



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

ON GOLDEN POND

by Ernest Thompson

April 14 – May 10, 2015, on the OneAmerica Stage

STUDY GUIDE

edited by Richard J Roberts

with contributions by Janet Allen

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Indiana Repertory Theatre

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On Golden Pond

by Ernest Thompson

As Ethel and Norman return to the familiar summer ritual of their tranquil vacation home on the water, they get a surprise guest in the form of their daughter's young stepson-to-be. Through the eyes of three generations, we experience the labors and liveliness of a couple in the midst of their twilight years, and are reminded that each moment is a gift we share with those we love.

Ernest Thompson's *On Golden Pond* is a captivating study in character, relationships, and overcoming the past. Norman has begun struggling with memory loss, yet finds comfort in making new memories with his grandson-to-be. His faithful wife Ethel confronts their daughter about her strained relationship with her father by illuminating uncomfortable moments in their past. *On Golden Pond* offers students a chance to engage in character analysis and to explore mood and tone by analyzing the significance of setting.

Estimated length: 2 hours, 30 minutes, including 1 intermission

Recommended for students in grades 7 through 12.

Themes, Issues, & Topics

Relationships between parents and children

Impact of aging on one's self-image

Importance of relationships to make life enjoyable

Inter-generational relationships adding to the richness of life

Student Matinees at 10:00 A.M. on April 22, 23, 28

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Beneath the Surface

by Janet Allen, Executive Artistic Director

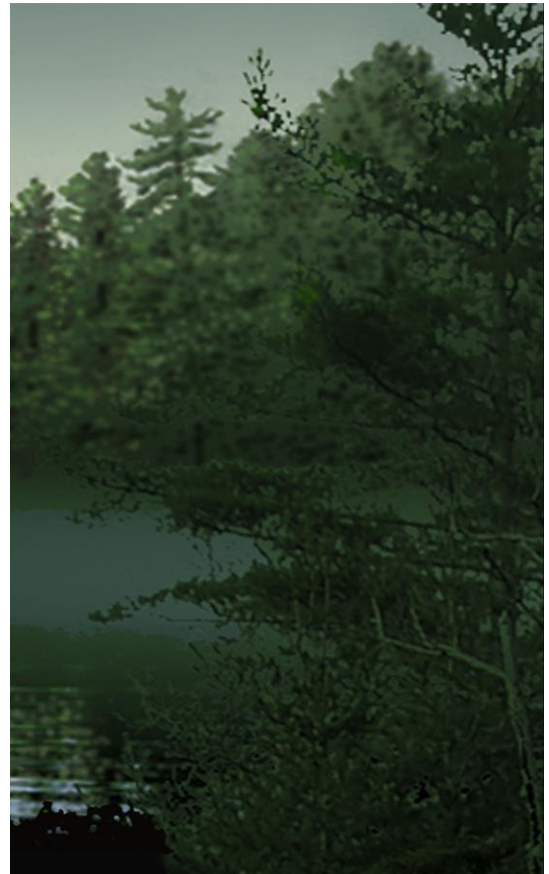
On Golden Pond hits most of us in a variety of places of longing: nostalgia for the kind of old-fashioned family play written in great profusion in the mid 20th century; desire for that ancestral cabin on the picture-perfect lake; yearning for unfolding weeks of summers to spend in it, nothing to do but read, fish, take walks, skinny dip, evenings on the screen porch, endless games of cards.... It sounds like a giant exhale of relief!

What most of us remember about this stage and screen chestnut is the crotchety Norman and his all-forgiving wife, Ethel, in pictorial flashes of the many celebrities who have played these roles over the years. What we don't tend to remember is what's underneath. And that's where the play surprises us.

On Golden Pond is actually a three-generational tug of war that is incredibly insightful about American family culture: about adult children having difficulty finding their way; about young children, the products of divorce, having to cope with changing circumstances; and of course about the travails of aging in a culture that doesn't do nearly enough to honor its elders. Despite the fact that Ernest Thompson was only 28 when he wrote the play, he had tremendous insight into all three of the generations onstage.

At the very heart of the play is the story of a father and daughter who somehow missed each other—who failed to figure out how to connect and stay connected. Nothing significant caused this fissure, just the day-to-day kinds of slights and overlooked hurt feelings that constitute many lives. They each need the other to initiate, to make a gesture.... What we, as audience members experience is the missed opportunities that happen to all of us when we aren't paying full attention to the signs.

One of the great beauties of the play is its unanswered questions: Is this Norman and Ethel's last summer on the pond? Will they see more of Chelsea in her new life? Will Billy's attentions spur Norman on to taking a new interest in living? Just as in life, many things remain unresolved, unfinished, like a refrain that dies away but might easily revive again. It reminds us to pay attention, not only to the beauty of the places we love, but to the beauty of the people we love, no matter their age.



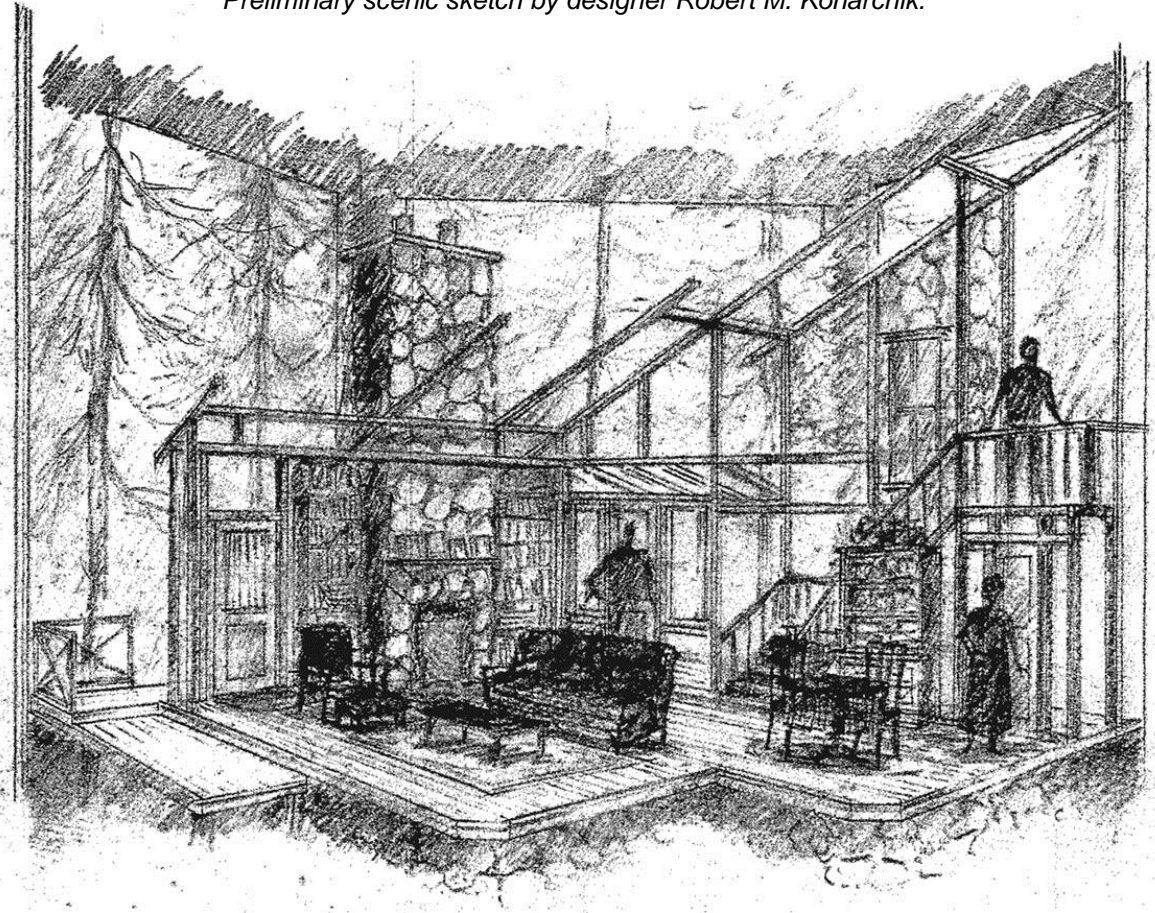
This composite image created by designer Robert M. Koharchik from a variety of sources is featured as part of the scenic backdrop for On Golden Pond.

Summer in Maine

Robert M. Koharchik Scenic Designer

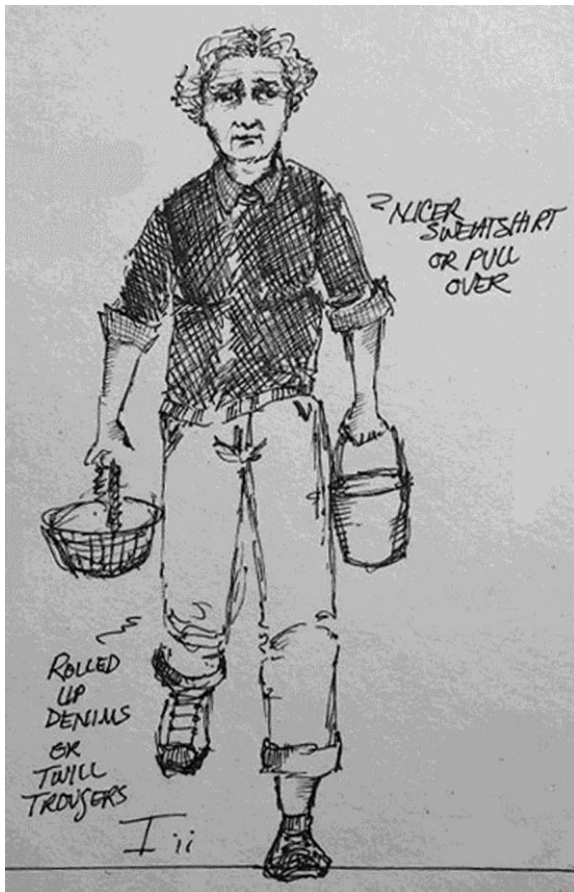
The design for this production set out to accomplish two things. The first is to establish the house where many summers have been spent and lasting memories created by the Thayer family. The second is to include in the overall environment a sense of the area around the house and give the lake a presence onstage, a view that is more than just a small glimpse outside a window.

Preliminary scenic sketch by designer Robert M. Koharchik.



Betsy Coopridier-Bernstein Lighting Designer

From summer weeks spent on Trout Lake in northern Wisconsin in the late 1980s, I feel a nostalgic affinity for the Thayers' wooded sanctuary on the shores of Golden Pond. There is clarity in the air and a particular quality of northern light as it reflects off rippling lake water that can make everything look quite magical. On early morning fishing jaunts with my husband, Alan, I often felt more triumphant catching a glimpse of those iconic loons than catching perch for dinner. Later in the day, the loons' soulful cries would beckon us down to the water's edge as the glow of sunset faded behind the distant tree line. Lingering at the dock, we would relive the day, wishing that time could indeed stand still. I have called upon my memories of Trout Lake to inspire choices in color, angle, intensity, and the movement of light in our very own lake house that now sits on the IRT stage at 140 West Washington Street.



Linda Pisano Costume Designer

The approach to the costumes for our production of *On Golden Pond* is not focused on period accuracy, but rather the timelessness of the storytelling. Although clearly there is a specific era of clothing involved, the garments should evoke a sense of how each character enters this lake house. The clothing will reveal not only the biography of the characters' lives up to this point; but some characters, such as Norman, Billy, and Ethel, will develop subtly in their details over the course of the play. The palette is controlled to imply the changing of the seasons. Overall, there is a very diverse range of ages, experiences, and geography among the characters, and the intent is that the gritty, lived-in quality of the clothing will suggest the nuances and personal idiosyncrasies of each character.

Preliminary costume sketches for Ethel (left) and Norman (below) by designer Linda Pisano.

Richard K. Thomas Sound Designer

Very few plays devote their titles to location. *On Golden Pond* is one such play. A pond in Maine. Set over five months that traverse what might be the last summer spent there by Norman and Ethel. What does that *place* sound like? How do those sounds evoke that potentially final journey? Perhaps more importantly, another journey takes place: the journey of self-discovery, even in our twilight years. What does that journey sound like? And who better than Carrie Newcomer to help guides us through it? After 18 albums, this Indiana native has become something of an icon across the country and around the world. *Rolling Stone* describes her impact as "Rapturously tuneful," adding that "Newcomer's material asks all the right questions and refuses to settle for easy answers." Carrie's music scrupulously searches for "the sacred in the ordinary" and helps us to discover those simple joys in Norman and Ethel's journey.



The Cry of the Loon

The silence of the predawn hours in the northern reaches of the Connecticut River Valley is occasionally shattered by an unearthly tremolo cry, difficult to describe and impossible to forget - almost like a demented person laughing. The caller is a common loon, one of the oldest ("most primitive") birds known.

There are five species of loon, but the one most common in New England is the common loon. This species spends the summers in the northern parts of New England, normally nesting along the shores of the many lakes and ponds of New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont, as well as the eastern Canadian provinces. However, because there is competition for food, some loons can be seen diving for fish in the River. The birds then migrate to coastal waters (from the Chesapeake Bay to the Gulf of Mexico) for the winter.



Loons are large birds, with wing spans approaching four feet, but they are also relatively heavy birds so the large wings are essential. They are extremely efficient diving birds, and their legs are set well back on the body, which aids in propulsion in the water but makes navigating on land nearly impossible. A loon is vulnerable on land because it can only thrust its chest forward a few inches and drag the legs back underneath the body. As a result, loons leave the water only to nest (very close to the shoreline) and to defecate.

Loons feed on fish and other aquatic life. They overwinter in southern waters, primarily because they must have an expanse of open water (sometimes as much as 400 yards) to get airborne. They return to northern waters in the spring, where the longer days provide ample time for the biologically expensive activities of laying eggs and raising chicks. Loons typically produce two eggs each year. Incubation takes about 28 days, and the parents share the nest duty equally. The average loon pair in New Hampshire fledges one chick each year - heat stress during incubation and predation by large bass and raptorial birds shortly after a chick hatches take their toll.



When the chicks hatch (usually around July 4th in New England), they immediately make their way to the nearby water and leave it only to defecate. The adults now take on the substantial challenge of feeding the babies and themselves - diving for 30 to 50 seconds at a time, catching fish, and feeding them directly to the chicks. During the first week, a chick may crawl on to the back of a parent which is paddling along on the surface. Chicks stay very close to the parents for the first three weeks, and respond immediately to calls warning of birds (or airplanes) flying overhead by scrambling under an adult's wing. The chicks grow very rapidly and are nearly the size of the adults within four to six weeks. They also begin to demonstrate independence, seeking their own food, diving, and exercising their wing muscles. They retain their dull grey back plumage during that time, although the belly turns white.

As winter approaches, the adults congregate with other adults in the region and migrate to more southern waters. Although loons mate for life and normally return to the same territory they occupied the previous year, a pair does not necessarily migrate together, and may not be reunited until the following year. Similarly, juveniles congregate with others in autumn and travel together - leaving before the northern ponds and lakes are covered with ice.

—*Patricia Vittum, Biology Department, University of Massachusetts Amherst*



The Real Golden Pond

Golden Pond is fictional. Playwright Ernest Thompson took his inspiration from Great Pond in Maine, where his family began spending summers in 1903.

Great Pond is located in Kennebec County in southern Maine. The southern tip of Great Pond is about 13 miles north of downtown Augusta (the capital of Maine), and about 7 miles north of the Augusta city limits. The nearest towns to Great Pond are Rome, about 1 mile northwest, and Belgrade, about 3 miles south. Great Pond stretches 7 mile at its longest point and 4 miles at its widest point. It covers 8, 500 acres (13 square miles) and has a shoreline of 46 miles. Its average depth is 21 feet, and its deepest point is 69 feet. Great Pond is one of the largest bodies of water in the world named a pond.

Although Camp Koochakiyi, mentioned several times in the play, is fictional, Camp Runoia is a girls' camp that has been operating on Great Pond since 1907.



Indiana Academic Standards Alignment Guide

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
- RL.3 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature, using knowledge of literary structure and point of view
- RL.4 – Build comprehension and appreciation of literature by connecting various literary works and analyzing how medium and interpretation impact meaning

- Sample: *11-12.RL.2.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).*
 - Using evidence from the play, explain the significance of the home on Golden Pond to each character in the play. How does the symbolism and meaning change from character to character? Over time?
- Sample: *9-10.RL.2.3: Analyze how dynamic characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.*
 - Identify and explain the central conflict faced by Norman Thayer, and analyze how it affects the other characters in the play. Use examples from the play to support your conclusions.

Reading – Nonfiction

- RN.2 – Extract and construct meaning from nonfiction texts using a range of comprehension skills.
- Sample: *8.RN.2.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what a text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.*
 - Read [this review](#) from a production of *On Golden Pond* on Broadway. Determine or identify the reviewer's overall feeling for the production and explain which parts of the text lead you to that conclusion, and why.

Resources

Books

The Big House: A Century in the Life of an American Summer Home

by George Howe Colt (2003)

The Outermost House: A Year of Life on the Great Beach of Cape Cod

by Henry Beston (1928)

On the Water: A Fishing Memoir by Guy de la Valdene (2015)

The Truth about Children and Divorce: Dealing with the Emotions

So You and Your Children Can Thrive by Robert E. Emery (2004)

The Forgetting—Alzheimer's: Portrait of an Epidemic by David Shenk (2001)

Losing My Mind: An Intimate Look at Life with Alzheimer's by Thomas DeBaggio (2002)

We Are Not Ourselves by Matthew Thomas (2014)

DVDs

On Golden Pond (1981)

Still Alice (2014)

Up (2009)

A River Runs Through It (1992)

The Whales of August (1987)

Do You Remember Love (1985)

The Grapes of Wrath (1940)

Websites

<http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/place-beyond-words-literature-alzheimers>

an article about recent novels dealing with Alzheimer's

<http://www.alz.org/>

Alzheimer's Association

<http://completenewengland.com/2011/07/23/complete-new-england-guide-to-lakes-of-new-england/>

<http://www.fisheyesoup.com/>

fishing search engine and directory

<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/family-divorce/children-and-divorce.htm>

<http://ernestthompson.us/>

Pre-Show Questions

Think of a situation in which multiple generations in your family, church, or neighborhood have spent time together. How do different generations' views on certain situations and issues differ? How are they the same? How do different generations choose to spend their time and energy? What kinds of situations push generations apart? What activities can bring generations together? What can young people learn from seniors? What can seniors learn from young people?

It has often been said that we choose our friends, but we cannot choose our relatives? How do family relationships differ from friendships? How are they the same? Why are some family relationships more challenging than others?

Post-Show Questions

Which character did you enjoy the most and why? Discuss how the actor's depiction of the character brought the playwright's creation to life for you.

On Golden Pond was first produced in 1979. In the play, Norman says a number of things which today might be considered inappropriate, or politically incorrect. How do different generations view such issues? When, if ever, can such comments be viewed as harmless jokes, and when should we speak up about our discomfort? How do we judge the difference?

How does the playwright use the loons as a symbol? What other symbols can you find in the play? What do they suggest about content and theme?

The original 1979 Broadway production of *On Golden Pond* featured Tom Aldredge and Frances Sternhagen. The 1981 movie starred Katharine Hepburn and Henry Fonda, with Jane Fonda as their daughter. A 2001 live television broadcast starred Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer. A 2005 Broadway production featured an African American cast and starred James Earl Jones and Leslie Uggams. How do different actors affect the same story? If you were to film this story today, who would you cast?

What are the issues between Chelsea and Norman? How is each responsible for this conflict? What are the challenges of parent-child relationships? What can be done to help resolve these issues?

Writing Prompts

Write a review of the play. What moments made an impression on you? 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? Send your reviews to: education.irt@gmail.com

Billy spends one month with Norman and Ethel. Write series of three or four letters from Billy to his dad over this month. Show in your letters how Billy's response to the situation and his attitude change over the month.

Write a letter from Chelsea to her father, discussing her issues with him. Then write a letter from Norman to Chelsea, his response. Or, write a letter from Chelsea to her mother or to a friend, talking about her relationship with her father. Then write a response to that letter.

The Thayer family spends their summers on Golden Pond. How does your family spend vacation time? Write about your family away from home, whether it's your feelings about a place you've visited many times together, or the unique memory of a place you visited once.

Activities

Create an oral history. Interview a grandparent or another older person you know. Tape record your conversation. Ask about childhood events, adventures, family stories, how things have changed, how things are the same. Perhaps you might conduct your interview at your local history center, to prompt memories of different times. Perhaps you might transcribe your interview to create a written memoir.

Organize a junior-senior mixer. Bring your class to your local senior center for a dance party. Let each generation bring examples of favorite music. Teach each other the dance moves of your time.

After seeing *On Golden Pond* at the IRT, watch the movie, which was also written by Ernest Thompson. How are the two similar? How are they different? What things happen in the film that would be difficult to show on stage? What stage conventions have been discarded for the film? Which did you find more effective? Why?

Vocabulary

People

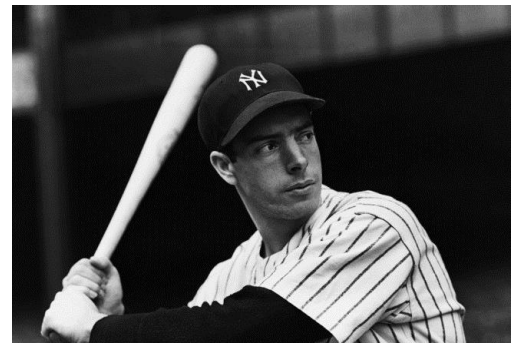
Aaron, Hank

Hank Aaron (born 1934) played as a right fielder in Major League Baseball from 1954 through 1976. He held the major league record for career home runs for 33 years, and he still holds several offensive records. He hit 24 or more home runs every year from 1955 through 1973, and is the only player to hit 30 or more home runs in a season at least fifteen times.



DiMaggio, Joe

Joe DiMaggio (1914–1999) played his entire 13-year career as a center fielder for the New York Yankees. He is perhaps best known for his 56-game hitting streak in 1941, a record that still stands. He was a three-time MVP winner and an All-Star in each of his 13 seasons.



Dumas, Alexandre, père

Alexandre Dumas, *père* (1802–1870), is one of the most widely read French authors. He is most famous for *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*. His son, Alexandre Dumas, *fils* (1824–1895), is best known for his play *Camille*.

Mussolini, Benito

Benito Mussolini (1883–1945) was leader of the National Fascist Party in Italy, ruling the country as Prime Minister from 1922 until his ousting in 1943. He ruled constitutionally until 1925, when he dropped all pretense of democracy and set up a legal dictatorship. Known as Il Duce ("the leader"), Mussolini was one of the key figures in the creation of fascism.

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), commonly known as FDR, served as the 32nd President of the United States. A Democrat, he won a record four elections and served from 1933 to his death in 1945. He was a central figure in world events during the mid-20th century, leading the United States during a time of worldwide economic depression and total war.

Saint Peter

In popular culture, St. Peter, one of the original 12 disciples, is often depicted as the doorkeeper at the gates of heaven. This image has developed from the description of Peter as "keeper of the keys of the kingdom of heaven" in Matthew 16:19.

Places

Augusta

Augusta is the capital of Maine. Its population is around 19,000, making it the third smallest state capital in the nation. It is the eighth largest city in Maine.

Bar Harbor

Bar Harbor is a popular tourist town on Mount Desert Island on the coast of Maine, about two hours east of Great Pond.

Brussels

Brussels is the capital and largest city of Belgium.

French Canada

Maine borders on Quebec, the center of French Canada, two-and-a-half hours north of Great Pond.

Newark

The largest city in New Jersey, second largest in the New York metropolitan area.

Portland

Portland is the largest city in Maine. It is located on the coast, about one hour southwest of Great Pond.

University of Pennsylvania

The University of Pennsylvania was founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1740 in Philadelphia. Today it has a student body of 24,000. US News and World Report ranks UPenn 8th in the nation, and its graduate English program 4th in the nation. *(below)*

Wilmington

Wilmington, Delaware, is a 30-minute drive southwest of the University of Pennsylvania. It is an 8-hour drive from Great Pond in Maine. It is the largest city in Delaware, with a current population of 70,000.



Things to Do on Golden Pond

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court is an 1889 novel by Mark Twain. In the book, a contemporary Yankee engineer from Connecticut is accidentally transported back in time to the court of King Arthur, where he uses his knowledge of modern technology to become a "magician". Twain wrote the book as a burlesque of Romantic notions of chivalry.

full gainer with a half twist

A gainer, also called a full gainer, is a type of dive in which the diver leaves the board facing forward and completes a full backward somersault to enter the water feet first with his or her back to the diving board. Adding a half twist, the diver would enter the water feet first but facing the diving board.

Monopoly

Monopoly is a board game that originated in the United States in 1903 as a way to demonstrate the evils of land ownership. The current version was first published by Parker Brothers in 1935.

Parcheesi

Parcheesi is an adaptation of the Indian cross and circle board game Pachisi, created in India as early as 500 CE. The modern American Parcheesi game was copyrighted in 1867. Today the name is owned by Parker Brothers, a subsidiary of Hasbro.



Parcheesi

Reader's Digest Abridged

The *Reader's Digest Condensed Books* were a direct-mail series issued four times each year beginning in 1950. Each contained five current best-selling novels and nonfiction books abridged specifically for *Reader's Digest*.

Swiss Family Robinson

The Swiss Family Robinson is a novel by Johann David Wyss, first published in 1812, about a family shipwrecked in the East Indies en route to Australia. Written by a German pastor, the novel was intended to teach his four sons about family values, good husbandry, the uses of the natural world, and self-reliance.

tollhouse cookies

The chocolate chip cookie was invented by Ruth Graves Wakefield, owner of the Toll House Inn in Whitman, Massachusetts. Her cookbook, *Toll House Tried and True Recipes*, was first published in 1936; the 1938 edition featured the "Toll House Chocolate Crunch Cookie."

Other Terms

chippies

The chipping sparrow is common throughout most of North America. They are gray below and an orangish-rust color above. Birdwatchers call them chippies.

hunky dory

The earliest known citations of this term are from the 1860s. The term *hunkey*, meaning fit and healthy, was already in existence, as was the term *hunkum-bunkum*, meaning the same as hunky dory. Where the *dory* part of the expression came from is unknown.

malaria

Malaria is an infectious disease transmitted by mosquito bite. It can cause fever, fatigue, vomiting, and headaches, and in extreme cases, seizures, coma, or death. It is most prevalent in tropical climates.

Nash

Nash cars were sold in the United States from 1916 to 1957, initially as a small independent company and later as a division of American Motors Corporation.

1950 Nash Ambassador



nitroglycerin

Nitroglycerin is used for the treatment of angina, acute myocardial infarction, severe hypertension, and coronary artery spasms.

old man of the sea

In Greek mythology, the Old Man of the Sea was a primordial figure who could be identified as any of several water-gods, generally Nereus or Proteus, but also Triton, Pontus, Phorcys, or Glaucus. He is the father of Thetis (the mother of Achilles).

Shylock

Derived from the principal character of Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*, the term shylock is generally used to identify a Jewish loan shark or usurer. Here, Norman is referring to his Jewish lawyer and suggesting that he is greedy. While the term has long been considered offensive, as late as the 1970s it was frequently used without comment or apology in casual conversation and print.

Works of Art – Kyle Ragsdale & the IRT

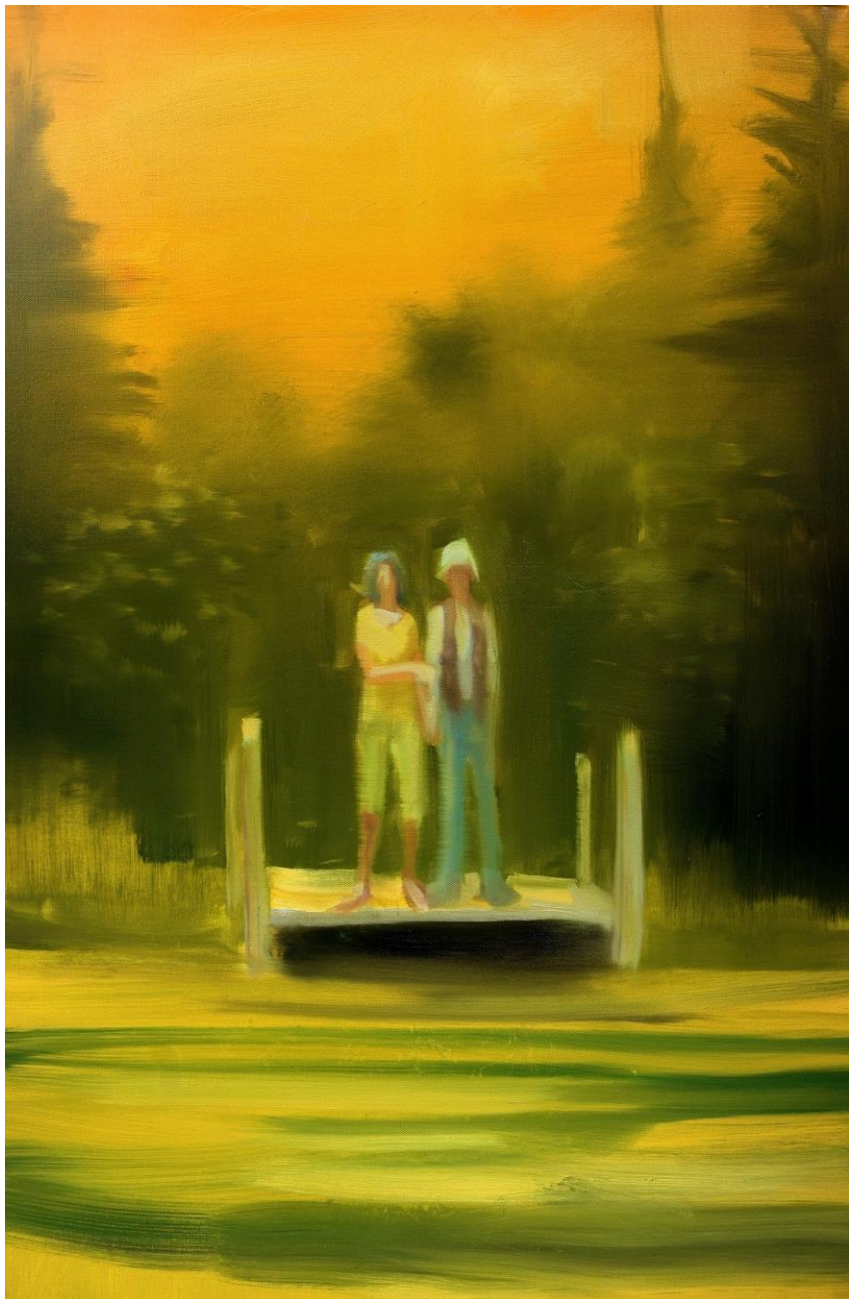
Last summer the IRT initiated a unique collaboration with one of Indianapolis's most prolific artists, Kyle Ragsdale. IRT executive artistic director Janet Allen worked with Kyle to create an original piece of art to represent each of the IRT's nine plays that make up the 2014-15 season. The IRT has used these images throughout the season and displayed them in the theatre. The IRT hosted a First Friday event in October to unveil these original pieces as well as some of Kyle Ragsdale's other pieces.

"I'd seen the movie when I was young, and in reading the play I hadn't seen the movie for a long time, but it seems like I remembered it as it was. There are a lot of different ways to think about visualizing that play.

When it came to painting, I thought of my friend Jill Ristine. She's kind of the woman figure, and the man kind of looks like her husband, Tom, but not too much. I really love the atmosphere of that painting and the light that is kind of dreamy. When so much of movie and TV culture focuses on youth, it's really interesting to think about a play that is about older people and how they face life and getting older. It's a good story."

—Kyle Ragsdale

On Golden Pond *by Kyle Ragsdale*



Going to the Theatre: Audience Role & Responsibility



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.