



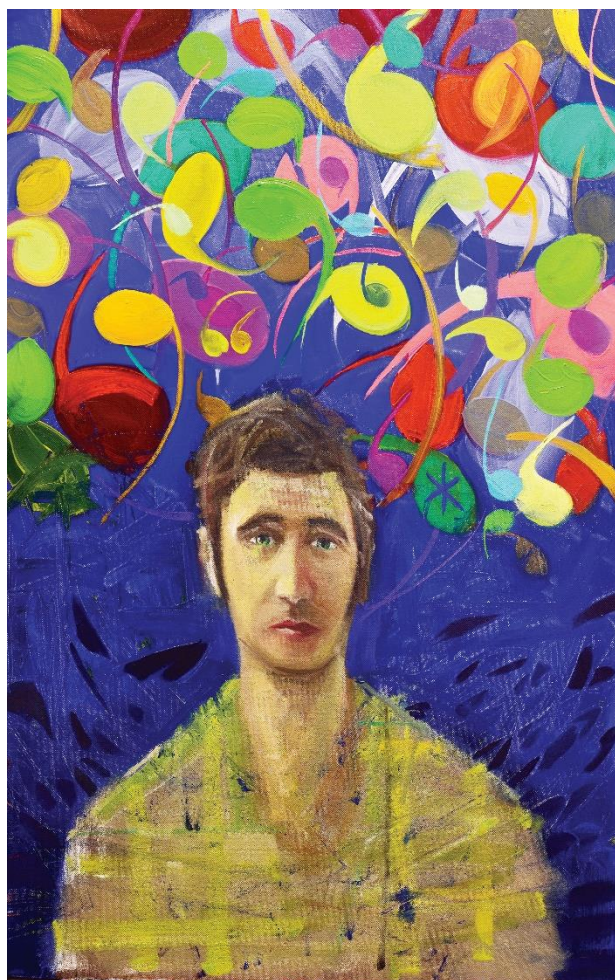
INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

Every Brilliant Thing

by **Duncan Macmillan**
with **Jonny Donahoe**

January 8 –
February 10, 2019

on the IRT's
Upperstage



STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts, Resident Dramaturg
with contributions by Janet Allen • Tim Ocel
Reuben Lucas • Guy Clark • Allan Hahn
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EVERY BRILLIANT THING

BY DUNCAN MACMILLAN WITH JONNY DONAHOE

What makes life worth living? The answers are both simple and profound in this one-of-a-kind Off-Broadway hit. A theatrical experience like none other, this witty new play shines compassionate light into the dark corners of the human condition.

Beginning as a young child, our narrator has compiled a list of every great thing that makes life worth living in the hopes of helping his mom, who battles with depression and suicide. As he grows older, his mission turns to collecting one million things for his list. Our storyteller takes us along for the ride in this direct-address performance, and includes the audience in the retelling by casting them to play different people throughout his life. This heart-wrenching and hilarious journey is a testament to the healing power of storytelling, and reminds us that hope is never truly lost.

STUDENT MATINEES 10:00 AM on January 16 & February 5, 2019

ESTIMATED LENGTH Approximately one hour and 15 minutes with no intermission

AGE RANGE Recommended for grades 9-12

CONTENT ADVISORY *Every Brilliant Thing* is a one-man dramedy that contains adult language and themes, including references to suicide. A script preview is available upon request.

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COVER ART BY KYLE RAGSDALE

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THE STORY OF

EVERY BRILLIANT THING

Every Brilliant Thing began life as a short story: “Sleeve Notes” by Duncan Macmillan. You can read it at: <https://www.atthekitchentable.com/sleeve-notes/>

Almost a decade after writing the story, Macmillan collaborated with actor Jonny Donahoe to create the play, which was premiered in Great Britain in 2013. The next year the play was produced off Broadway, where it was filmed by HBO. (In British English, the word “brilliant” often has the same meaning as “awesome” or “fantastic” in American English. A “brilliant thing” means a wonderful or noteworthy thing, rather than a thing that is brightly lit or extremely intelligent.)

The short story and the play begin with a boy whose mother has attempted suicide. He attempts to help her by creating a list of things that make life worth living. Over the years, she makes further attempts, and the growing young man finds comfort and purpose in adding to the list, while his father shares with him his love of music. Even after his mother dies, the young man continues to add to the list. He marries. As he struggles with his own depression, he eventually stops working on the list, and throws it away. His wife leaves him, and he spends several years alone. Eventually, it is music that brings him back to the list, and to the possibility of hope.

Marcus Truschinski in the IRT production of Every Brilliant Thing. Photo by Zach Rosing.



AROUND THE CAMPFIRE

BY JANET ALLEN, EXECUTIVE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Every Brilliant Thing is a new kind of experience in the theatre for IRT—you will already have sampled a bit of this new experience if you are now in your seat! As you are about to learn further, this play places the audience into a new yet old relationship with a performer, rather more like being in the living room of a storyteller who you want to root for and encourage. This play invites us to participate. We can choose from a wide range of involvements—including no involvement at all—but I think that you will find that a significant part of the charm and heart of this piece is experiencing this new dynamic, literally hearing audience voices commingle with the voice of a performer (I'll just call him Marcus from here on out).

This experience really harkens back to an ancient storytelling tradition, where humans drew about fires to talk and share stories that remind us of our shared humanity in all its fragilities, our shared strengths in banding together, and our need for shared humor and pathos for survival. Subtly, the play also suggests that we have done damage to our humanity by placing distance—be it geographical or technological or fearful—between ourselves and our fellows, and that a return to the fireside is worth the effort. The play reminds us, in form as well as content, that we are all struggling with challenges, that we all share mornings where it's hard to get out of bed, that we all create mantras or lists that help calm us and guard against the many defeating impulses that being human assigns us.

Every Brilliant Thing is the creation of two Englishmen—a writer and an actor—and it has taken off in many parts of the world due to the generosity of these men. The stage directions explicitly invite us to adapt the details to meet our conditions of geography and nuance of language, so we have done so. That generosity is also at the core of the piece—from its premise, it exudes a belief that if we listen closely to one another, if we give over to authentic sharing, if we engage our empathy, we can accomplish anything together. We can survive together. We can experience our humanity more deeply by lowering some of the barriers that separate us. This is also a new experience in trust: in the safety of the theatre, in the generosity of a performer (Marcus!), in a belief that language can actually express our hopes, not just our differences or our cynicism.

So, we invite you to gather around the metaphoric fire that Marcus has lit for you in these frigid days of winter. He will guide us gently, encourage us generously, share openly, and invite us into a place where it's safe to laugh, sigh, grieve, wonder, and experience joy, partly of our own making. Welcome to our campfire for humanity.



PAYING ATTENTION

BY TIM OCEL, DIRECTOR

There is a line in *Every Brilliant Thing* that grabbed my attention from the very beginning: “If you live a long life and get to the end of it without ever once having felt crushingly depressed, then you probably haven’t been paying attention.”

The statement is simple, but true. The idea that one can be crushingly depressed *and not know it* because “you haven’t been paying attention” seems reasonable. Also, dangerous.

It made me wonder if I’ve been paying attention.

My history with this piece is that last year I saw a staged reading of it by a student director at Webster University. I didn’t know the play, was immediately suspicious of being asked to participate, surprised that I had *fun* participating, and immediately wanted to direct the play if given the chance. Several weeks later, and purely by coincidence, Janet Allen asked if I was interested in directing a production with Marcus Truschinski. Of course, I said yes.

Marcus and I go back about ten years when he played Amiens for me in a production of *As You Like It* at American Players Theater, and then Proteus for me at the same company in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Terrific actor, lovely man, hard worker, wonderful collaborator. It’s only October and we’ve already Skyped about the play and begun to share our own experiences with depression....

I have always paid attention to things—enough to know that the line separating living from dying can be very blurry; that to be in the world is sometimes more difficult than the choice to leave it. But I also know that life offers an infinite variety of lights along with the ever-lurking shadows. And so, I offer you this play, and Marcus Truschinski.



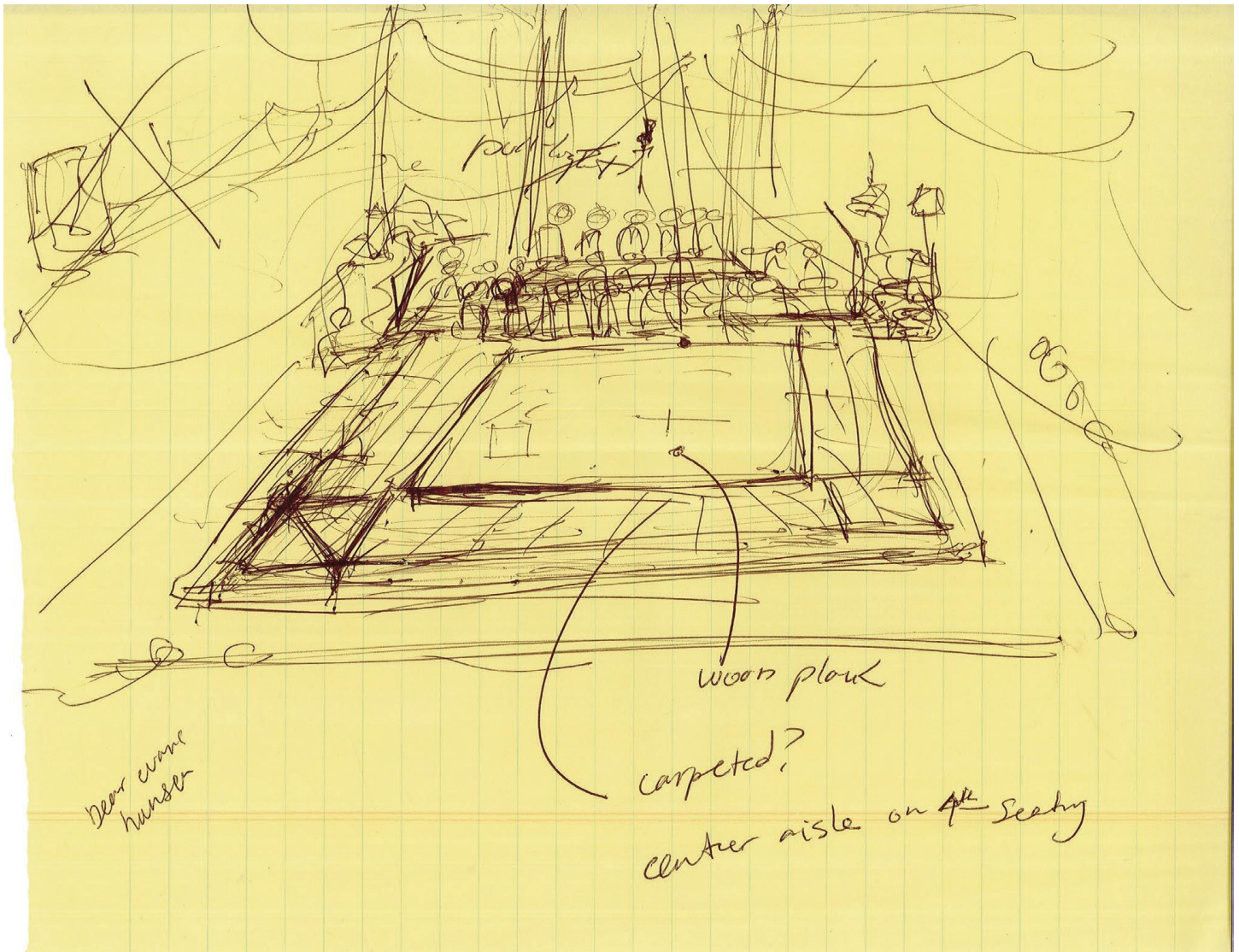
Marcus Truschinski in the IRT production of Every Brilliant Thing. Photo by Zach Rosing.

SHARING THE STORY

REUBEN LUCAS SCENIC DESIGNER

The scenic design is approached from the notion that it is an attic full of memories. This attic space is expressed by hanging roof rafters draped with light bulbs (loosely representing the list), a central attic floor, and various piles of stuff and boxes placed around the stage. Together these items create an environment that is welcoming, warm, and bursting with family stories (cheerful and tearful), encouraging the audience to connect to the storytelling by recalling their own family "attic." My family's "attic of memories" is a well-worn picture box that is usually haphazardly stored in a closet. During family gatherings, if the picture box is brought out it means an evening of laughter, stories, reminiscing, and good-natured poking fun.

Rough preliminary sketch by scenic designer Reuben Lucas.





GUY CLARK COSTUME DESIGNER

"All sorrows," Isak Dinesen felt, "can be borne if you put them into a story." In *Every Brilliant Thing*, our narrator has a difficult story to tell, a story of loss, and yet we will laugh as he tells it because he has first put us at ease. To do so, he needs to be comfortable telling his story. The costume for *Every Brilliant Thing* attempts to put our actor at ease as he engages with his audience and invites us to share this story of sorrow told with humor.

Preliminary rendering by costume designer Guy Clark.

ALLAN HAHN LIGHTING DESIGNER

I find in *Every Brilliant Thing* so many of the elements that I value as an audience member and a theatre maker. The intimate bond between actor and audience is at its most crystal clear when under the spell of a single master of the craft. The elegance of a tale well told: the breathless journey down the rabbit hole into another world, familiar enough to easily picture ourselves in it, yet strange enough to be compelling and fresh. The deep empathy for characters seen and unseen who seem by turns like familiar portraits or mirrors of the self. And most importantly, the powerful human bond that comes from the shared experience of watching live theatre with a room full of strangers. In unsettled times most of all, this coming together to share the enterprise of storytelling—our most uniquely human ability—is why theatre matters and why I'm so grateful it's my job.

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Everyone feels sad or “blue” from time to time for a few days or weeks. Depression is when these feelings don’t go away and they interfere with daily life. Depression is a real illness. It makes you feel sad and helpless. It gets in the way of your life and relationships. It inhibits your ability to think and act. But, with help, you can feel better again.

Depression is something we tend to recognize in others, but may have a hard time seeing in ourselves. It can show in many physical and emotional ways:

- Change in your appetite
- Tiredness not related to physical exertion
- Restlessness or irritability
- Slowness of movement or speech
- Feeling depressed or withdrawn
- Loss of interest in things you once enjoyed
- Cause trouble with mental tasks such as remembering, concentrating or making decisions
- Make you feel nervous and jumpy
- Cause trouble sleeping
- Cause headaches, stomachaches, or other aches and pains
- Drain your body of energy

Getting better takes time

Talk therapy will help you feel better. Often, medication is used at the same time as therapy to help reduce symptoms of depression. But change doesn’t happen right away. Depression takes away your energy and motivation, so it can be hard to feel like going to therapy and sticking with it. But therapy has been proven to be very valuable in the treatment of depression. Therapy for depression is often done for a set number of sessions. In other cases, you and your therapist decide together at what point you no longer need therapy.

Depression: Tips to Help Yourself

As your health care providers help treat your depression, you can also help yourself. Keep in mind that your illness affects you emotionally, physically, mentally and socially. So full recovery will take time. Take care of your body and your soul and be patient with yourself as you get better.

Be with others

Don’t isolate yourself – you’ll only feel worse. Try to be with other people. And take part in fun activities when you can. Go to a movie, ballgame, religious service, or social event. Talk openly with people you can trust. And accept help when it’s offered.

Keep your perspective

- Depression can cloud your judgment. So wait until you feel better before making major life decisions.
- This illness is not your fault. Don’t blame yourself for your depression.
- Recovering from depression is a process. Don’t be discouraged if it takes some time.
- Depression saps your energy and concentration. Set small goals and do what you can.

Get Help Now

National Hotlines: Text HELPNOW to 741741 or call 800.273.8255

Local Resource: Call Community Health Network at 800.662.3445



TALKING TO A FRIEND ABOUT DEPRESSION OR SUICIDE

Only 1 in 5 teens seek help for their depression or suicidal thoughts. Don't hesitate to reach out to your friend and encourage them to seek mental health services and get the help they need. If you are worried that a friend may be contemplating suicide, or if they are displaying warning signs, speak up.

Remember: It's not important how you ask, it's important that you ask.

WHAT TO DO IF A FRIEND COMES TO YOU FOR HELP

Don't panic! Remain calm and remember that you can help.

Listen carefully. Let your friend know that you care. Be supportive and don't judge them.

Take it seriously.

Seek help. Get a trusted adult to help you.

Ask if they are thinking about suicide.

Do not leave your friend alone. If you cannot stay with them, find someone you trust.

WHAT NOT TO DO IF A FRIEND COMES TO YOU FOR HELP

Don't promise to keep it a secret. It is important to get help.

Don't be afraid to ask them directly.

Don't say "I know how you feel". Listen openly to what they have to say. Make it about them.

Don't suggest that something is "wrong" with them because they feel this way.

Don't ignore your friend. It takes courage to ask for help and they chose you.

HOW TO START THE CONVERSATION

Ask if you can talk with them alone in private.

Ask questions to get them to open up.

"I'm worried about you. How are you doing?"

"You haven't been acting like yourself lately. Is everything okay?"

"You seem really down. Are you okay?"

Listen to their story and allow them to talk freely.

Express concern and caring. Ask if they have thought about ending their life.

"Are you thinking about suicide?"

"Do you want to kill yourself?"

Have resources available and encourage them to seek mental health services.

"Seeking help can take courage, but it's the smart thing to do."

"I know reaching out for help can be scary, but I want to help you."

—courtesy of Community Health Network

www.HaveHope.com/teen

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE AUDIENCE

It might be tempting to think of the audience's role as passive—the actors on stage are doing all the work, the audience is just watching and listening. The word *audience* comes from the root *audio*—the act of listening. Watching and listening are not necessarily physically active, but they engage your mind; they cause you to respond and think and feel. Without an audience, there is no performance—no theatre.

The nature of the audience has changed throughout history. In its earliest beginnings, theatre began as ritual: tribal dances and festivals celebrating marriage and birth, asking the gods for a good harvest, preparing for war or celebrating victory—basically any big event that the community cared about. It was a participatory kind of theatre; the performers were the villagers, and they were inspired by the belief that their lives depended on a successful performance—the ritual had to be done properly so that the harvest would be plentiful or the battle victorious, so that life could continue as it should. These rituals were performed at regular intervals, governed by the changing of the seasons and the rolling of the years as well as particular happenings in the village. Many of these types of festivals survive today in the folk history of Asia, Europe, Africa, and South America. But right here in America, these ancient rites are not that far removed from the weekly rites of worship in churches, synagogues, and mosques. In a way, a minister or rabbi is a performer, and a congregation is an audience—an audience who participates very actively in the performance, and who invests a great deal of caring and belief in the importance of that ritual being done as it should be done.

Our contemporary western theatre is descended from the ancient Greeks. Their theatre stemmed from the celebration of the wine harvest and Dionysus, the god of wine. Dancers and singers parading through the countryside evolved into performances in giant amphitheatres carved into the mountainside. Thousands of people would flock to the theatre for a week-long drama festival. Attending the theatre was considered an important duty of citizenship. Laughing at comedy and being moved by tragedy were essential to participating in the life of the community and ensuring its further prosperity. It was a wine festival, so there was a lot of drinking—which means it was always a lively, talkative audience.

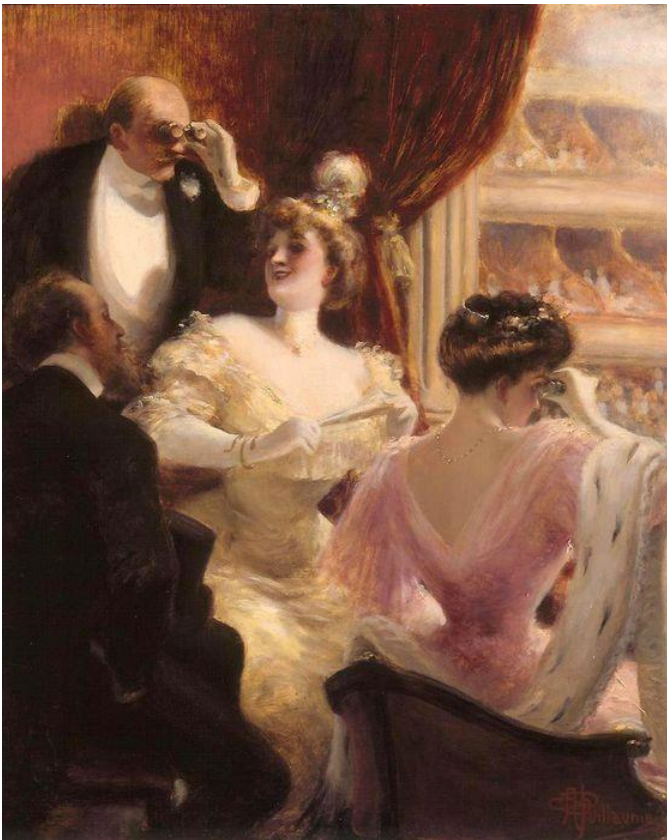


A performance at the ancient Greek theatre at Epidaurus.

Roman theatre developed in much the same way as the Greeks—with comedy, tragedy, and festivals—but then moved on to less uplifting subject matter with violent spectator sports such as gladiator fights and public executions.

Next came the Dark Ages when theatre pretty much disappeared, along with all other arts and culture. During the Middle Ages, the arts began to re-emerge within the church as a method to teach an illiterate population. Church music and stained glass windows were a way to preach the Bible to those who couldn't read it. For the same reason, the church began to develop medieval "Mystery Plays": quasi-theatrical productions that moved to different locations much like traveling "stations of the cross." To spread their message to the broadest section of the population, these plays left the confines of the church building and began to travel on what were known as "pageant wagons." Each wagon held one scene, and a series of wagons hooked together permitted a company to tell an entire story. Rather than sitting in front of a single stage where scenery was changed in front of them, the audience stood and moved from wagon to wagon.

The Renaissance was a great flowering of arts and culture outside the church, and theatre once again became very popular in Italy, Spain, France, and England. During the Elizabethan period, theatre companies were awarded status and privilege based on patronage from wealthy landholders or the royal family. With patronage came money, so the companies began building theatres. The theatre of Shakespeare's day was inexpensive, popular, and considered to be an incredibly good time. The cheap seats were so cheap, there were no seats: half the audience stood around the stage for a penny, while those who could afford two or three pence sat in the octagonal stalls surrounding the pit. A few of the richest patrons might even sit on the stage itself. Elizabethan audiences did not know what it meant to be quiet for a performance, and they would talk back to the actors as well as each other.



In the 17th and 18th centuries, theatre became a luxury. For the almost entirely upper-class audience, the purpose of going to the theatre was "to see, and to be seen." The auditorium became a rectangular surrounded by boxes that were just as important as the stage. The house lights were up full not so the audience could see the action on the stage, but so they could see *each other* better. There were a lot of light, fluffy comedies performed in an oratory style—actors wearing big costumes and doing a lot of posing. At the same time, opera developed along the same lines, with even larger, more ornate theatres filled with audiences showing off more opulent clothes. Theatre and opera were social events as much as if not more than cultural events.

La loge au theatre by Albert Guillaume.

In the mid-1800s along came opera composer Richard Wagner, one of the biggest egos in the history of art. He wanted audiences to focus exclusively on his music, so he built his own theatre with no boxes to show off in and all the seats facing the stage. And then he turned off the house lights, so even if the audience wanted to look at each other, they couldn't: they were forced to watch the performance.

Around this same time, theatre began to move away from its poetic and epic roots and began trying to create a more realistic world onstage. Plays were less about kings and gods and more about middle-class men and women in their living rooms and kitchens. Instead of plays that were frankly theatrical, and characters who fully acknowledged the presence of the audience, there developed the idea of the "fourth wall," and audiences became silent eavesdroppers through an invisible barrier.

For the past one hundred years or so, except for a flare-up of experimental theatre in the sixties and seventies, fourth-wall realism has been the norm. Even musicals, which can be very presentational in their songs and dances, have tended to be more tradition in their book scenes. Today, however, just about anything goes. The pendulum is swinging back towards theatre that is intrinsically "theatrical"—less realistic, less linear, with each new play showing us a new twist in form and structure. These new twists require that audiences be more nimble, more open to new ideas, and more willing to go along with the ride, wherever it takes us.

For example, *Every Brilliant Thing* asks for a level of audience participation that many theatregoers may have never experienced before. Before the show begins, you will meet our actor, Marcus Truschinski, right in the seats. He will be passing out lines from the play for members of the audience to read when called upon. During the play itself, he might ask you to play a character. He might ask you to get up out of your seat. Don't be afraid! If you really just want to sit back and watch, he won't force you. But if you are so inclined, we think you will find that you will love being part of this unique show, as well as part of the audience.



Marcus Truschinski in
the IRT production of
Every Brilliant Thing.
Photo by
Zach Rosing.

MUSIC IN THE PLAY

A number of great 20th century musicians are mentioned in the play, and their music may be heard as well.

Cannonball Adderley

Cannonball Adderley (1928-1975) was a jazz alto saxophonist. His best-known song, “Mercy, Mercy, Mercy,” was a crossover hit on the pop charts in 1966. He led a variety of bands during his career.

Albert Ayler

Albert Ayler (1936-1970) was an avant-garde jazz saxophonist, singer, and composer whose stylistically unorthodox work is associated with the free jazz music of the 1960s. He was found dead in New York City’s East River in November 1970; his death was ruled a suicide.

Cab Calloway

Cab Calloway (1907-1994) was an American jazz singer and bandleader, known for his mastery of scat singing. He also appeared in a variety of films and a handful of stage musicals.

Ray Charles

Ray Charles (1930-2004) was a singer-songwriter and composer who pioneered the genre of soul music in the 1950s by combining blues, jazz, and gospel styles to create a new sound. In 2002, *Rolling Stone* ranked Charles number 10 on its list of the 100 Greatest Artists of All Time, as well as giving him the number two spot on their list of 100 Greatest Singers of All Time.

John Coltrane

John Coltrane (1926-1967) was a jazz saxophonist and composer, a pioneer in the genre of free jazz considered one of the most significant saxophonists in music history. His awards and honors include a 1997 Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and a 2007 special Pulitzer Prize.

Duke Ellington

Duke Ellington (1899-1974) was a composer, pianist, and bandleader, and is considered among the most influential jazz musicians of all time. His awards and honors include the 1969 President Medal of Freedom and a posthumous special Pulitzer Prize for music in 1999.



Duke Ellington

Bill Evans

Bill Evans (1929-1980) was a jazz pianist and composer. His honors include seven Grammy Awards out of 31 nominations, and a spot in the Jazz Hall of Fame.

Ella Fitzgerald

Ella Fitzgerald (1917-1996) was a jazz singer and one of the most influential musicians in jazz history. She was known for the flexibility and expansive range of her powerful voice, as well as for her ability to vocally mimic a variety of musical instruments. Her awards and honors include the National Medal of Art and the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Ella Fitzgerald



Donny Hathaway

Donny Hathaway (1945-1979) was an American jazz, blues, soul, and gospel singer, songwriter, and pianist. His best-known composition is the Christmas classic “This Christmas.” Regarded today as one of the most significant influences on the tradition of American soul music, Hathaway died young, committing suicide at age 33 after a long struggle with mental illness.

Billie Holiday

Billie Holiday (1915–1959) was a jazz singer who had a seminal influence on jazz music and pop singing. Strongly inspired by jazz instrumentalists, she pioneered a new way of manipulating phrasing and tempo. Poor health, coupled with a string of abusive relationships and ongoing drug and alcohol abuse, caused her voice to wither over the years before she died at 44.

The Ink Spots

The Ink Spots were an American pop group comprised of vocalists Bill Kenny, Deek Watson, Charlie Fuqua, and Orville “Hoppy” Jones. The group formed in Indianapolis in the early 1930s, and in the 1940s they had more than 30 hits on the U.S. pop charts, several of which reached number one.

Weldon Irvine

Weldon Irvine (1943-2002) was a composer, playwright, poet, and pianist. As a musician, he was involved with jazz, funk, hip hop, R&B, and gospel. He wrote more than 500 songs, including the lyrics to Nina Simone’s 1969 hit “To Be Young, Gifted, and Black,” which became a civil rights anthem. In 2002 he shot himself in front of the Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York.

Etta James

Etta James (1938–2012) was a singer who performed in various genres, including blues, R&B, soul, rock and roll, jazz, and gospel. Her powerful, deep, earthy voice bridged the gap between rhythm and blues and rock and roll. She won six Grammy Awards and 17 Blues Music Awards.

Daniel Johnston

Daniel Johnston (b. 1961) is a singer-songwriter associated with lo-fi and alternative music. Active since 1978, Johnston has released a number of studio albums and is also an author of comic books. Johnston's life-long struggle with mental illness is the subject of the 2005 documentary film *The Devil and Daniel Johnston*.

Curtis Mayfield

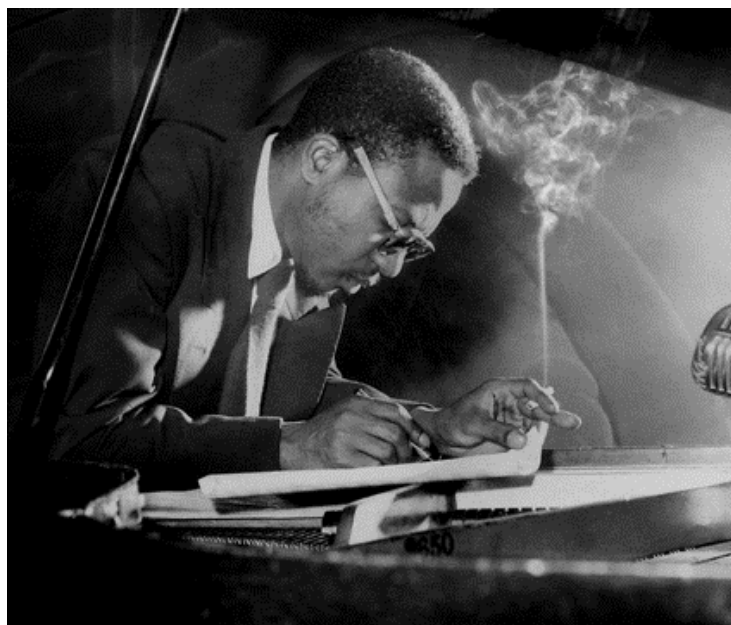
Curtis Mayfield (1942-1999) was an American singer-songwriter, guitarist, and record producer, and one of the most influential artists in the genre of soul music. Mayfield is credited with bringing greater social consciousness to African-American music.

Hank Mobley

Hank Mobley (1930-1986) was a hard bop and soul jazz tenor saxophonist and composer described by music critic Stacia Proefrock as "one of the most underrated musicians of the bop era."

Thelonius Monk

Thelonious Monk (1917–1982) was a jazz pianist and composer. He had a unique improvisational style and made numerous contributions to the standard jazz repertoire, perhaps most famously "Round Midnight." His compositions and improvisations feature dissonances and angular melodic twists. He is the second-most-recorded jazz composer after Duke Ellington, which is particularly remarkable as Ellington composed more than a thousand pieces, whereas Monk wrote about 70.



Thelonius Monk

Nina Simone

Nina Simone (1933–2003) was a singer, songwriter, pianist, arranger, and activist in the Civil Rights Movement. Her music spanned a broad range of musical styles including classical, jazz, blues, folk, R&B, gospel, and pop. She is considered one of the most influential singers of the 20th century.

Ronnie Singer

Ronnie Singer (1928-1953) was a jazz guitarist from Chicago. During his brief career, he played with such jazz legends as Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. Although no professional recordings of Singer's work exist, he was a significant influence on other jazz guitarists. In 1953, at age 25, Singer, along with his wife, committed suicide in a New York hotel room.

Sarah Vaughan

Sarah Vaughan (1924–1990) was a jazz singer who won four Grammy Awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award. She was given an NEA Jazz Masters Award in 1989.

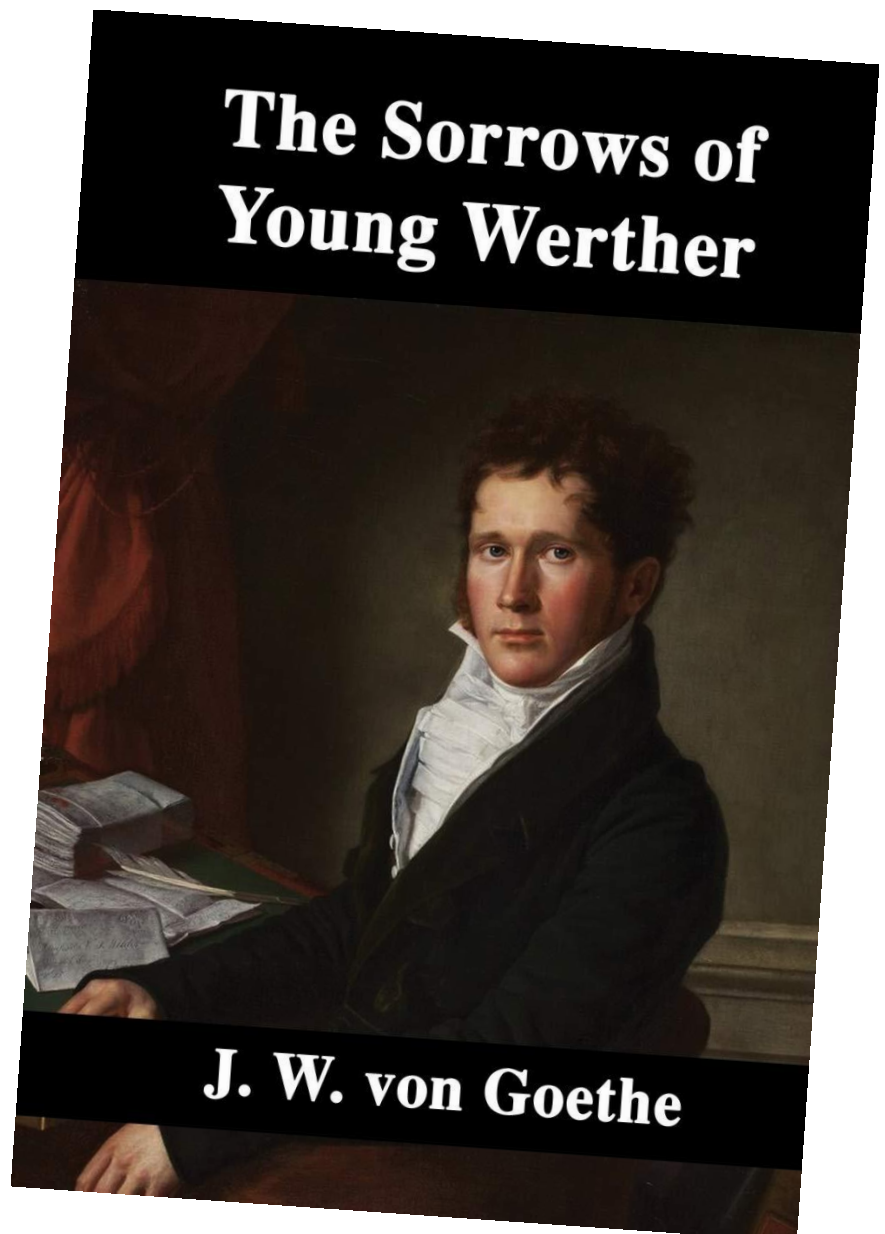
THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER

The Sorrows of Young Werther was written by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1774. Goethe (1749-1832) was a German writer and statesman and one of the most influential figures in German literary and intellectual history. He wrote novels, poetry, and verse drama, as well as works on botany and mineralogy. He was a major influence on such important thinkers as Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, and Emerson.

The Sorrows of Young Werther is a novella, a work of fiction longer than a short story but shorter than a novel (generally 7,500-40,000 words). First introduced during the Renaissance (where it acquired its name from the Italian word *novella*, meaning “a tale” or “a piece of news”), the novella flourished in nineteenth-century Germany. Other popular novellas include *Death in Venice* (1912) by Thomas Mann (1875-1955), *The Metamorphosis* (1915) by Franz Kafka (1883-1924), and *A Christmas Carol* (1843) by Charles Dickens (1912-1870).

Written in the form of a collection of letters, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* tells the story of a young artist, Werther, who pines over his unrequited love for Charlotte, who is engaged to another man. The book's publication made Goethe an instant celebrity, despite controversy over Werther's suicide at the story's conclusion.

Following its publication in 1774, the popularity of *The Sorrows of Young Werther* resulted in a number of copycat suicides in which young men would dress up in clothing such as Werther is described as wearing and shoot themselves, often with a copy of the book in hand. This phenomenon led to the novel being banned for a time in Denmark and Italy.



ALIGNMENT GUIDE

Seeing a performance at 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 and comprehend a variety of literature independently and proficiently
- RL.2 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by analyzing, inferring, and drawing conclusions about literary elements, themes, and central ideas
 - Sample: 9-10.RL.2.2: *Analyze in detail the development of two or more themes or central ideas over the course of a work of literature, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details.*
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
 - Sample: 11-12.RL.3.2: *Analyze a work of literature in which the reader must distinguish between what is directly stated and what is intended (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement) in order to understand the point of view.*
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

READING - NONFICTION

- RN.2 – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills
 - Sample: 8.RN.2.3: *Analyze how a text makes connections and distinctions among individuals, events, and ideas.*

READING - VOCABULARY

- RV.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature and nonfiction texts by determining or clarifying figurative, connotative, and technical meanings
 - Sample: 9-10.RV.3.3: *Interpret figures of speech (e.g., euphemism, oxymoron) in context and analyze their role in the text.*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW

What are some of the ways in which different people deal with their problems? What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of working things out on your own? ... seeking help from others? ... expressing your feelings or holding them inside?

AFTER SEEING THE SHOW

Why do you suppose the playwrights chose not to give their central character a name? How do names define us? What possibilities or opportunities are created by the lack of a name?



Compare the boy's relationship with his mother to his relationship with his father. How are they alike? How are they different? What do you imagine the parents' relationship was to each other? How does this family dynamic compare to the man's relationship with Sam?

Although the mother never talks with her son about the list, how does she respond to it in different ways? At one point he says, "The list hadn't stopped her. Hadn't saved her. Of course it hadn't." Do you agree? Why or why not?

The original short story that is the basis of the play is entitled "Sleeve Notes." What are sleeve notes? How does this title suggest an analogy to the play itself?

When his mother dies, the Man says, "After the service ... I realized how much the list had changed the way I see the world." How has it changed him? How do his feelings about the list change over the years? How does the list affect others?

During the play, the Man says, "I now realize it's important to talk about things. Particularly the things that are the hardest to talk about." What is hard for people to talk about? Why are they hard to talk about? Why is it important to talk about them? What are the consequences of not talking about them? What are the benefits of talking about them?

*Marcus Truschinski in the IRT production of Every Brilliant Thing.
Photo by Zach Rosing.*

WRITING PROMPTS

Read the original short story “Sleeve Notes”: <https://www.atthekitchentable.com/sleeve-notes/>

Write a paper comparing the story to the play. How are they different? How are they alike? Why do you suppose the playwrights added the character of Sam and the plotline of marriage? Why do you suppose the playwrights decided to use so much audience participation to tell their story? How does this element tie into the themes of the play?

In the play, the Man talks about how he first learned about death as a child, with the death of his dog. Write about your own first experience of death and mortality. How did it affect you at the time? How did you react? When you look back on that experience, what do you understand or question now that you didn’t then? What have subsequent experiences taught you about life, death, and mortality?

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’ performance 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.irt@gmail.com

ACTIVITIES

With the considerable amount of audience participation in *Every Brilliant Thing*, it is easy to see how improvisation is an important part of the play. Find some improv activities to do with your class at these websites:

<https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/improv-games-for-collaboration/>

<http://improvcyclopedia.org/games/>

<https://funattic.com/improv-games/>

<http://www.bringyourownimprov.com/Games.htm>

<https://www.dramatoolkit.co.uk/drama-games/category/improvisation>

RESOURCES

FOR DEPRESSION & SUICIDE

WEBSITES

<http://www.havehope.com>

Community Health Network

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/chat/>

Lifeline Crisis Chat is a service of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. This free service can provide online emotional support, crisis intervention, and suicide prevention services. Connect with chat specialist 24/7 from your computer.

PHONE NUMBERS

National Hotline | 800.273.8255

If you're in a crisis, having suicidal thoughts or emotional distress, call this national hotline for free 24/7.

Community Behavioral Health Services | 317.621.5700

To schedule an appointment with a mental health professional, call Community Behavioral Health Services at 317.621.5700.

APPS

Jason Foundation: A Friend Asks

A free app that provides the information, tools and resources to help a friend (or yourself) who may be struggling with thoughts of suicide.

Lifebuoy

A free self-help app that assists suicide survivors as they normalize their lives after a recent attempt.

For direct links to these apps, go to:

<http://www.havehope.com/teen/resources/>

GLOSSARY

adrenalin

Adrenalin is a hormone produced by the adrenal glands that plays an important role in the fight-or-flight response. Adrenalin increases blood flow to the muscles, output of the heart, and blood sugar.

Andre Agassi

Andre Agassi (b. 1970) is a retired professional tennis player and former world number one champion considered to be one of the greatest tennis players of all time.

anti-depressants

Antidepressants first became prescription drugs in the 1950s, although it was estimated that no more than 100 individuals per million were treatable with these new drugs, and pharmaceutical companies did not market them enthusiastically. Fluoxetine was discovered by Eli Lilly and Company in 1972 and approved by the FDA in 1988. Sold as Prozac, within a year annual sales in the United States reached \$350 million, and worldwide sales eventually reached a peak of \$2.6 billion a year. By 2010, the 19 most popular anti-depressants were each being prescribed to between 3 and 33 million patients. In the United States, antidepressants are today the most commonly prescribed medication; roughly 70% of patients are female and 30% are male.

antihistamines

Antihistamines treat allergies. They can temporarily relieve sneezing, nasal congestion, and hives resulting from dust mites, pollen, or animal allergies.

aromatic duck pancakes with hoisin sauce

Aromatic duck pancakes are a classic Chinese dish. Rather than resembling the Western version of a pancake, they consist of pieces of duck breast coated in aromatic liquor (a seasoning containing peppercorns, sherry, and onions, among other ingredients). Hoisin sauce is a sweet, dark, spicy sauce made from soybeans, vinegar, sugar, garlic, and spices.



aspirin

Aspirin is used to treat fever, pain, and inflammation. It is one of the most widely used medications globally, with an estimated 44,000 tons consumed each year.

Marlon Brando

Marlon Brando (1924-2004) is credited with helping to bring realism to American film acting. His career included Oscar-winning performances in *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *The Godfather* (1972), as well as originating the role of Stanley Kowalski in Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway in 1947. Brando remains a major cultural icon.

cortisol

Cortisol is a steroid hormone released by the human body in response to stress. Its functions include increasing blood sugar, suppressing the immune system, and aiding in the metabolism of fat and carbohydrates.

Gustav Mahler

Gustav Mahler (1860-1911) was an Austrian composer of the late Romantic period and one of the leading conductors of his time. In researching a 2010 book about Mahler, British musicologist Norman Lebrecht discovered that one of Mahler's close relatives emigrated to the United States, where a family member became linked to a family of African-American and French creole descent—ancestors of Beyoncé.



*Gustav Mahler & Beyoncé—
distant cousins.*

Mexican wrestler

Professional wrestling in Mexico is known as *lucha libre* (literally, “free fight”). Masks have been significant to Mexico since the days of the Aztecs, and have been used in *lucha libre* since the early part of the 20th century to evoke the images of animals, gods, ancient heroes, and other archetypes, whose identity the *luchador* takes on during a performance.

Marilyn Monroe

Marilyn Monroe (1926-1962) was one of the most famous sex symbols of the 1950s and remains a major cultural icon. She often played comic, stereotypically empty-headed “blonde bombshell” roles—an image that she purposefully cultivated early in her career, but later struggled to break away from. After only a decade as a major star, she was found dead in her home, an apparent suicide. According

to one study, the number of suicides in the United States in the ensuing months jumped by 12 percent compared with the same months in the previous year—from around 1600 to 1800 per month.

Mork & Mindy

Mork & Mindy was a TV sitcom that aired from 1978 to 1982. The series starred Robin Williams (1951-2014) as Mork, an extraterrestrial from the planet Ork trying to understand human behavior, and Pam Dawber (b. 1951) as Mindy, Mork's human friend, roommate, and eventual wife.

palindrome

A palindrome is any word, phrase, or number that is the same backwards and forwards. Examples: mom, racecar, 2002, "a man, a plan, a canal – Panama."

pentobarbital

Pentobarbital is a short-acting barbiturate, a drug that acts as a central nervous system depressant and can produce a wide range of effects from mild sedation to total anesthesia. Pentobarbital is used for the purpose of euthanasia for both humans and animals.

plinth

In architecture, a plinth is a square slab or pedestal at the base of a column. The word may also refer to any block or pedestal on which an object such as a vase or statue is displayed.

The Samaritans

The Samaritans is a registered British charity that strives to provide emotional support for people at risk for suicide in the United Kingdom and Ireland, primarily via their 24-hour phone hotline. Founded in 1953, the Samaritans extend their work internationally through Befrienders Worldwide, an organization of more than 400 centers in 38 nations, including the United States. The Samaritans' list of media guidelines for reporting on suicide was published in 2013, and the organization has since received a number of awards recognizing its work in influencing the way suicide is reported.

vinyl records

Early phonograph records were made of highly breakable shellac. Records made of polyvinyl chloride became widely used in the 1950s and remained so until the emergence of the compact disc in the 1980s. In recent years, vinyl has experienced a resurgence in popularity among audiophiles.



Marcus Truschinski in the IRT production of Every Brilliant Thing. Photo by Zach Rosing.

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:

Leave mp3 players, cameras, mobile phones, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home.

You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.

Food and drink must stay in the lobby.

The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.

Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.

Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.

Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show.

Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.

Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.

Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call because this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

