
<b>costilla</b> ribs	<b>gordo</b> fat	<b>pasión</b> passion	<b>uno</b> one	
<b>cuarta</b> fourth	<b>gracias</b> thank you	<b>pendejo</b> stupid	<b>uy</b> oops	
<b>decia</b> say	<b>hable</b> speak	<b>perdón</b> sorry	<b>vamos</b> come on	
<b>Dios</b> God	<b>hacía</b> toward	<b>pero</b> but	<b>ve</b> go	
	<b>hoimbro</b> shoulder	<b>pie</b> foot	<b>ves</b> see	
	<b>hola</b> hello	<b>pierna</b> leg	<b>veintiuno</b> twenty-	



# GERMAN GLOSSARY

*Frida Kahlo's father was a German immigrant living in Mexican.  
He speaks a few German words in the play.*

**drei**  
three

**eins**  
one

**gut**  
good

**jetzt**  
now

**kleine**  
little

**Machst du?**  
Do you?

**nein**  
no

**und**  
and

**vier**  
four

**Wo wohnst du?**  
Where do you live?

**Wie gehts?**  
How is it going?

**zwei**  
two



# OPIOIDS



In constant pain for most of her life, Frida Kahlo often turned to drugs for relief. Throughout the play, you will see her inject herself with morphine. Morphine is a strong opioid that is found naturally in opium, a dark brown resin produced by drying the latex of opium poppies. It is mainly used as pain medication, often administered by injection. It is addictive and prone to abuse.

Opioids include the illegal drug heroin, synthetic opioids such as fentanyl, and pain medications available legally by prescription—such as morphine. Prescription opioids are generally safe when taken for a short time and as directed by a doctor, but because they produce euphoria in addition to pain relief, they can be misused and have addiction potential.



Read this article about teens and opioid use from the Center for Disease Control.

# INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing *Frida ... A Self Portrait* at the Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key literature standards to consider on your trip would be:

## READING LITERATURE

- RL.1 Read a variety of literature within a range of complexity appropriate for one's grade.
- RL.2 Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by identifying, describing, and making inferences about literary elements and themes.
- RL.3 Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure, and point of view.
- RL.4 Build comprehension and appreciation of literary elements and themes and analyze how sensory tools impact meaning.

## READING—VOCABULARY

- RV.1 Build and apply vocabulary using various strategies and sources.
- RV.2 Use strategies to determine and clarify words and understand their relationship.
- RV.3 Build appreciation and understanding of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying the meaning of words and their uses.

## SPEAKING AND LISTENING

- SL.1 Develop and apply effective communication skills through speaking and active listening.
- SL.3 Develop and apply active listening and interpretation skills using various strategies.

## MEDIA LITERACY

- ML.1 Develop an understanding of media and the roles and purposes of media.
- ML.2 Recognize the purpose of media and the ways in which media can have influences.

## THEATRE CREATING

- TH.Cr1 Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

## THEATRE PERFORMING

- TH.Pr.4 Select, analyze, and interpret artistic work for presentation.

## THEATRE RESPONDING

- TH.Re.7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- TH.Re.8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- TH.Re.9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

## THEATRE CONNECTING

- TH.Cn.10 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.
- TH.Cn.11 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.
- Many technical theatre standards.

## VISUAL ARTS

- VA:Cr.2.2 Artists and designers balance experimentation and safety, freedom and responsibility while developing and creating artworks.
- VA:Pr.6 Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
- VA:Re.7 Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- VA:Re.8 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
- VA:Re.9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.
- VA:Cn.11 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

# INDIANA ACADEMIC STANDARDS ALIGNMENT GUIDE CONT.

## HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES LITERACY

- LH.3 Build understanding of history/social studies texts, using knowledge, structural organization, and author's purpose.

## PSYCHOLOGY

- P.7 Students discuss the socio-cultural dimensions of behavior including topics such as conformity, obedience, perception, attitudes, and the influence of the group on the individual.

## ETHNIC STUDIES

- ES.1 Cultural Self-Awareness.
- ES.2 Cultural Histories within the United States Context and Abroad.
- ES.3 Contemporary Lived Experiences and Cultural Practices.
- ES.4 Historical and Contemporary Contributions.

## SOCIOLOGY

- S.2 Students examine the influence of culture on the individual and the way cultural transmission is accomplished. Students study the way culture defines how people in a society behave in relation to groups and to physical objects. They also learn that human behavior is learned within the society. Through the culture, individuals learn the relationships, structures, patterns and processes to be members of the society.
- S.3 Students examine the process by which people develop their human potential and learn culture. Socialization will be considered as a lifelong process of human social experience.
- S.5 Students learn to differentiate between the biological differences that divide the human population into male and female, and gender which is the personal traits and social positions that members of a society attach to being male or female. The development and changes in gender roles over time will be examined.
- S.7 Students identify the effects of social institutions on individual and group behavior. They understand that social institutions are the social groups in which an individual participates, and that these institutions influence the development of the individual through the socialization process.

## GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY OF THE WORLD

- GHW.2 Students examine the physical and human geographic factors associated with the origins, spread and impact of major world religions in different regions of the world.
- GHW.6 Students examine physical and human geographic factors that influenced the origins, major events, diffusion, and global consequences of new ideas in agriculture, science, culture, politics, industry, and technology.
- GHW.7 Students explore the physical and human geographic factors affecting the origins and the local, regional and supranational consequences of conflict and cooperation between and among groups of people.

## WORLD HISTORY AND CIVILIZATIONS

- WH.6 Students analyze and explain trends and events of global significance, such as world wars, international controversies and challenges, and cross-cultural changes which have influenced our modern world.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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## **Before Seeing the Play**

1. What do you know about Frida Kahlo? What was her life or art like?
2. What do you know about her husband, Diego Rivera? What was his art or life like?
3. What do you know about artists and the arts during the first half of the 20th century?
4. Think of one of your favorite artists—painter, sculptor, writer, musician, actor, etc. How familiar are you with the full range of their work? What do you know about their life? How do you think their life is reflected in their work? What makes you connect with an artist—their work, their life, or some combination of both?

## **After Seeing the Play**

1. Discuss some of the struggles and hardships that Frida Kahlo faced in her everyday life. How do you think these challenges affected her art?
2. How is playwright and actor Vanessa Severo similar to Frida Kahlo? How are they different?
3. Talk about the effectiveness of having one character on stage who plays multiple roles. What are the challenges? What are the advantages?
4. What did you learn about Frida Kahlo that you didn't know before? How did this change your perceptions of her work?
5. Compare this version of presenting Kahlo's life (through the lens of Vanessa Severo) to a more traditional biographical play or movie.
6. Discuss the doctor in the hospital after Kahlo's bus accident. How do you suppose Kahlo might have responded to his assessment of her injuries? How might he have been more sensitive to her presence?
7. Discuss how Kahlo's art might have changed with each big event in her life.
8. Think about Clive Powell, the journalist character who is interviewing Frida Kahlo in the play. We never hear him speak; we only hear Kahlo's responses to him. What portrait of him do Kahlo's reactions create? What kind of person is he? How do you think he is changed by his time with Kahlo?
9. Spend some time looking at some of Kahlo's paintings. Notice not only the central image, but the small details and other elements that appear in the painting. What does the painting say to you? How does it relate to what you know of Kahlo's life? What story is the painting telling you? How does it make you feel?

# RESOURCES

## Books:

*The Diary of Frida Kahlo: An Intimate Self-Portrait* by Frida Kahlo

*The Story of Frida Kahlo: A Biography for New Readers* by Susan B. Katz

*Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* by Hayden Herrera

*Frida Kahlo: The Story of Her Life* by Vanna Vinci

*Viva Frida* by Tim O'Meara

*The Lacuna* by Barbara Kingsolver

*Me, Frida, and the Secret of the Peacock Ring* by Angela Cervantes

*Frida Kahlo: Making Her Self Up* by Claire Wilcox

*What Would Frida Do?: A Guide to Living Boldly* by Arianna Davis

*The Secret Book of Frida Kahlo* by F. G. Haghenbeck

*Frida Kahlo and My Left Leg* by Emily Rapp Black

*The Education of Margot Sanchez* by Lilliam Rivera

*A Time to Dance* by Padma Venkatraman

*Marcus Vega Doesn't Speak Spanish* by Pablo Cartaya

## Movies:

*Frida, Naturaleza Viva*, 1983 NR

*A Ribbon around a Bomb*, 1992 NR

*Diego Rivera: I Paint What I See*, 1992 NR

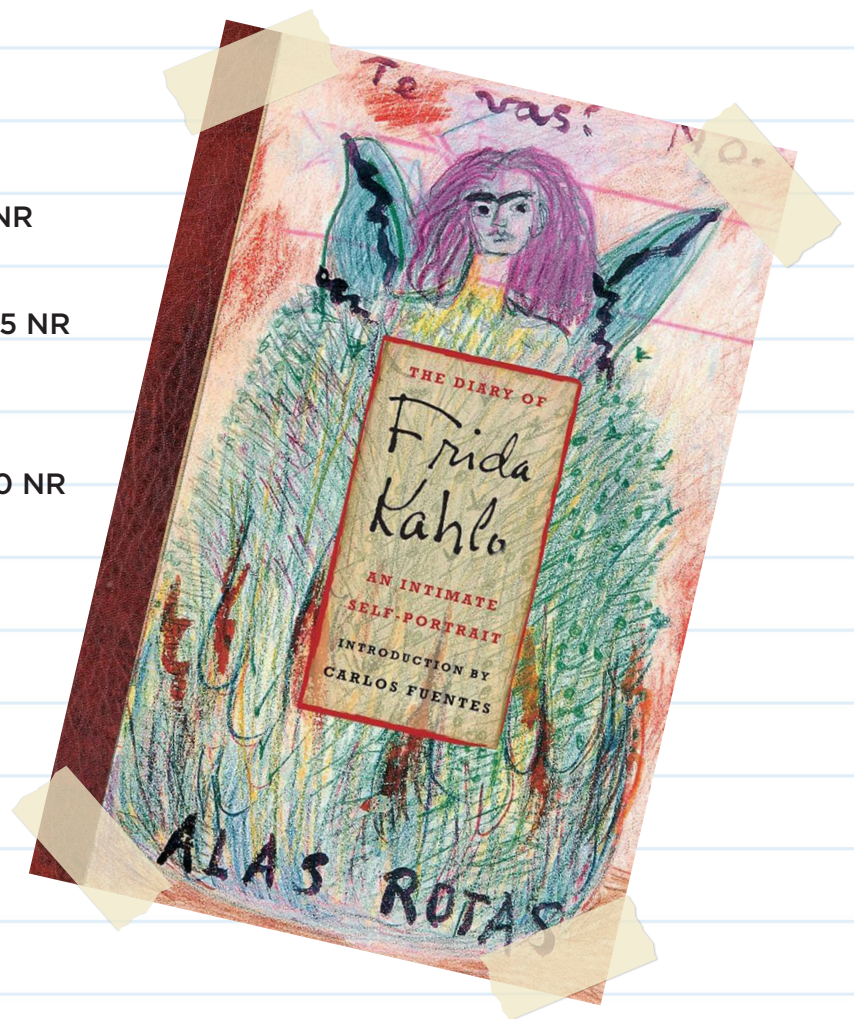
*Frida*, 2002 R

*The Life and Times of Frida Kahlo*, 2005 NR

*Chez Frida Kahlo*, 2011 NR

*Frida—Viva la Vida*, 2019 NR

*Exhibition on Screen: Frida Kahlo*, 2020 NR



# WRITING PROMPTS

1. Write a short autobiography of yourself. What are the important parts of your life that you would want included in a story about your life?
2. Write a letter from Kahlo to one of the other “characters” in the story. At what point in her life would she write this letter? What would she want to talk to them about? Would she be angry, indifferent, happy?
3. Think of an artist (painter, musician, dancer, actor, writer, etc.) that has some similarities to your life. Write a monologue as you portraying that artist. Talk about how you relate to that artist.
4. Research one of the other characters in the play and write a dialogue scene between Kahlo and that person.
5. At both the beginning and the end of her play, Vanessa Severo repeats this quote attributed to Frida Kahlo: “I used to think I was the strangest person in the world. But then I thought ... there are so many people in the world, there must be someone just like me who feels bizarre and flawed in the same ways I do. I would imagine her, and imagine she must be out there thinking of me too. Well, I hope that if you are out there and hear this and know that, Yes, it’s true, I’m here ... and I’m just as strange as you.” Write about how this quote might apply to your own life.
5. Write a review of the play. A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors’ performances of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? **To share your reviews with others, send to: [education@irtlive.com](mailto:education@irtlive.com)**



# ACTIVITIES



1. Create a self-portrait in the style of Kahlo. Be sure to add symbols of things or ideas that are important to you.
2. If you were to put on a one-actor show about your life, what characters would be featured besides yourself? Create your own clothesline with articles of clothing that would best represent each person who is important to your story.
3. La Casa Azul was the home that Kahlo was raised in. Today it is a museum. Research la Casa Azul, then build a replica of what it may have looked like at the time she lived in it. Be creative about what available materials you might use for different elements.
4. When Frida Kahlo was first becoming interested in painting, after her bus accident, she studied the Old Masters: painters like Botticelli, da Vinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, Bosch, Holbein, Dürer, Breugel, el Greco, Caravaggio, Rubens, van Dyck, Velázquez, Rembrandt, Vermeer, Watteau, Fragonard, Reynolds, Gainsborough, David, Ingres, Goya, Turner, Constable, and Delacroix, to name just a few. Choose two or three of these painters and compare their works to Kahlo's. How do you think she might have been influenced by their style? Find related pairs of paintings—one by Kahlo, one by an Old Master—two portraits, for example, or landscapes, or still lifes. Create a bulletin board display that points out differences and similarities between the two works.
5. Diego Rivera is most known for his murals. As a class, create a mural that portrays your school or town. Take inspiration from both Diego and Kahlo, but find your own style. Experiment with scale and use bold colors. Try to represent a broad cross-section of people, places, and things.



# GLOSSARY

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**corset** | A surgical corset is sometimes used to aid in the stabilization and immobilization of the abdomen and spine. It may reduce lumbar discomfort, promote good posture, and reduce pain.

**cicadas** | Cicadas are large insects with an exceptionally loud song, produced in most species by the rapid buckling and unbuckling of drum-like tymbals. Cicadas usually sing most actively during the hottest hours of a summer day.

**congenital disorder** | A congenital disorder is an abnormal condition that is present at birth. It may result in disabilities that may be physical, intellectual, or developmental.

**demeanor** | Your demeanor is your outward appearance and behavior. It includes the way you stand, the way you talk, and your facial expressions.

**demigod** | The term demigod seems to have first appeared in the works of the poet Ovid (43 BCE–17/18 CE), writing about the ancient world of mythology. A demigod is the child of a god and a mortal, such as Perseus, Orpheus, or Hercules.

**I.D.** | *I.D. (The International Design Magazine)* was a magazine covering the art, business, and culture of design, published eight times a year from 1954 to 2010.

**Mexico City** | Mexico City is the capital of Mexico, and the largest city in North America. The city's population growth has been extraordinary over the last century. When Frida Kahlo was born there in 1907, the population was around half a million. When the play takes place, in 1954, it was three and a half million. Today, it is 22 million.

**regimen** | A regimen is a prescribed course of medical treatment, physical exercise, or diet for the promotion or restoration of health.

**renderings** | drawings

**saudade** | *Saudade* is a Portuguese word derived from the Latin *solitās* or *solitātem*, meaning "solitude." *Saudade* is an emotional state of melancholic or deeply nostalgic longing for a beloved yet absent something or someone, especially one that might never be encountered again. It is an elusive recollection of feelings, experiences, places, or events, with a sense of separation from the excitement, pleasure, or joy that these things once caused.

**Suzuki method** | The Suzuki method of actor training is a rigorous physical discipline drawn from such diverse influences as ballet, traditional Japanese and Greek theatre, and martial arts. The training seeks to heighten the actor's emotional and physical power and commitment to each moment on the stage.

# THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE



**You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show. Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:**

Please leave mobile phones, cameras, and other electronic devices at home or switch them off in your bag. While texting might seem private, the light and motion can be distracting for those nearby and on stage. Please wait to text until after the show.

For student matinees, you are welcome to enjoy food and drinks in the lobby areas.

When you notice the house lights dimming and going out, it is a gentle signal to settle into your seats before the start of the play.

While the play unfolds, please refrain from chatting with your neighbors. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. Your focus on the play helps ensure an uninterrupted experience for both the audience and the actors.

For the safety of everyone in the room, please remain in your seat and keep all hands, feet, and other items to yourself and away from the actors onstage or in the aisles.

To minimize disruptions, please remind yourself to use the restroom before the show. You don't want to miss any exciting moments!

We encourage you to express your emotions during the play: laugh, cry, sigh, gasp! The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Lastly, please remain at your seat and join in the applause during curtain call. This is a moment to show your appreciation for the performance, and it allows the actors a chance to express their gratitude for your attention.

**Thank you for being part of our theatre community, and enjoy the show!**

# STUDENT MATINEE ARRIVAL & PARKING INFORMATION

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## ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

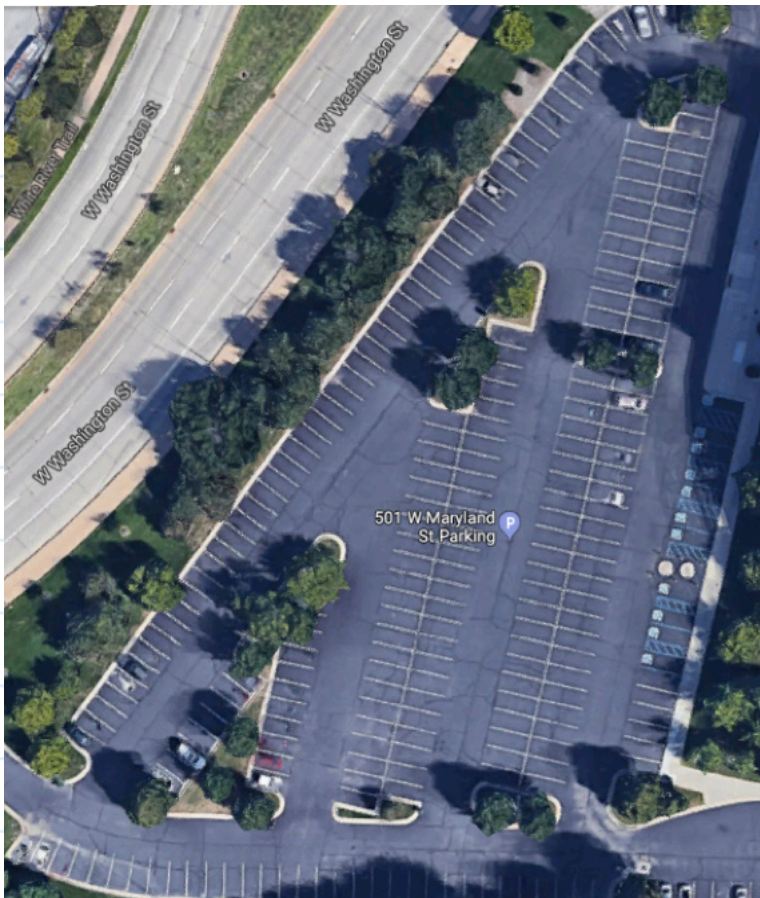
- IRT is located one-half block west of Circle Centre Mall on Washington Street, between northbound Illinois Street and southbound Capitol Avenue
- The physical address of IRT is 140 West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204.
- Groups should unload and load directly in front of the theatre. (Do not block the entrance to Embassy Suites garage.) Please plan to arrive 20-30 minutes before your performance is scheduled to begin.
- You will be greeted at the curb by an IRT Staff Member and directed to the correct entrance.
- For shows on the IRT Upperstage, students and teachers will take the stairs to the 4th floor.
- The teacher named on the reservation should check in with the IRT Education staff member stationed in the lobby.
- Your group will be ushered to your assigned seats.
- Students and chaperones should follow instructions of all IRT Staff for your safety.

## LATE ARRIVAL

- If you believe that you are going to be late, please contact the IRT Main Office at 317.635.5277. Provide the receptionist with a phone number and the name of the school so that Education staff may be in contact with you.
- You can contact IRT Education ([education@irtlive.com](mailto:education@irtlive.com)) with non-emergency information on the day of the show.

## PARKING

- Buses may park for free at Victory Field unless they are having an event - we will inform you if that is the case. The House Manager will give you a parking pass for each bus when you arrive. It should be displayed in the windshield.
- Continue east on Washington Street past the JW Marriott and turn left across Maryland Street into the Victory Field lot.
- **PLEASE NOTE that Victory Field no longer has public restroom spaces available. We apologize for any inconvenience.**
- See the map on the next page for full details.
- Additional parking options are located on the next page.
- **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking information in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**



## VICTORY FIELD PARKING MAP

Victory Field parking lot is located on the West side of the stadium. From IRT, continue west on Washington Street past the JW Marriott. Turn left on Schumacher Way, and cross Maryland Street into the Victory Field lot.

Some buses may need to double park in the lot. The image is of the Victory Field parking lot.

**PLEASE NOTE that Victory Field no longer has public restrooms available to drivers. This is a change from years past. We apologize for any inconvenience.**

Thank you,  
Indianapolis Indians and  
Indiana Repertory Theatre

## ADDITIONAL PARKING OPTIONS

In the event that Victory Field is unavailable for free parking, here are some other potential options. **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking info in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**

**White River State Park:** Paid surface parking is located on Washington Street, across from Victory Field. May require advance notice; event rates may apply. *(Approximately .6 mi from IRT.)*



**Indianapolis Zoo:** Paid parking is available on Washington Street, west of White River State Park. First come, first served. *(Approximately 1.2 mi from IRT.)*



**Downtown Indy:** Explore all available parking options at the Downtown Indy website. Buses are welcome to utilize street parking if all used spaces are paid.

## CAR AND VAN PARKING OPTIONS

### CIRCLE CENTRE MALL PARKING

Ask a Theatre employee for a voucher that will reduce your parking fee by \$6 This voucher is available at select garages when attending an IRT show. This is only valid during the IRT's season.

### Addresses for the Circle Centre Mall Garages:

RED GARAGE | 28 West Washington Street or 48 West Maryland Street

BLUE GARAGE | 26 West Georgia Street

## PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

IndyGo's Red Line, the city's rapid bus transit system, connects Broad Ripple and Fountain Square to the heart of downtown and other neighborhoods in Indianapolis. With buses running every 10-20 minutes and a stop directly next to the IRT on Capitol Avenue, the Red Line provides another convenient option for your transportation to the Theatre.

**To plan your trip or for more information about the Red Line and other nearby routes, visit [IndyGo.net](http://IndyGo.net) or call IndyGo Customer Service at 317-635-3344.**