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OUR TOWN

by Thornton Wilder

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Teacher's Study Packet written & edited by Richard J Roberts & Milicent Wright

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Works of Thornton Wilder

Novels

The Cabala (1926)

The Bridge of San Luis Rey (1927—Pulitzer Prize)

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The Eighth Day (1967)

Theophilus North (1973)

Plays

The Trumpet Shall Sound (1920)

The Angel That Troubled the Waters (1928)

The Long Christmas Dinner (1931)

Pullman Car Hiawatha (1931)

The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden (1931)

Our Town (1938—Pulitzer Prize)

The Merchant of Yonkers (1938)

The Skin of Our Teeth (1942—Pulitzer Prize)

The Matchmaker (1954—a reworking of *The Merchant of Yonkers*)

(the basis for the 1964 musical *Hello Dolly!)*

The Alcestiad (1955)

Plays for Bleeker Street (1962)

Screenplay

Shadow of a Doubt (1943) (collaboration)

Other Works

American Characteristics and Other Essays (published 1979)

The Journals of Thornton Wilder, 1939-1961 (published 1985)

THORNTON WILDER
1897-1975

Thornton Wilder was known among his friends and colleagues for his wide range of interests and his ability to converse intelligently and entertainingly on any subject. Paul Lifton's book on Wilder's theatre work is called *Vast Encyclopedia*; Gilbert A. Harrison entitled his Wilder biography *The Enthusiast.* Wilder is the only writer in history to have won Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and drama.

Born in 1897, Thornton Niven Wilder was the grandson of two Congregationalist ministers. His father, Amos, studied economics and worked as a publisher and editor. He was a stern and iron-willed father. Thornton's mother, Isabella, loved culture and encouraged her son's artistic interests. Thornton had an older brother and three younger sisters. A twin born with Thornton died at birth, a loss he felt his entire life. The entire family was educated, devout, and active in their community.

Wilder's childhood ranged over a wide variety of environments. He was born in Madison, Wisconsin, the state capital, a small college city located on a scenic isthmus between two lakes. His family kept a lake cottage where they played under the trees and swam on hot afternoons and ate supper on the porch. Wilder spent part of his youth in Hong Kong and China while his father served as a diplomat. China's ancient culture and vast size left deep impressions on the adolescent, as did humanity's endurance despite crushing poverty and disease. He later attended high school in Berkeley, California, where he discovered theatre in the University of California, Berkeley's Greek amphitheatre, playing crowd parts in costumes his mother made.

After two years at Oberlin College in Ohio, Wilder transferred to Yale. His first full-length play, *The Trumpet Shall Sound,* was published in the *Yale Literary Magazine.* World War I raged in Europe, but Wilder's nearsightedness disqualified him from the Army. Eventually he left school to serve as a clerk in the U.S. Coast Guard Artillery Corps; the war ended two months later.

Wilder finished his degree at Yale in 1920 and sailed to Rome, where he studied archaeology at the American Academy. Digging into the ancient past and working with now-precious artifacts that had once been everyday objects intensified his awareness of the vastness of time and space, a feeling he had first experienced in China. He was fascinated by the way archaeologists found great secrets hidden in tiny fragments; he compared the process to looking through a microscope and a telescope at the same

time. His year in Rome forever changed his sense of his own significance in the universe.

Meanwhile, Wilder's father arranged a job for him teaching French at a prep school in New Jersey. After a few short weeks in Paris, Wilder returned to the United States and studied French at the Berlitz Language School. (Throughout his life he would read widely in English, French, and German, and converse in Italian and Spanish.) Although he was at first reluctant, he discovered that he loved teaching, and the students loved him; for the rest of his life he referred to himself as an educator first and a writer second. Continuing to write, he spent the first of nine summers at the prestigious MacDowell Artists' Colony near Peterborough, New Hampshire, where he took long daily walks and wrote in solitude in a cabin in the woods.

In 1926 Wilder earned his master's degree in Romance languages at Princeton and published his first novel, *The Cabala*, inspired by his experiences in Rome. His second novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, examines the fate of five travelers who are killed in the collapse of a bridge in eighteenth century Peru. Seeking to find meaning in such a loss, a scholarly monk explores the lives of the five victims, an endeavor that leads to his own death at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. Published in 1927, the book was a huge success, earning Wilder instant fame, fortune, and his first Pulitzer Prize. He built a house for his parents and supported them the rest of their lives. His sister Isabel became his secretary, assistant, literary agent, and hostess. Wilder never married.

In 1930 Wilder began teaching an extremely popular creative writing class at the University of Chicago. It was there he met avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, who became his closest personal friend as well as a literary colleague. He also became friends with world heavyweight champion Gene Tunney and spent weekends with F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald. Other famous friends included the writers Ernest Hemmingway and Willa Cather and actor Montgomery Clift.

With the death of his father in 1936, Wilder felt free to quit teaching and focus on his writing full-time. The result was *Our Town.* A modest success on Broadway, the play earned Wilder his second Pulitzer Prize and went on to become perhaps the most-produced American play ever written.

Wilder's next play, *The Merchant of Yonkers*, adapted from a nineteenth century comedy by Johann Nestroy, was a failure. With World War II looming, Wilder wrote *The Skin of Our Teeth*, in which the typically American suburban Antrobus family survives an ice age, a great flood covering the entire globe, and a devastating war. The play mixes

modern pop culture with biblical and historical references in a seriocomic blend. The family maid, Sabina, often speaks directly to the audience, sharing her doubts about the quality of the play and occasionally even refusing to speak her lines as written. Whatever the disaster, humanity survives. The play opened in 1942, and Wilder won his third Pulitzer Prize.

When America entered World War II, Wilder joined the Air Force as an intelligence officer. While waiting to report for duty, he worked with Alfred Hitchcock on the screenplay for *Shadow of a Doubt*. The story scratches at the surface of the all-American small town Wilder depicted in *Our Town*: a teenage girl in a close, happy family begins to suspect that her easy-going, fun-loving uncle is in fact a serial killer. The film is one of Hitchcock's finest and most suspenseful.

After the war, Wilder continued writing and lecturing and taught American poetry at Harvard. *The Ides of March*, his 1948 historical novel about Julius Caesar, is his most experimental work. In 1954 he rewrote his failed play *The Merchant of Yonkers*, making a previously minor character named Dolly Levi the central character and changing the title to *The Matchmaker*. The farcical comedy with its slapstick situations and mistaken identities was a big success. Ten years later Wilder gave permission for a musical version, and the result was *Hello, Dolly!*, a smash hit which won ten Tony Awards, ran for seven years on Broadway, and is still widely performed.

In 1963 Wilder was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the first year the award was given for distinguished civilian service in peacetime. In 1973, at the age of 76, he published his last novel, the autobiographical *Theophilus North*; it remained on the best-seller list for 21 weeks.

When Wilder died in 1975, *Newsweek* published an obituary written by Bill Roeder in the style of *Our Town*, entitled "Exit the Stage Manager." It ended like this:

> He was getting up in years at the age of 78. Still, it was a jolt for us folks in Grover's Corners—and I'll bet for a whole lot of other people, too—when Thornton Wilder slipped away with a heart attack during his afternoon nap the other day. God rest him. H'm—11 o'clock in Grover's Corners. You get a good rest, too. Good night.

Our Town • A History of the Play

Thornton Wilder once recalled one of his teachers telling the class to be still "just long enough to hear the world fall through space." The students held their breath, hearing nothing but silence, then a far-off train whistle. Wilder recreates this experience of pausing and cherishing the random and ordinary moments of life in his play *Our Town*.

In the early 1930s Wilder wrote a series of short, experimental plays that contained ideas and techniques he would later reuse or expand upon in *Our Town*. *The Long Christmas Dinner* shows four generations over 90 years of family celebrations. Stage directions note that the actors eat "imaginary food with imaginary knives and forks." The entrance stage left signifies birth; the exit stage right, death. *Pullman Car Hiawatha* features a Stage Manager who serves as narrator, director, and occasional actor. One of the train's passengers dies early in the play but returns as a ghost. Among the towns the train passes through is Grover's Corners, Ohio.

Famed Broadway producer-director Jed Harris was interested in Wilder's next play. Wilder had found himself dissatisfied with the current state of the theatre as he saw it. He felt modern plays were "inadequate ... evasive ... soothing" rather than stimulating. He wanted to startle the audience, to strip away the elaborate artifice of realism, to replace the distraction of "drama" with the heart of truth. He wanted to find the relationship between the ordinary, moment-to-moment details of everyday life and the universal truths of history, religion, and philosophy—in his own words, to place "the life of a village against the life of the stars."

Wilder's early drafts of *M Marries N* evolved into *Our Village* and eventually *Our Town*. Although there are no direct correlations, most of the characters and places in the play were inspired by people he knew and places he had visited. Grover's Corners is largely based on Peterborough, New Hampshire, the town near the MacDowell Colony where he revised Act I and started Acts II and III. Portions of this quintessential small-town American play were also written on the Caribbean island of St. Lucia; most of the third act was written in Zurich, Switzerland. Wilder required isolation and long, daily walks to write; he said a good day's walk could produce one 15-minute scene.

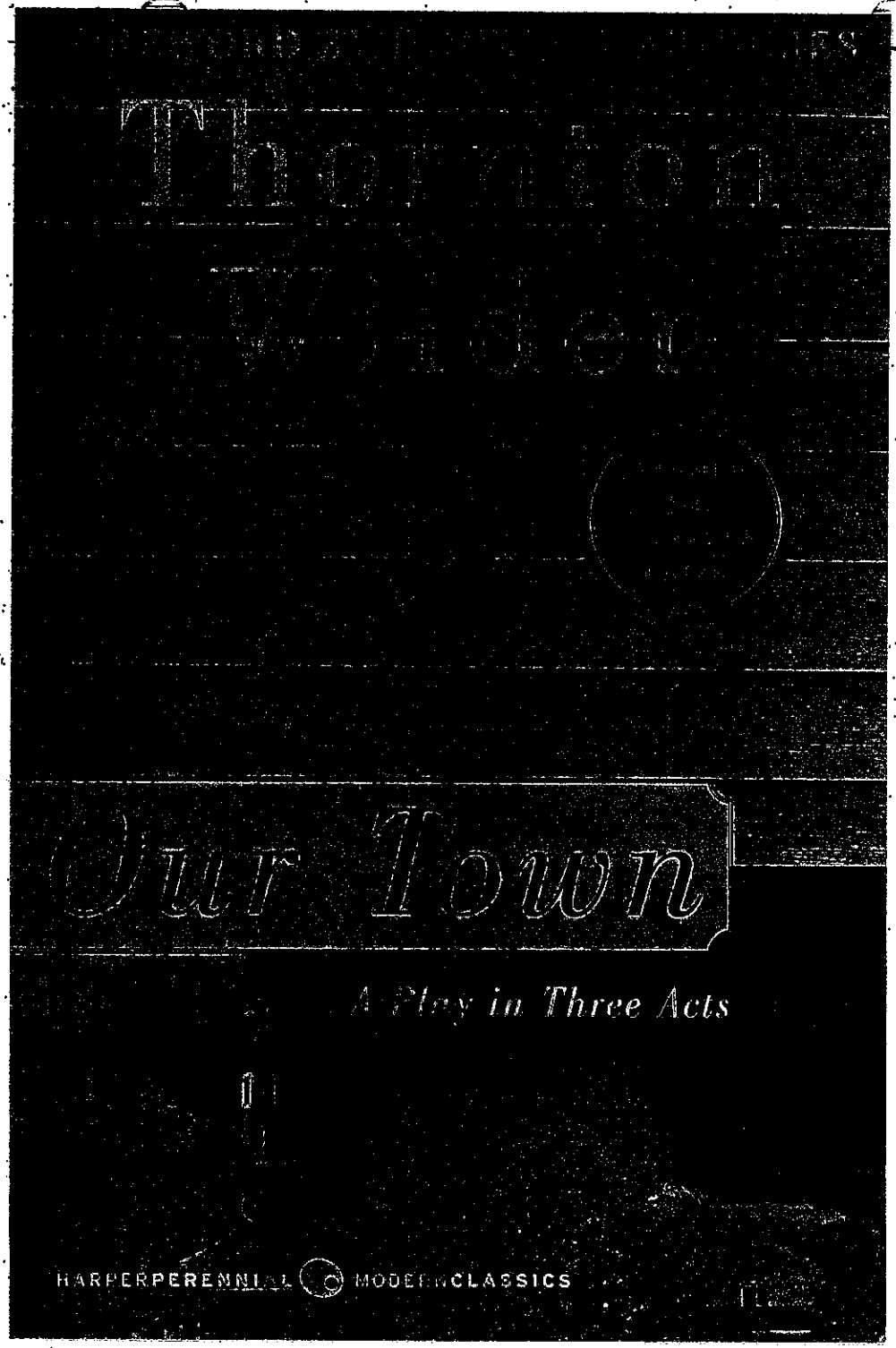
The play's lack of stage scenery, its use of a narrator figure (the Stage Manager), its focus on the everyday moments of life with little standard dramatic conflict, its unique cemetery scene in which the dead sit quietly in chairs and converse with each other—all these elements were startling breaks from the conventions of American drama in the 1930s. Some of these ideas looked back to the ancient Greek plays that had first drawn Wilder to the theatre as a child. Other self-consciously theatrical concepts suggested the recent avant-garde works of Luigi Pirandello, such as *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (whose world premiere Wilder had attended). But at the same time, Wilder was writing for the mainstream Broadway stage. In a letter from Zurich, he wrote, "Lord! What I got myself in for. A theologico-metaphysico-transcription from the *Purgatorio* with panels of American rural genre-stuff. Isn't it awful?"

When Wilder returned from Europe, Jed Harris whisked him off to his country estate on Long Island, where the two worked together on rewrites and revisions. Wilder enjoyed the process, believing Harris had the vision and the boldness to bring this unconventional play to a conventional audience. Unfortunately, their relationship turned sour as Harris continued to rewrite the play on his own in rehearsal. Wilder felt that Harris's staging of the play's "invisible" geography was sloppy and that the ideas in the play had been watered down. He feared that Harris had let the first two acts become too congenial and folksy, then pushed the final act too far in the direction of anguish and tears.

Indifferent audiences and mixed to negative reviews during the play's tryouts in Princeton and Boston deepened the rift between playwright and director. (One review was headlined: "Speech-Making by 'Corpses' Unusual Feature.") Harris considered shutting down the production; only strong support from critic Alexander Woollcott and playwright Marc Connelly kept the play going. It opened in New York on February 4, 1938. To everyone's surprise, the opening night audience cheered, and critics were enthusiastic. Ticket sales picked up in May when Wilder was awarded the Pulitzer Prize, and even more in September when he played the role of the Stage Manager himself for two weeks, earning respectable reviews for his performance. Harris sent out a national tour, then closed it abruptly ten months later when he realized that Frank Craven, the actor playing the Stage Manager, was earning more money than he was as producer-director.

The play's popularity among amateur and school groups developed immediately: between April 1939 and December 1940, it was staged in 800 communities in 47 states. United Artists released the Hollywood movie version of *Our Town* in 1940, with William Holden as George and Martha Scott and Frank Craven recreating their stage roles of Emily and the Stage Manager. Wilder worked closely with producer Sol Lesser and fellow screenwriters Frank Craven (yes, the actor) and Harry Chandlee. The film uses conventionally realistic scenery, and Wilder himself approved a change in the ending so that Emily wouldn't die. He felt that while audiences accepted her death on stage, on the screen, with close-ups and a realistic world, her death would feel excessively cruel. What was important to him was the lesson learned during her brief return to childhood. The film was a financial and critical success. Several subsequent television versions have been filmed in theatres or on empty sound stages.

It has often been said that *Our Town* is performed somewhere in the United States every evening. There have been four Broadway revivals, most recently in 2002 with Paul Newman as the Stage Manager. Since the first Scandinavian production in 1938, the play has been translated into dozens of languages and performed all over the world. This uniquely American play has universal themes which speak to all peoples.



Foreword

You are holding in your hands a great American play. Possibly, *the* great American play.

If you think you're already familiar with *Our Town*, chances are you read it long ago, in sixth or seventh grade, when it was lumped in a tasting portion of slim, palatable volumes of American literature along with *The Red Pony* by John Steinbeck and Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*. You were compelled to read it, like nasty medicine force-fed for your own good, when you were too young to appreciate how enriching it might be. Or perhaps you saw one too many amateur productions that, to put it kindly, failed to persuade you of the play's greatness. You sneered at the domestic activities of the citizenry of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, and rolled your eyes at the quaint-seeming romance between George Gibbs and Emily Webb. You dismissed *Our Town* as a corny relic of Americana and relegated Thornton Wilder to the kitsch bin along with Norman Rockwell and Frank Capra.

You may have come around on Capra (*It's a Wonderful Life* actually owes a great deal to *Our Town*), and you may

now be able to credit Rockwell for being a fine illustrator even if you can't quite bring yourself to call him an artist, but Wilder is another story. In your mind he remains the eternal schoolmaster preaching old-fashioned values to a modern public that knows far more than he does, and you remain steadfast in your skepticism of his importance to American literature.

You are not alone.

I have a confession to make: I didn't always appreciate the achievement of Thornton Wilder, either. Like many of you, I had read *Our Town* when I was too young and had seen it a few times. I thought I knew it and, frankly, didn't think much of it; I didn't get what was so great about it. That is, until I happened to see the 1988 Lincoln Center Theater production, directed by Gregory Mosher, an experience which remains one of the most memorable of my theater-going life. I was so mesmerized by its subversive power, so warmed by its wisdom, so shattered by its third act, that I couldn't believe it was the same play I thought I had known since childhood. I went home and reread the masterpiece that had been on my shelf all along, and pored over the text to see what Mosher and his troupe of actors (led by Spalding Gray as the Stage Manager) had done differently. As far as I could tell, they had changed very little. *I* was the one who had changed. By the late eighties, I had entered my thirties and had a foothold in life; I had buried both my parents; I had protested a devastating war; and I had fallen in love. In other words, I had lived enough of a life to finally understand what was so great about *Our Town*.

"The response we make when we 'believe' a work of the imagination," Wilder wrote, "is that of saying: 'This is the way

things are. I have always known it without being fully aware that I knew it. Now in the presence of this play or novel or poem (or picture or piece of music) I know that I know it.'"

Wilder was right: *I believed every word of it.*

One of the many joys of teaching is that you get to introduce students to work you admire. Since you can never relive the experience of seeing or hearing or reading a work of art for the first time, you can do the next best thing: you can teach it. And, through the discoveries your students make, you can recapture, vicariously, some of the exhilaration that accompanied your own discovery of that work long ago.

I teach playwriting to undergraduates at Yale. In addition to weekly writing assignments and a term project, my students read, and together we dissect, a variety of contemporary American and English plays (all personal favorites)—Harold Pinter's *Betrayal;* David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross;* John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation;* three plays by Caryl Churchill: *Fen, Top Girls,* and *Mad Forest;* Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof;* Wallace Shawn's *Aunt Dan and Lemon;* Chris Durang's *Marriage of Bette and Boo;* and Anna Deavere Smith's *Fires in the Mirror* among them—each of which provides rich areas for discussion about structure, character, event, theme, story, style.

A few years ago I added *Our Town* to the list. I schedule it at the end by devious design: after our semester-long exploration of What Makes a Good Play, I sneak in a truly great one. Only I don't *tell* them it's a great one. "Why did you assign this play?" they demand to know. "Nothing happens." "It's dated." "Simplistic." "Sentimental."

I have them where I want them. Now I can give myself

the pleasure of persuading them that they've got it all wrong, that the opposite of their criticisms is true: *Our Town* is anything but dated, it is timeless; it *is* simple, but also profound; it is full of genuine sentiment, which is not the same as its being sentimental; and, as far as its being uneventful, well, the event of the play is huge: it's life itself.

Like many works of great art, its greatness can be deceptive: a bare stage, spare language, archetypal characters. "Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the mind," Wilder wrote, "not in 'scenery.'" Indeed, he begins the play with: "No curtain. No scenery." It is important to recognize the thunderclap those words amounted to. Consider the context: The play was written in 1937, when stage directions like that were still largely unheard of in American dramaturgy. The season *Our Town* graced Broadway, the other notable plays were now-forgotten boulevard comedies by Philip Barry and Clare Boothe (*Here Come the Clowns* and *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*, respectively); and melodramas by now-forgotten playwrights E. P. Conkle and Paul Vincent Carroll (*Prologue to Glory* and *Shadow and Substance*). Wilder alone was challenging the potential of theater. An old-fashioned writer? Thornton Wilder was radical! A visionary!

In his 1957 introduction to *Three Plays*, Wilder wrote of the loss of theatergoing pleasure he began to experience in the decade before writing *Our Town*, when he "ceased to believe in the stories [he] saw presented there. . . . The theatre was not only inadequate, it was evasive. . . . I found the word for it: it aimed to be *soothing*. The tragic had no heat; the comic had no bite; the social criticism failed to indict us with responsibility." (Has our theater really changed all that much since Wilder wrote those words? The same claim could

be made today, given the "soothing" fare that dominates a Broadway where the "serious" play is the anomaly.)

Stripping the stage of fancy artifice, Wilder set himself a formidable challenge. With two ladders, a few pieces of furniture, and a minimum of props, he attempted "to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life." Actors mimed their stage business; a "stage manager" functioned as both omniscient narrator and player. These ideas were startlingly modern for American drama in 1937. True, Pirandello broke down the conventions of the play fifteen years earlier, in Europe, in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (the world premiere of which Wilder attended), and in the United States in the decade before *Our Town*, O'Neill tested the bounds of theatrical storytelling, with mixed results, in *Strange Interlude*. But with *Our Town*, Wilder exploded the accepted notions of character and story and catapulted the American drama into the twentieth century. He did for the stage what Picasso and Braque's experiments in cubism did for painting and Joyce's stream of consciousness did for the novel. To mistake him for a traditionalist is to do Thornton Wilder an injustice. He was, in fact, a modernist who translated European and Asian ideas about theater into the American idiom.

By 1930, Wilder, who started his writing career as a novelist, had begun experimenting with dramatic form. Influenced by the economy of storytelling of Noh drama, he boldly compressed ninety years of a family's history into twenty minutes of stage time in *The Long Christmas Dinner*. His 1931 one-act, *Pullman Car Hiawatha*, which brings to life with a minimum of scenery a section of a train car and some of its passengers, reads as a marvelous rehearsal for many of the ideas he put to confident use in *Our Town*; it is

also a fascinating play in its own right. In it, Wilder is in remarkably fertile fettle: chairs serve as berths in the Pullman car; actors represent the planets and passing fields and towns (including a Grover's Corners, Ohio); a stage manager is present (there's one in *The Happy Journey to Trenton and Camden,* too); a ghost makes an appearance, that of a German immigrant worker who perished while helping to build a trestle the train crosses; and, perhaps most strikingly, a young woman—a prototype for Emily—dies unexpectedly on the journey. The woman cries to the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who have arrived to escort her to her final destination, "I haven't done anything with my life . . . I haven't realized anything," before accepting her fate. "I see now," she says finally. "I see now. I understand everything now."

Anyone who dismisses *Our Town* as an idealized view of American life has failed to see the impieties and hypocrisies depicted in Wilder's vision. "Oh, Mama, you never tell us the truth about anything," Emily bemoans to her mother.

Simon Stimson, the alcoholic choirmaster, is a brilliant creation, buffoon and tragic figure all at once. He is not a stumbling town drunk designed for easy laughs; rather, he is a tortured, self-destructive soul whose cries for help are ignored by a provincial people steeped in denial. In the tragedy of Simon Stimson—a suicide, we learn in Act III—Wilder illustrates the failure of society to help its own and the insidiousness of systematic ignorance. "The only thing the rest of us can do," Mrs. Gibbs opines about Stimson's public drunkenness, "is just not to notice it." We may laugh at her Yankee pragmatism but it is also chilling.

The perfection of the play starts with its title. Grover's

Corners belongs to all of us; it is indeed *our* town, a microcosm of the human family, genus American. But in that specificity it becomes all towns. Everywhere. Indeed, the play's success across cultural borders around the world attests to its being something much greater than an American play: it is a play that captures the universal experience of being alive.

The Stage Manager tells us the play's action begins on May 7, 1901, but it is as specific to that time as it was, no doubt, to 1937, and as it is to the time in which we're living. The three-act structure is a marvel of economy. Act I is dubbed "Daily Life," Act II, "Love and Marriage," and Act III, "I reckon you can guess what that's about."

The simultaneity of life and death, past, present, and future pervades *Our Town.* As soon as we are introduced to Doc and Mrs. Gibbs, the Stage Manager informs us of their deaths. Minutes into the play and already the long shadow of death is cast, ironizing all that follows. With the specter of mortality hovering, the quotidian business of the people of Grover's Corners attains a kind of grandeur.

When eleven-year-old Joe Crowell, the newsboy, enters, making his rounds, he and Doc Gibbs chat about the weather, the boy's teacher's impending marriage, and the condition of his pesky knee. The prosaic turns suddenly wrenching when the Stage Manager casually fills us in on young Joe's future, his scholarship to MIT, his graduating at the top of his class. "Goin' to be a great engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France.—All that education for nothing." How could anyone accuse Wilder of sentimentality when he, like life, is capable of such cruelty? In just a few eloquent sentences he captures both the capriciousness of life and the futility of war. The war Wilder referred

to, of course, was the Great War—the world was between wars when he wrote *Our Town*—but the poignancy of the newsboy's fate is felt perhaps even more exquisitely today, in light of all the death and destruction the world has endured since.

Note the audacious and surprising ways in which Wilder has structured his acts; he interrupts the narrative flow of each with a stylistic departure. In Act I, Professor Willard and Editor Webb offer discursive sidebars about the geography and sociology of Grover's Corners, a device reminiscent of the collagist technique of newsreel and newspaper snippets employed by his contemporary, the novelist John Dos Passos, in his *U.S.A.* trilogy.

At the start of the second act, it is three years later, George and Emily's wedding day. The Stage Manager interrupts the frantic preparations to show us "how all this began. . . . I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin." And he takes us back in time to the drugstore-counter conversation the couple had "when they first knew that . . . they were meant for one another." Once that seminal event is re-created, we return to the wedding itself. Emily, the bride with cold feet, plaintively asks her father, "Why can't I stay for a while just as I am," expressing the ageless, heartbreaking, child's wish to prolong the charmed state of childhood and stave off the harshness of the adult world.

The passage from Love and Marriage to Death is as abrupt and wrenching as it is in real life. The people whose vitality moved and amused us before intermission are now coolly seated in rows in the town cemetery. Mrs. Gibbs, Simon Stimson, and Mrs. Soames, "who enjoyed the wedding so," are all dead now, as is Wally Webb, whose young life was cut short by a burst appendix while on a Boy Scout camping trip.

Much as the soda-fountain flashback is the centerpiece of the second act, Emily's posthumous visit to the past in the middle of Act III provides the emotional climax of the play. Newly deceased while giving birth to her second child, Emily wishes to go back to a happy day and chooses her twelfth birthday. The dead warn her that such a return can only be painful. The job of the dead, they tell her, is to forget the living. Emily learns all too quickly that they are right and decides to join the indifferent dead. Her farewell is one of the immortal moments in all of American drama:

> Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners . . . Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking . . . and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

Wilder modestly wrote, "I am not one of the new dramatists we are looking for. I wish I were. I hope I have played a part in preparing the way for them." He was wrong about not being one of the "new dramatists." In some respects he was the *first* American playwright. The part he played in preparing those who followed—Williams, Miller, Albee, Wilson (Lanford), Wilson (August), Vogel, to list a few—is incalculable.

"The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives

in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will,"—it's all here, all in *Our Town*, all the passages of life.

If you are new to *Our Town*, I envy you. A joyous discovery awaits you.

Welcome—or welcome back—to *Our Town*.

—Donald Margulies
New Haven, Connecticut

OuR ToWN

THE NEW YORK TIMES

April 1, 2007
Essay

The Genius of Grover's Corners

By JEREMY McCARTER

Original cast: "Our Town" opened in 1938 and won the Pulitzer Prize.

Mary McCarthy liked Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" more than she cared to admit. It was 1938, and the theater of social protest — of Odets and Blitzstein — was at its zenith: an inconvenient time for a politically minded critic to fall for this homespun tale of life in Grover's Corners. In enjoying this Broadway hit, she later remembered wondering, "was I starting to sell out?"

McCarthy was not the first, and very far from the last, to feel the strange queasiness that sometimes besets Wilder's admirers. With his slender output and whiff of Norman Rockwell wholesomeness, he can seem an odd figure alongside Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller and Tennessee Williams on the Rushmore of American drama — if he's granted a place there at all. His new enshrinement in the Library of America, which has just published Wilder's Collected Plays & Writings on Theater (Library of America, $40), may not convince everyone it's finally safe to love him. But this anthology of some of America's most bewitching theatrical writing offers the best chance yet to figure out how the man who

might be our greatest playwright could also be our most misunderstood.

Great reputations, we tend to think, should be held aloft by imposing columns of major works. But producing one magnum opus after another was never Wilder's style. Much of his energy went into writing one-acts, the kind of little pieces that many playwrights treat as fodder for the next company that asks for help with a fund-raiser. For Wilder, who disdained kitchen-sink drama in favor of the absolutes — finding the universe in a grain of sand, then reversing the lens to view the whole cathedral of existence — the short plays were as likely to be masterpieces as the long.

Thus the one-act "Pullman Car Hiawatha," the story of a sleeper car making an overnight trip to Chicago, features not just the petty concerns of the passengers but the voices of the planets and the hours: human mortality in its smallness and its largeness. "The Long Christmas Dinner" telescopes 90 years of a family's history into one never-ending holiday feast, and as generations appear, have children, wither and depart, only we in the audience appreciate what changes and what doesn't. "Every least twig is wrapped around with ice. You almost never see that," young Genevieve marvels, not realizing that her mother has made this observation years earlier nor that her daughter-in-law will one day do the same. Wilder's tone is dry, fond; if God were to dabble in anthropology, and the recording angels to write with wry humor and infinite tolerance of human folly, this is how the holy books would read.

These qualities find their fullest expression in "Our Town," a show you might recall, if your high school had a drama club. For all the play's ubiquity, though, how well do we really understand it? Everyone remembers the folksy Stage Manager leading us through the story, as pretty Emily Webb grows up in picturesque Grover's Corners in Act I, marries the local baseball star George Gibbs in Act II, and is buried in Act III. You may remember, too, how she decides to relive one day of her life, and sums up the play's cosmic gospel as she returns to her grave: "Oh earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you."

Frequently lost in the sentimental haze that most revivals inflict upon the play is the contrary voice of Simon Stimson, the town drunk and suicide. "That's what it was to be alive," he snarls. "To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those ... of those about you." He makes a good point. Grover's Corners is, in retrospect, an unbearable place: quite content to be homogeneous, conformist, anti-intellectual and lacking "any culture or love of beauty." When staged properly, the play doesn't let us to feel simple nostalgia. We ought to weep at Emily's famous line not because she finds earth wonderful, but because she was unable to find it so during her close-minded life in her close-minded town — which is, of course, our town. Wilder makes a profound statement about the limits of human understanding here, one that requires delicacy and a little steel to convey. " 'Our Town' is one of the toughest, saddest plays ever written," Edward Albee has said. "Why is it always produced as hearts and flowers?"

If Wilder had moped around in black, drunk himself into oblivion or — if you're feeling romantic — hanged himself like Simon Stimson, people might not have so much trouble finding that note of radical despair amid the bathos. But like Alfred Hitchcock (for whom he wrote the unmistakably Wilderian screenplay for "Shadow of a Doubt"), he confounded the popular image of the genius as a tortured, self-destructive soul. Wilder cultivated a wide circle of friends and remained throughout his 78 years an enthusiastic teacher and lecturer. Though he had plenty of frustrations and some Broadway flops, he rewrote the highest-profile of these to create the hit farce "The Matchmaker," then watched someone else rewrite his rewrite to create "Hello, Dolly!" It made him a fortune without his lifting a finger. With habitual modesty, he said he differed from his contemporaries in one respect: "I give (don't I?) the impression of having enormously enjoyed it."

All this unfashionable contentment might make the creator of Grover's Corners sound like some dismissible hayseed. In fact, he was among the worldliest writers of his generation. Born in 1897 in Madison, Wis., Wilder — the survivor of a pair of twin brothers — followed his consul father to China and Hong Kong before settling with his highly cultured mother in Berkeley, Calif. After Yale, he began a lifelong circuit of the hubs of the intelligentsia (MacDowell, Harvard, the home of his close friend Gertrude Stein) with a year doing archaeology at the American Academy in Rome. He read voraciously in at least four languages, becoming so erudite it sometimes seemed to work against him: the fragments of his unfinished play "The Emporium," included in the Library of America volume, are less captivating than the journal entries in which he wrestled with how to blend Kafka, Kierkegaard and

Stein in a Philadelphia department store. Yet he remains the only writer to win a Pulitzer Prize for drama (twice) and for fiction ("The Bridge at San Luis Rey"). To really do him justice, the Library of America needs to publish volumes of both.

In the meantime, J. D. McClatchy, the editor of this volume, has included many of Wilder's essays on theater, an inspired move that helps dispel the gravest misunderstanding of all. To audiences reared on the realistic dramas of O'Neill, Williams and Miller, Wilder's plays can seem overloaded with self-conscious trickery: the Stage Manager who guides the action, the imaginary props. His prefaces and other writings reveal these aren't mere flights of fancy: they're the essence of his art, his way of acting on an uncommonly sophisticated view of drama.

For Wilder, theater's ability to present the universal and eternal made it "the greatest of all the arts," but the 19th-century vogue for box sets and realistic props had reduced it to "a minor art and an inconsequential diversion." He realized that for theater to regain its old pre-eminence, it would need to abandon naturalism and rediscover the tools of Shakespeare and the Greeks: stage conventions that convey — a marvelous distinction — "not verisimilitude but reality." Thus Wilder's lack of scenery and other brazenly theatrical devices are all ways of escaping the literal and picayune, of stretching theater as far as an engaged audience's imagination can take it. The uncanny result is plays that pursue the emotional aims of Chekhov with the adventurous theatricality of Brecht.

That doesn't necessarily make Wilder our greatest playwright, but if we really understand him, he seems by far the most essential: the homegrown writer who made the largest claims for the theater, who put its special capacities to better use than his contemporaries — or his successors. While you can see hints of his influence in later playwrights — John Guare and Lanford Wilson, for instance — American theater today remains in thrall to the "childish attempts to be 'real' " that he decried. All the family-room dramas and stagy sitcoms that pour forth every season show he still represents a road largely not taken.

Though this collection helps make sense of Wilder, what he really needs — what our theater needs — is producers willing to stage these plays, and directors sensitive to their fragile allure. In hands like those of the Keen Company, which staged an exquisite revival of "Pullman Car Hiawatha" three years ago, Wilder leaves you feeling that you haven't just watched a show. With the actors and other playgoers, you've tried to make a little better sense of the funny, scary, bewildering business of being alive.

Jeremy McCarter, the theater critic at New York magazine, is editing a collection of Henry Fairlie's writing.

Thornton *Wilder*

> I can no longer conceal from you that I'm writing the most beautiful little play you can imagine. Every morning brings an hour's increment to it, and that's all, but I've finished two acts already. It's a little play with all the big subjects in it, and it's a big play with all the little things of life lovingly impressed into it....
>
> *—letter to Gertrude Stein from Thornton Wilder, 1937*

Thornton Wilder was known among his friends and colleagues for the wide range of his interests and his ability to converse intelligently and entertainingly on any subject. Paul Lifton's book on Wilder's theatre work is called *Vast Encyclopedia*; Gilbert A. Harrison entitled his Wilder biography *The Enthusiast*. Wilder is the only writer in history to have won Pulitzer Prizes for both fiction and drama.

Born in 1897, Wilder lived a peripatetic childhood. He was born in Madison, Wisconsin, the state capital, a small college city located on a scenic isthmus between two lakes. His family kept a lake cottage where they played under the trees and swam on hot afternoons and ate supper on the porch. Wilder spent part of his youth in Hong Kong and China while his father served as a diplomat. China's ancient culture and vast size left deep impressions on the adolescent, as did humanity's endurance despite crushing poverty and disease. He later attended high school in Berkeley, California, where he discovered theatre in the University of California, Berkeley's Greek amphitheatre, playing crowd parts in costumes his mother made. The shy, thoughtful boy began to emerge from his shell.

After two years at Oberlin College, Wilder transferred to Yale. His first full-length play, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*, was published in the *Yale Literary Magazine*. After graduation Wilder sailed to Rome, where he studied archaeology at the American Academy. Digging into the ancient past and working with now-precious artifacts that had once been everyday objects intensified his awareness of the vastness of time and space, a feeling he had first experienced in China. He was fascinated by the way archaeologists found great secrets hidden in tiny fragments; he compared the process to looking through a microscope and a telescope at the same time. His year in Rome forever changed his sense of his own significance in the universe.

Reluctantly returning to the United States to teach at a prep school, Wilder discovered that he loved teaching, and the students loved him; for the rest of his life he referred to himself as an educator first and a writer second. Continuing to write, he spent the first of nine summers at the prestigious MacDowell Artist's Colony near Peterborough, New Hampshire, where he took long daily walks and wrote in solitude in a cabin in the woods.

Wilder's first novel, *The Cabala*, was inspired by his experiences in Rome. His second novel, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, examines the fate of five travelers who are killed in the collapse of a bridge in eighteenth century Peru. Seeking to find meaning in such a loss, a scholarly monk explores the lives of the five victims, an endeavor that leads to his own death at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition. Published in 1927, the book was a huge success, earning Wilder instant fame, fortune, and his first Pulitzer Prize.

In 1930 Wilder began teaching an extremely popular creative writing class at the University of Chicago. It was there he met avant-garde writer Gertrude Stein, who became his closest personal friend as well as a literary colleague.

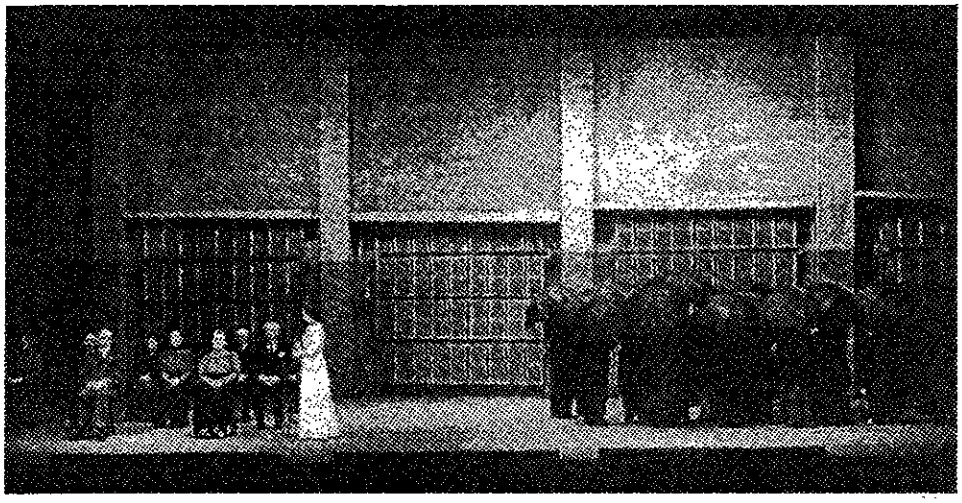
Our Town had its first performance in January 1938. A modest success on Broadway, the play earned Wilder his second Pulitzer Prize and went on to become perhaps the most-produced American play ever written.

With World War II looming, Wilder wrote *The Skin of Our Teeth*, in which the typically American suburban Antrobus family survives an ice age, a great flood covering the entire globe, and a devastating war. The play mixes modern pop culture with biblical and historical references in a seriocomic blend. It opened in 1942, and Wilder won his third Pulitzer Prize.

Alfred Hitchcock asked Wilder to work on the screenplay for *Shadow of a Doubt*. The story scratches at the surface of the all-American small town Wilder depicted in *Our Town*: a teenage girl in a close, happy family begins to suspect that her easy-going, fun-loving uncle is in fact a serial killer.

In 1963 Wilder was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 1964 his play *The Matchmaker* became the musical *Hello, Dolly!* His last novel, published in 1973, when he was 76, was the autobiographical *Theophilus North*; it remained on the best-seller list for 21 weeks. Wilder died in 1975.

Throughout his life and career, Thornton Wilder made surprising connections. He tried to find the relationship between the ordinary, moment-to-moment details of everyday life and the universal truths of history, religion, and philosophy; as he said of *Our Town*, he wanted to place "the life of a village against the life of the stars."



The original 1938 Broadway production of Our Town, *above, inspired scenic designer David Birn. (below) Sketches for George and Emily by costume designer Ann Sheffield.*

Welcome to GROVER'S CORNERS pop. 2,642

SHANNON McKINNEY
Lighting Designer

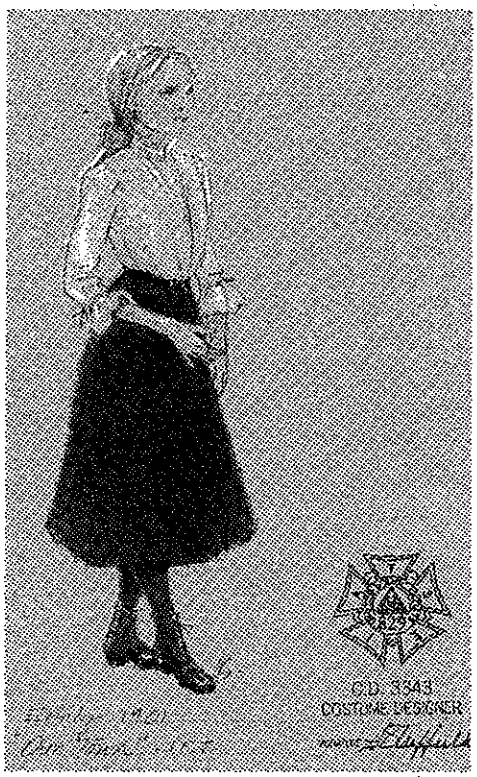
When I was hired to design this production, I reread *Our Town* for the first time in decades—and I fell completely in love. How could I have been so unaware of the brilliant nuance and heart-wrenching detail of this script? It captures vividly the stunning drama of daily life moments—those moments that hit you in the chest with their simplicity and their profoundness. I am now a mother of three children, so of course this script now makes absolute sense to me. Anyone who has had children understands that poignant pull when you witness your child experiencing something for the first time. You want to hold the moment forever, you want to give it up to the intangible universe; you want it to be documented for all time. As the lighting designer for this production, I believe it is my job to help heighten those moments and illuminate them in all their brilliance, and at the same time to focus those moments and to tighten in and magnify their intricate detail.

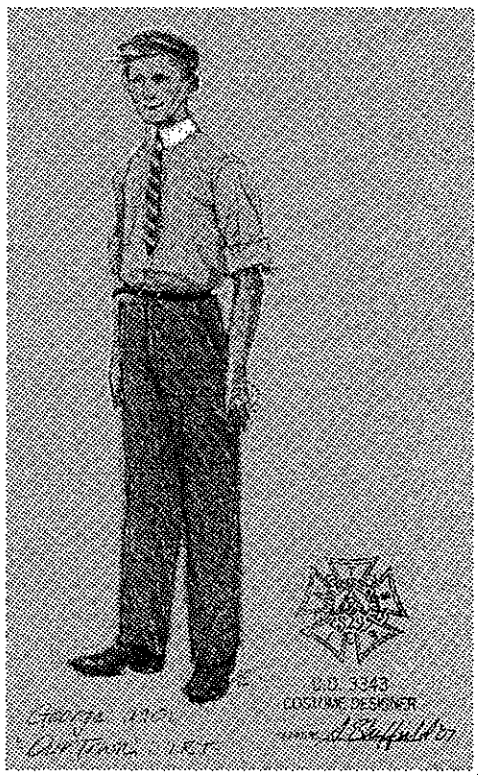
DAVID BIRN
Scenic Designer

The first words in the script are "No curtain. No scenery." What a shock that must have been in 1938 to audiences accustomed to nothing but realistic box sets. Today's audience is quite familiar with actors on a bare stage, so how do we make "no scenery" fresh again? We've decided to go back to the beginning, to recreate the spirit of that first, new, suprising *Our Town*, inspired by photographs from the original production. The goal of all this fancy nothingness is simple: scenery disappears, and what we see is actors floating in infinity.

ANN SHEFFIELD
Costume Designer

It is easy to glance at the nostalgic patina of Thornton Wilder's vision of America and miss the play's rich, complex, occasionally dark inner life. My responsibility is to find the natural people inside the period costumes. I've done my research, I know the silhouette, I've studied the fashions—but what I really want is to find the genuine people living in those old photographs. People who believed in an honest day's work. People who actually believed they could know everybody in their town. Most importantly, people you recognize from your own life—people who could be your neighbors, your friends, your family.





Our Time

by Janet Allen, Artistic Director

Among the key questions that we ask ourselves as artists when we select a play as iconic at *Our Town* is, "why this play now?" Unlike a symphony or a museum, where dozens or hundreds of works may be played or shown in a given year, we have only ten opportunities this season to move our audiences to reflect and rejoice in the human condition. Sometimes the answer to the question "why now?" is fairly circumstantial: we have finally succeeded in gathering the artists we want to create it, or the rights to a recently written piece have finally become available, or a long-awaited new play is finally ready for production.

But these aren't the reasons why we're producing *Our Town* in 2007. Our reasons have more to do with a larger sense of history—both American history and IRT history. Let's start with the latter: the IRT produced *Our Town* nearly 25 years ago, in 1973, the theatre's third season. For the fledgling institution that the IRT was at that moment, producing *Our Town* was a means of establishing credibility—a courageous young theatre company takes on a towering American classic. Now the theatre is 36 years old and moving, one hopes, into an era of established yet daring adulthood. And commensurately, our institutional reasons to do this play now have to do with adult responsibility.

Each generation needs a stirring *Our Town* of its own, because the play strikes one so differently at intervals over one's life span. When we first read it in school, we identify with the children in Act I as they study and dabble in romance. As parents, we feel for the conflicted Gibbses and Webbs, who give their children over to marriage and adulthood in Act II as we have just done or are about to do with our own. As seniors, like the citizens of Act III, we begin to contemplate our own places in the graveyard on the hill. So this production of *Our Town* is for the Great Generation as they prepare for their own Act III; for the Boomers and Gen X as they experience the parental dramas of Act II; and perhaps especially for Gen Y, as they receive their first invitation (of many, one would hope) into this luminous American play.

While it may sound like we are undertaking the play in 2007 as a thankless duty or an ennobling, impersonal act, nothing could be farther from the truth. It is a very selfish act for an artist. Anyone who has ever worked on this play will quickly assert that it gives back like few plays do. It contains the seeds of an entire life's journey and the wise perspective of all eternity—and all in the "two hours' traffic of our stage." It is nothing short of life distilled to its essence. Professional artists either wait to take on this play until they believe they have sufficient life experience to do it justice, or they are granted (as is the case with our Stage Manager, Bob Elliott) the gift of working on the piece in more than one phase of their lives.

As to its place in American thinking, here are some rather unscientifically collected notions. Gertrude Stein wrote to her friend, Thornton Wilder, in 1937 (at about the time he was finishing *Our Town*), "You are a puzzle to me and if I could solve that puzzle I could solve the puzzle of America." Hmmm. Thornton Wilder, a novelist whose early work was all set outside the United States, a world traveler, a scholar deeply immersed in Greek literature, a celebrant of James Joyce, Asian theatre, and European existentialism, a man who had never had a play successfully produced in his home country—what might he have to say about the American condition?

Another notion: It is said that on September 12, 2001, Joanne Woodward (perhaps most famous as the wife of icon Paul Newman, but a wonderful actor and artistic director in her own right) awoke and realized she had to produce *Our Town* at her theatre, the Westport Country Playhouse. That production (which, by the way, starred her famous husband as the Stage Manager) played on Broadway the following year to packed houses—a play thought to be relegated forever to hopelessly sentimental high school productions. In the words of one of our contemporary playwrights, Donald Margulies, a play "you were compelled to read, like nasty medicine force-fed for your own good, when you were too young to appreciate how enriching it might be." Ms. Woodward is not the only theatre professional in the past six years who has felt that *Our Town* had a tremendous amount to say to our times.

Another notion: Wilder wrote the play in 1937, when the world stood on the brink of profound change. Certainly Wilder was well-traveled and well-read enough to know that something momentous was looming even for isolationist America. He chose, as the historic moment for *Our Town*, the era 1901-1913. Why? His magnificent 1967 novel, *The Eighth Day,* suggests a possible reason. He notes that the First World War "started Americans moving about all over the country and changing their residences on a whim," but in pre-war America, *Our Town* America, "every man, woman, and child believed he or she lived in the best town in the best state in the best country in the world. This conviction filled them with a certain strength."

Certainly, the poison gas, the trenches, the devastation of World War I shook that strength—just as the mass destruction, the concentration camps, the bombings of World War II would cause mass displacement, doubt, and acute cynicism in the power of human good. How could we as Americans (or anyone in the West for that matter) ever be the same again, ever find a "conviction [that fills us] with a certain strength?"

Today we have even more decades of human destruction and uncertainty standing between us and the "simple" life lessons of *Our Town:* the American Depression(s), Vietnam, increasing urban violence and displacement, the challenges of a growingly diverse society, the decline of the dollar, the "attack on America." This historical perspective can cause the play, on the surface, to look naïve, merely nostalgic, or simplistic—all criticisms that have been and will be leveled at *Our Town* (dare I say primarily by the young!) over time. But they are missing the point.

Today is a time in which we collectively have a deep need for this play: its truths about where we came from, the reassurance found

in its focus on the cycles of life (even with all their associated fears), its portrait of our small-town roots (a phenomenon now generationally fleeting away), its assertion that at some point we did have shared values—even though, as Emily says in the end of the play, "Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you." When the Twin Towers went down, we realized what must have been there for some time: that the world did not, in fact, regard us anymore as the heroes of World War II. As political dissension and religious debate, fear and growing hatred threaten to tear our country apart, *Our Town* holds many verities for our lives. Not because it is meant as a real snapshot of American life before it got complicated—it aims to capture truth, not reality. Not because it is set in the early primary state of New Hampshire—in its specificity it is both highly local and highly universal. Because it is plainspoken, direct, hopeful, painfully honest, and innately American, we celebrate *Our Town*—which is every town—today. In the vulnerability that we feel in the world today as Americans—when military superiority and economic prosperity have failed to calm our fears—*Our Town* reminds us of what is eternal and good in the American psyche, and captures that indomitable spirit of inquiry that even our polarized social and political conditions cannot dampen or deny.

Wilder with his closest friend, Gertrude Stein

to see the World brand new

by Peter Amster, Director

In his preface to *Three Plays*, Thornton Wilder wrote:

> Toward the end of the twenties I began to lose pleasure in going to the theatre. I ceased to believe in the stories I saw presented there. When I did go it was to admire some secondary aspect of the play, the work of a great actor or director or designer. Yet at the same time the conviction was growing in me that the theatre was the greatest of all the arts. I felt that something had gone wrong with it in my time and that it was fulfilling only a small part of its potentialities....
>
> I began to feel that the theatre was not only inadequate, it was evasive; ... It aimed to be *soothing*. The tragic had no heat; the comic had no bite; the social criticism failed to indict us with responsibility.

What Wilder did in response was to return to theatrical conventions offered up by the ancient Greeks, the Elizabethans, the Chinese and Japanese. He banished scenery and props, he allowed characters to address the audience directly, he explored the potential of an empty space to be limned, not by the specific realities of objects, but by the universal truths engendered by our own imaginations: "Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the mind—not in things, in 'scenery,'" he wrote. By returning to ancient conventions, Wilder created something new in 1937, something unsettling rather than soothing, something strange and yet possessing a distinctly American voice. He created *Our Town*.

That was 70 years ago. Today the rear wall of an empty theatre no longer holds the same fascination and mystery that it did in 1938. We've seen plenty of plays that eschew scenery and props, where narrators and even characters pierce the fourth wall and talk to the audience. Is it possible to make it new again, "strange" again, without distorting its voice?

In endeavoring to imagine a production that accomplishes this, I have returned to 1937 to look around. The Great Depression. The winds of war gathering in the East and America's isolationist response. The growing voice of social protest. Perhaps by reminding us what *Our Town* must have felt like when it was new, not just for the audience, but also for the theatre artists who were brought together to present this play, we can find a way of restoring its original impact.

The furor created by the opening of *Our Town* has died down. It has become an American institution, like Mount Rushmore. It is being performed every night of the year, all over the world. Nostalgia has wrapped *Our Town* in a rosy glow; our familiarity with it has bred, if not contempt, then condescension. Yes, *Our Town* is timeless, but not because it presents a simple picture of life in a New Hampshire village; rather, because within that simple village lies the whole round of human existence. It is perennial, not because it is performed every year, but because it has the power to transform each generation that discovers it. It is essential, not because the usual trappings of the stage have been removed, but because what remains reminds us of what is basic to our humanity, what is fundamentally important: as Wilder himself put it, "to find a value above all price for the smallest events of our daily life."

Synopsis of *Our Town*

Our Town is set on a bare stage with no scenery except a few chairs and tables. The first act focuses on daily life in the small town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, in May 1901. The Stage Manager introduces us to Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs and their children, George and Rebecca, and Mr. and Mrs. Webb and their children, Emily and Wally. Joe Crowell delivers the morning newspaper and Howie Newsome delivers the milk. After the children go to school, Professor Willard gives background information on the town, and Mr. Webb, editor of the newspaper, answers questions from the audience. That evening, the children do their homework while the church choir rehearses. Constable Warren encounters Simon Stimson, the choir director, as he weaves his drunken way home.

The second act, set three years later, focuses on the wedding of George and Emily. As the two families prepare for the big event, once again Howie Newsome delivers the milk, and now Si Crowell, Joe's younger brother, delivers the newspaper. The Stage Manager takes us back in time for a few moments to the day when George and Emily first realized that, "as the saying goes ... they were meant for one another." At the wedding itself, the parents have mixed feelings, and both George and Emily suffer momentary doubts, but they reaffirm their love. The ceremony is lovely, and Mrs. Soames cries happily.

The third act is set nine years later. Emily has died in childbirth, and her cousin Sam Craig chats with the funeral director, Joe Stoddard. At the cemetery, Emily meets Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Soames, Simon Stimson, and others who have died in Grover's Corners. Although she is warned against it, Emily decides to relive a day in her life. What Emily learns as she goes back in time reinforces the eternal value of the seemingly simple, common, everyday moments captured by Thornton Wilder in *Our Town.*

OUR TOWN
Text Elucidations

Page

ACT I

4 **Grover's Corners, New Hampshire**
Fictional town inspired by Wilder's time in Peterborough, New Hampshire, and other nearby towns. Much of the play was written at the MacDowell Colony, an artists' retreat near Peterborough. Daily walks through the countryside and the town were an important part of Wilder's writing process. *(Note: Throughout this document, distances measured from Grover's Corners are based on the location of Peterborough.)*

4 **latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes**
Latitude is the angle between any point on the earth's surface and the equator. Longitude is the angle east or west between any point on the earth's surface and a north-south line passing through the Royal Observatory, Greenwich (near London in the United Kingdom). By combining these two angles, the position of any location on Earth can be specified.

4 **Polish Town**
Poland lost its independence at the end of the 1700s and suffered a series of political divisions. The subsequent abolition of serfdom created a population of farmers without land to farm. Coupled with the beginnings of industrialization and commercial agriculture, and a population boom that exhausted available land, Polish peasant-farmers, once considered an immovable fixture of the land, were transformed into migrant-laborers. Between 1870 and 1914, over 2.6 million people emigrated from Polish territories to the United States. Most did not plan to remain permanently and become "Americanized." Instead they came temporarily to earn money, invest in property, and wait for the right opportunity to return to Poland and buy land there, which would assure them a more desirable social status within their familiar world. (This disinterest in assimilation may explain the presence in Grover's Corners of a separate "Polish Town.") American employers considered the sturdy Poles well-suited for arduous manual labor; consequently, Polish migrants were drawn to the coal mines of Pennsylvania and the heavy industries—steel mills, iron foundries, slaughterhouses, oil and sugar refineries—of the Great Lakes cities, especially Chicago and Buffalo. (Perhaps Poles come to Grover's Corners to work in the Cartwright blanket factory.) Eventually the coming of World War I in 1914 made return to Poland almost impossible, and by the time travel became possible again, many of the Polish temporaries had decided to become permanent Americans.

4 **Canuck**
American slang for Canadians in general and French Canadians in particular. The word is derived from a cross between *Canada* and *Chinook,* the native people in the Columbia River region. Today the term is often considered offensive.

4 **Congregational Church**
Congregational churches are Protestant Christian churches practicing congregationalist church governance, in which each congregation independently and autonomously runs its own affairs. In Great Britain, the early congregationalists were called *separatists* or *independents* to distinguish themselves from the similarly Calvinistic Presbyterians. (The theology of John Calvin and his followers emphasizes the omnipotence of God and salvation by grace alone. Calvinism is often associated with a strict, severe moral code.) In the United States, congregationalists include the Pilgrims of Plymouth, whose ecclesiastical tradition is in the Unitarian Church, and the Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, who are the forerunners of the contemporary Congregational Church. The first colleges and universities in America, including Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Williams, and Amherst, were founded by the Congregationalists. By 1800, all but one

Congregationalist church in Boston had Unitarian preachers teaching the strict unity of God, the subordinate nature of Christ, and salvation by character. Harvard University, founded by Congregationalists, itself became a source of Unitarian training. Thus, the Congregationalist churches were the seedbed from which American liberal religion and society arose.

4 **Presbyterian**

The Presbyterianism church features Calvinist theology and the presbyterian form of church governance. Local congregations are governed by Presbyteries made up of church elders, non-clergy who take part in local pastoral care and decision-making. Presbyterians place great importance upon education and continuous study of the scriptures, theological writings, and understanding and interpretation of church doctrine. The point of such learning is to enable one to put one's faith into practice; Presbyterians try to exhibit their faith in action as well as words. In the United States, Presbyterians have a reputation for order and decorum, formality of worship, and social exclusivity.

4 **Methodist**

The Methodist Church traces its origin to the evangelistic teaching of John Wesley in eighteenth century Britain. Early Methodists reacted against perceived apathy in the Church of England, became open-air preachers, and established Methodist societies wherever they went. Spread to the United States through vigorous missionary activity, Methodism appealed especially to workers, agricultural workers, and slaves. Traditionally, Methodism has believed in free will, via God's grace, as opposed to predestination—distinguishing it, historically, from Calvinist traditions. Early Methodism focused on bible study, and a systematic, "methodical" approach to scriptures and Christian living.

4 **Unitarian**

Unitarianism is the belief in the single personality of God, in contrast to the doctrine of the Trinity (three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—in one God). Unitarian Christians believe in the teachings of Jesus; adhering to strict monotheism, however, they maintain that Jesus was a great man and a prophet of God, but not God himself. Unitarians believe in the moral authority, but not necessarily the divinity, of Jesus. Their theology is thus distinguishable from the theology of Catholic, Orthodox, mainline Protestant, and other Christian denominations, who hold the Trinity doctrine as a core belief. While there are both religiously liberal and religiously conservative unitarians, the name "Unitarian" is most commonly associated with the liberal branch of this theology.

4 **Baptist**

The name "Baptist" comes from the conviction that followers of Jesus Christ are commanded to be immersed in water as a public display of their faith; thus most adherents reject infant baptism. Organizationally, Baptist churches operate on the congregational governance system, giving autonomy to individual local Baptist churches. There have been two views about the origins of the Baptists. Some hold that Baptist churches and practices have had perpetual existence since the time of Christ and His apostles. Others see Baptists as the descendants of the Anabaptists or as a separation from the Church of England. Anabaptists were widely scattered churches in sixteenth century Europe that rejected infant baptism and "rebaptized" members as adults. They held to many teachings of modern day Baptists, such as believers' baptism by immersion and freedom of religion. Separatists were English Protestants in the seventeenth century who considered it their duty to totally separate from the Church of England (in contrast to the Puritans who sought to purify the Church of England from within).

4 **Catholic Church**

The Roman Catholic Church traces its origins to the original Christian community founded by Jesus Christ and spread by the twelve apostles, in particular Saint Peter. The Catholic Church is the largest Christian church, representing around half of all Christians, and is the largest organized body of any world religion. Catholic tenets include belief that the Eucharist is really, truly, and objectively the Body and Blood of Christ; belief in seven sacraments (Baptism,

Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony); the use of sacred images, candles, vestments and music, and often incense and water, in worship; veneration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the Blessed Virgin Mary, and veneration of the saints; and requests to the departed saints for intercessory prayers. The term "catholic"—from the Latin *catholicus* (universal, general)—originated in the fourteenth century, meaning "of the doctrines of the ancient Church," or literally, "universally accepted." The word was not applied to the Church in Rome until the sixteenth century, after the Reformation, a religious movement that began as an attempt to reform the Roman church and resulted in the creation of Protestant churches. (The term "Protestant" was originally used to describe Germans who declared their dissent from the Church's denunciation of the Reformation. The word was taken up by Lutherans in Germany; the Swiss and the French preferred *Reformed*. Today *Protestant* refers to a member of any Western Christian church outside Catholicism.)

5 **Bryan**
William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) lawyer, statesman, and politician, was a three-time Democratic Party nominee for President of the United States. One of the most popular speakers in American history, he was noted for his deep, commanding voice. Bryan was a devout Presbyterian, a strong proponent of popular democracy, an outspoken critic of banks and railroads, a leader of the silverite movement in the 1890s, a dominant figure in the Democratic Party, a peace advocate, a prohibitionist, an opponent of Darwinism, and one of the most prominent leaders of Populism in late ninteenth- and early twentieth century America. He was called "The Great Commoner" because of his total faith in the goodness and rightness of the common people. He is probably best known today for his crusade against Darwinism, which culminated in the Scopes Trial in 1925 (dramatized in Lawrence and Lee's *Inherit the Wind*, produced at the IRT in 2005).

5 **horse blocks**
a step or block of stone, wood, etc., for getting on or off a horse or in or out of a vehicle.

5 **First automobile's going to come along in about five years**
Ransom Eli Olds (1864-1950) founded the Olds Motor Vehicle Company in Lansing, Michigan, in 1897. The company was renamed Olds Motor Works and relocated to Detroit in 1899. Olds created the assembly line in 1901 (although most credit Henry Ford, whose contribution was to refine the process and perfect the standardization of components). This new approach to putting together automobiles enabled him to more than quadruple his factory's output, from 425 cars in 1901 to 2,500 in 1902. Within a year, Cadillac, Winton, and Ford were producing cars in the thousands. (Henry Ford's Model T, the first popularly affordable car, would not be introduced until 1908.)

5 **heliotrope**
The heliotrope is known for its cherry pie fragrance. A South American native, the plant has broad, course leaves that look tropical, and a somewhat gnarly growth habit. Heliotrope blooms in midsummer; each stem produces only one flower head which produces many smaller flowers continually, lasting upwards of a couple months each. The name *heliotrope* (Greek; *helios*: sun, *tropein*: turn) derives from the fact that these plants turn their leaves to the sun.

5 **burdock**
Burdock is a thistle plant with hollow leafstalks and large, oval, dark green leaves that are woolly underneath. The plant flowers from July through October. Burdock is related to the artichoke, and while in Japan it is a popular root vegetable, in the United States it is generally considered a weed. (In the 1940s, Swiss inventor George de Mestral was inspired by his daily encounters with burdock while walking his dog and created Velcro.)

6 **butternut tree**

The Butternut, also occasionally known as the White Walnut, is a species of walnut native to the eastern United States and southeastern Canada. It is a deciduous tree growing to 60 feet tall, with light gray bark. The leaves, formed in bunches of 11 to 17 along either side of a common stem, are downy and yellowy green. Butternut grows quickly, but is rather short-lived for a tree, rarely living longer than 75 years. The nuts are used in baking and making candies, having an oily texture and pleasant flavor. Butternut wood is often used to make furniture, and is a favorite of woodcarvers.

6 **The earliest tombstones ... say 1670-1680**

The first settlers in New Hampshire arrived at Odiorne's Point (near what is today Portsmouth) in 1623, only three years after the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth. The colony was named New Hampshire after the English county of Hampshire. Sixty miles inland, Peterborough—the primary inspiration for Grover's Corners—was first developed in 1738, when four proprietors divided the area into lots and began attracting settlers to this frontier outpost. The settlers were primarily young families from Londonderry, 30 miles east, looking for land upon which to establish farms. They were of Scotch-Irish descent and held very strict Presbyterian beliefs. They established a farming community that was incorporated as a town in 1760.

7 **Canton, Ohio**

Canton is located in northwestern Ohio, south of Cleveland and Akron, about 630 miles west of Grover's Corners. In 1905, around the time Mrs. Gibbs might have visited, its population was about 40,000. It is a mostly industrial and agricultural community.

7 **pneumonia**

Pneumonia is an illness of the lungs and respiratory system in which the alveoli (microscopic air-filled sacs of the lung responsible for absorbing oxygen from the atmosphere) become inflamed and flooded with fluid. Pneumonia can result from a variety of causes, including infection with bacteria, viruses, fungi, or parasites, and chemical or physical injury to the lungs. Before the development of penicillin in the 1940s, pneumonia was a common cause of death.

8 **Concord**

Concord is the capital of New Hampshire, located about 30 miles northeast of Grover's Corners. Located astride the Merrimack River, the city is known for its furniture making, textile mills, and granite quarries.

9 **Massachusetts Tech**

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is a private research university located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, founded in 1861 in response to the increasing industrialization of the United States. Although based upon German and French polytechnic models of an institute of technology, MIT's founding philosophy of "learning by doing" made it an early pioneer in the use of laboratory instruction, undergraduate research, and progressive architectural styles.

9 **the war**

World War I, also known as the First World War, the Great War, and "the War to End All Wars," was a global military conflict that took place primarily in Europe between 1914 and 1918. More than nine million soldiers and civilians died. The conflict had a decisive impact on the history of the twentieth century. The experiences of the war led to a collective trauma for all participating countries. The optimism of the 1900s was gone, and those who fought in the war became known as the Lost Generation. The social trauma caused by years of fighting manifested itself in different ways. Some people were revolted by nationalism and its results. They began to work toward a more internationalist world, supporting organizations such as the League of Nations. Pacifism became increasingly popular. Others had the opposite reaction, feeling that only strength and military might could be relied upon in a chaotic and inhumane world. The rise of Nazism and Fascism included a revival of the nationalist spirit and a rejection of many post-war changes. A sense of disillusionment and cynicism became pronounced, with nihilism growing in

popularity. This disillusionment for humanity found a cultural climax with the Dadaist artistic movement. Many believed that the war heralded the end of the world as they had known it, including the collapse of capitalism and imperialism. Communist and socialist movements around the world drew strength from this theory and enjoyed a level of popularity they had never known before.

11 **separator**
an apparatus that uses centrifugal force to separate liquids of different specific gravities (such as cream from milk).

14 **gingham**
a light plain-weave cotton fabric with checks in white and another color.

16 **Strawberry phosphates**
a carbonated drink with fruit syrup and a little phosphoric acid.

16 **a dollar**
A dollar in 1901 had the purchasing power of about $24 today.

16 **pull up your pants at the knee**
At this time, boys wore short pants called knickerbockers, which gathered at the knee; a boy buckling his knickerbockers below the knee is trying to appear more grown up than he is.

18 **I thought I'd string some of these beans**
Today's green beans were once called string beans; the pod had an inedible "string" along one edge that needed to be removed before cooking.

18 **I've decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me.**
Mrs. Webb is preparing to can beans to preserve them for the family to eat during the winter. The canning process dates back to the late eighteenth century in France when the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte, concerned about keeping his armies fed, offered a cash prize to whoever could develop a reliable method of food preservation. Nicholas Appert conceived the idea of preserving food in bottles, like wine. After 15 years of experimentation, he realized if food is sufficiently heated and sealed in an airtight container, it will not spoil. By the time of the American Civil War two-piece lids made air-tight with disposable rubber rings or gaskets set between glass lid and jar were becoming popular. Ball jars (made in Muncie, Indiana) and Mason jars made air-tight home canning a domestic institution. By the 1880s, American women, taking advantage of the lowering cost of sugar and the woodstove, had launched the annual summer routine of putting up a wealth of orchard fruit, garden vegetables, and even meats. Instructions in period cookbooks directed that the food be precooked and packed hot in the heated jars, then filled to overflowing with heated syrups or brines and sealed quickly. It was hot work in hot weather.

19 **parlor**
a formal living room that is set aside for entertaining guests.

19 **three hundred and fifty dollars**
In today's currency, $8,400.

19 **highboy**
a tall chest of drawers divided into two sections and supported on four legs. At this time, the value of old American furniture as historic antiques was just beginning to be recognized.

20 **legacy**
a gift of personal property by will; an inheritance.

20 **the Civil War**
The American Civil War (1861–1865) was a major war between the United States (the "Union") and eleven Southern states that declared they had a right to secession and formed the Confederate States of America. The Union, led by President Abraham Lincoln, opposed the expansion of slavery into territories owned by the United States, which increased Southern desires for secession. The war produced about 970,000 casualties (3% of the population), including approximately 620,000 soldier deaths—two-thirds by disease. The war accounted for more casualties than all other U.S. wars combined. The main results of the war were the restoration of the Union and the end of slavery in the United States. About 4 million black slaves were freed in 1865. Based on 1860 census figures, 8% of all white males aged 13 to 43 died in the war, including 6 percent in the North and 18 percent in the South.

20 **Antietam**
The Battle of Antietam was fought on September 17, 1862, near Sharpsburg, Maryland, and Antietam Creek, about 500 miles southwest of Grover's Corners. The first major battle in the American Civil War to take place on Northern soil, it was the bloodiest single-day battle in American history, with almost 23,000 casualties.

20 **Gettysburg**
The Battle of Gettysburg (July 1 – July 3, 1863) was fought in and around the town of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, about 450 miles southwest of Grover's Corners. It was the battle with the largest number of casualties in the American Civil War and is frequently cited as the war's turning point. Between 46,000 and 51,000 Americans were casualties in the three-day battle. That November, President Lincoln used the dedication ceremony for the Gettysburg National Cemetery to honor the fallen and redefine the purpose of the war in his historic Gettysburg Address.

21 **our State University**
perhaps Keene State College, founded in 1909 located in Keene, 15 miles west of Grover's Corners, part of the University System of New Hampshire.

21 **Pleistocene**
There have been at least four major ice ages in the earth's past. The Pleistocene Epoch was the most recent ice age, from 1.81 million to 11,550 years before the present.

21 **granite**
Granite is an igneous rock formed from magma. Widely distributed throughout the continental crust of the Earth, it is the most abundant basement rock that underlies the relatively thin sedimentary veneer of the continents.

21 **Appalachian range**
The Appalachian Mountains are a vast system of mountains in eastern North America. The range is mostly located in the United States but extends into southeastern Canada, forming a zone, from 100 to 300 miles wide, running from the island of Newfoundland 1,500 miles south-westward to central Alabama in the United States. The term *Appalachian* is thought to come from a Choctaw word.

22 **Devonian**
The Devonian is a geologic period of the Paleozoic Era spanning from roughly 416 to 359 million years ago. It is named after Devon, England, where rocks from this period were first studied.

22 **basalt**
a hard, black, often glassy, volcanic rock. It was produced by the partial melting of the Earth's mantle.

22 **Mesozoic**
The Mesozoic Era, from 251 million years ago to 65 million years ago, is one of three geologic eras of the Phanerozoic Eon. Lying between the Paleozoic and the Cenozoic, Mesozoic means "middle animals." It is often called the Age of the Dinosaurs.

22 **shale**
Shale is a fine-grained sedimentary rock whose original constituents were clays or muds. It is characterized by thin laminates breaking with an irregular curving fracture, often splintery and usually parallel to the bedding plane.

22 **sandstone**
Sandstone is a sedimentary rock composed mainly of sand-size mineral or rock grains. Most sandstone is composed of quartz and/or feldspar because these are the most common minerals in the Earth's crust. Like sand, sandstone may be any color, but the most common colors are tan, brown, yellow, red, gray, and white. Since sandstone beds often form highly visible cliffs and other topographic features, certain colors of sandstone have been strongly identified with certain regions. Some sandstones are resistant to weathering, yet are easy to work. This makes sandstone a common building and paving material.

22 **the meteorological situation**
Meteorology (from the Greek: *meteoron*, "high in the sky"; and *logos*, "knowledge") is the interdisciplinary scientific study of the atmosphere that focuses on weather processes and forecasting.

22 **mean precipitation**
average rain- and/or snow-fall

22 **anthropological data**
Anthropology is the social science that studies the origins and social relationships of human beings.

22 **Amerindian**
Native American.

22 **Cotahatchee**
This seems to be a fictional tribe.

22 **the tenth century of this era**
the 900s CE

22 **brachiocephalic**
The Cephalic index is the ratio of the maximum width of the head to its maximum length. It was once widely used to categorize human populations, but is no longer used for that purpose except for describing individuals' appearances. A brachycephalic skull is relatively broad and short (typically with the breadth at least 80percent of the length).

22 **Slav**
any of the people of eastern Europe or Asian Russia who speak a Slavonic language.

22 **Mediterranean**
any of the people who come from a region bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

23 **Postal District**
the area outside the town limits that is served by the local post office.

23 Mortality and birth rates: constant
The number of people who die and the number of babies who are born over any given time are similar, keeping the population consistent.

23 MacPherson's gauge
This seems to be a fictional measure.

24 Board of Selectmen
In most New England towns, the adult population gathers annually in a town meeting to act as the local legislature, approving budgets and laws. Day-to-day operations were originally left to individual oversight, but when towns become too large for individuals to handle such workloads, they elect an executive board of, literally, select(ed) men to run things for them. The board may consist of three or five members with staggered terms.

24 Women vote indirect
The right to vote is known as "suffrage." American women were pioneers in the women's suffrage cause, advocating women's right to vote from the 1820s onward. Some early victories were won in the territories of Wyoming (1869) and Utah (1870—although Utah women were disenfranchised by the U.S. Congress in 1887). Other territories and states granted women the right to vote in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—Colorado (1893), Illinois (1913), New York (1917)—but universal women's suffrage did not come until the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified in 1920.

26 Robinson Crusoe
Robinson Crusoe is a novel by Daniel Defoe, first published in 1719 and sometimes regarded as the first novel in English. The book is a fictional autobiography of the title character, an English castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical island, encountering natives, captives, and mutineers before being rescued. Within years of its publication, the book had reached an audience as wide as any book ever written in English. By 1900, no book in the history of Western literature had spawned more editions (700), spin-offs, and translations. The book proved so popular that the names of the two main protagonists have entered the language. The term "Robinson Crusoe" is virtually synonymous with the word "castaway" and is often used as a metaphor for being or doing something alone. In the book, Crusoe usually refers to his servant as "my man Friday," from which the term "Man Friday" (or "Girl Friday") originated, referring to a personal assistant, servant, or companion.

26 Handel's "Largo"
Largo is an Italian musical term for a composition or passage that is to be performed in a slow and dignified manner. "Ombra mai fu" is an aria from the opera *Serse* written in 1738 by George Frideric Handel. The title, which translates from the Italian as *Shade there never was*, is the first aria of the opera. It is sung by the title character in praise of a tree's shade as he sits underneath it. It is commonly known as Handel's "Largo." The opera was a commercial failure, lasting only five performances in London after its premiere. In the nineteenth century, however, the aria was rediscovered and became one of Handel's best-known pieces. It has often been arranged for other instruments, including solo piano, violin and piano, and groups of strings.

26 Whistler's "Mother"
Arrangement in Grey and Black: The Artist's Mother, famous under its colloquial name *Whistler's Mother*, is an 1871 oil-on-canvas painting by American-born painter James McNeill Whistler. It enjoyed a colorful history: threatened by rejection at the Royal Academy, pawned by the artist, bought by the Musée du Luxembourg in Paris, it now hangs in the Musée d'Orsay, Paris. Through exhibitions, publications, and caricatures, it became one of the most familiar images of the century, and a great American icon.

28 **Monroe Doctrine**

The Monroe Doctrine is a U.S. doctrine (a belief or system of beliefs accepted as authoritative by a group) which, on December 2, 1823, proclaimed that European powers would no longer colonize or interfere with the affairs of the nations of the Americas. The United States planned to stay neutral in wars between European powers and their colonies. However, if these latter types of wars were to occur in the Americas, the United States would view such action as hostile. President James Monroe first stated the doctrine during his seventh annual State of the Union Address to Congress, a defining moment in the foreign policy of the United States.

28 **Louisiana Purchase**

The Louisiana Purchase was the acquisition by the United States of approximately 530 million acres (828,000 square miles) of French territory in 1803, at the cost of about 3¢ per acre, totaling $15 million. The land purchased contained all of present-day Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska, and portions of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, New Mexico, Texas, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and Louisiana. The land included in the purchase comprises around 23 percent of the territory of the modern United States. An important moment in the presidency of Thomas Jefferson, the purchase faced domestic opposition as being possibly unconstitutional. Although he felt that the Constitution did not contain any provisions for acquiring territory, Jefferson decided to purchase Louisiana because he felt uneasy about France and Spain having the power to block American traders' access to the port of New Orleans.

29 **telegraph**

Telegraphy (from the Greek words *tele* = far and *graphein* = write) is the long-distance transmission of written messages without physical transport of letters. The first telegraphs came in the form of optical telegraphs, including the use of smoke signals and beacons, which have existed since ancient times, or semaphores using pivoting blades or paddles, shutters in a matrix, or hand-held flags. An electrical telegraph was independently developed and patented in the United States in 1837 by Samuel F. B. Morse, who also developed the Morse code signaling alphabet. Telegraphy messages sent by the telegraph operators using Morse code were known as *telegrams* or *cablegrams*, often shortened to *a cable* or a *wire* message. Before long distance telephone services were readily available or affordable, telegram services were very popular. Telegrams were often used to confirm business dealings and, unlike e-mail, telegrams were commonly used to create binding legal documents for business dealings. Telegraphy includes recent forms of data transmission such as fax, e-mail, the Internet, and computer networks in general.

31 **silk off a spool**

A colloquial expression denoting ease and smoothness, like silk thread unwinding from its spool.

33 **cornerstone**

A cornerstone (or foundation stone) is a ceremonial masonry stone, or facsimile, set in a prominent location on the outside of a building, with an inscription on the stone indicating the construction dates of the building and the names of architect, builder, and other significant individuals. The ceremony of laying a cornerstone is an important cultural component of Western architecture. Some cornerstones include time capsules from the time a particular building was built. The origins of this tradition date back at least to Biblical times. The cornerstone concept is derived from the first stone set in the construction of a masonry foundation, important since all other stones will be set in reference to this stone, thus determining the position of the entire edifice.

33 **silicate glue**

A glue made with silicon, the second most abundant element (after oxygen) in the earth's crust. Silicon has many industrial uses. Elemental silicon is the principal component of most semiconductor devices, most importantly integrated circuits or microchips. In the form of silica and silicates, silicon forms useful glasses, cements, and ceramics. It is also a component of silicones, mixed compounds often used as sealants.

33 **Babylon**
Babylon was a city of ancient Mesopotamia, the ruins of which can be found in present-day Iraq, south of Baghdad. It was the "holy city" of Babylonia from around 2300 BC, and the seat of the Neo-Babylonian Empire from 612 BC. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. It has been estimated that Babylon was the largest city in the world from c. 1770 to 1670 BCE, and again between c. 612 and 320 BCE.

33 **Greece**
Ancient Greece is a period in Greek history that lasted for around nine hundred years, from c. 1150-146 BCE. It is generally considered to be the seminal culture that provided the foundation of Western Civilization. Greek culture had a powerful influence on the Roman Empire, which carried a version of it to many parts of Europe. The civilization of the ancient Greeks has been immensely influential on the language, politics, educational systems, philosophy, science, and arts, giving rise to the Renaissance in Western Europe and again resurgent during various neo-Classical revivals in eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe and the Americas.

33 **Rome**
Ancient Rome was a civilization that grew from a small agricultural community founded on the Italian Peninsula circa the ninth century BCE to a massive empire straddling the Mediterranean Sea. In its 12-century existence, Roman civilization shifted from a monarchy, to a republic, to an autocratic empire. It came to dominate Western Europe and the entire area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea through conquest and assimilation. The Roman empire went into decline in the 5th century, the start of the Dark Ages. Roman civilization is often grouped into "classical antiquity" with ancient Greece, a civilization that inspired much of the culture of ancient Rome. Ancient Rome contributed greatly to the development of law, war, art, literature, architecture, technology, and language in the Western world, and its history continues to have a major influence on the world today.

33 **the joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then**
The ancient Greek tragedies are centered around gods and kings, while the ancient Roman comedies focus on common people and their domestic conflicts.

33 **Treaty of Versailles**
The Treaty of Versailles (1919) was the peace treaty which officially ended World War I between the Allied and Associated Powers and Germany. Of the many provisions in the treaty, one of the most important and controversial provisions required Germany and its allies to accept full responsibility for causing the war and to disarm, make substantial territorial concessions, and pay reparations to certain countries that had formed the Allies. The Treaty was undermined by subsequent events starting as early as 1922 and was widely flouted by the mid-thirties.

33 **Lindbergh flight**
Charles Augustus Lindbergh (1902-1974), known as "Lucky Lindy" and "The Lone Eagle," was an American pilot famous for the first solo, non-stop flight across the Atlantic, from Roosevelt Field, Long Island, New York, to Paris in 1927 in the *Spirit of St. Louis.* In the ensuing deluge of notoriety, Lindbergh became the world's best-known aviator. The massive publicity surrounding him and his flight boosted the aircraft industry and made a skeptical public take air travel seriously.

33 **provinces**
territories occupied by the constituent administrative districts of a nation; an alternative term for *states.*

34 **You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to**
Enthusiastic congregational singing was an important part of the evangelical movement by which Methodist theology took root and spread through tent revivals and such.

36 **Contoocook**
a village about 30 miles north-north-east of Grover's Corners, named after the Contoocook River that runs through it.

39 **Dr. Ferguson**
the minister at the church

ACT II

48 **Cicero's Orations**
Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE) was a Roman statesman, lawyer, political theorist, and philosopher, widely considered one of Rome's greatest orators and prose stylists. Cicero is generally seen as one of the most versatile minds of Roman culture and his writing the paragon of Classical Latin.

49 **It's like what one of those Middle West poets said: You've got to love life to have life, and you've got to have life to love life.**
Edgar Lee Masters (1868-1950) was an American poet, biographer, and dramatist. His book *Spoon River Anthology* (1915) is a collection of short poems that collectively describe the life of the fictional small town of Spoon River, named after the real Spoon River that ran near Masters's hometown of Lewistown, Illinois. The collection includes 212 separate characters, all providing 244 soliloquies. Each poem is an epitaph of a dead citizen, delivered by the dead themselves.

"Lucinda Matlock"

I went to the dances at Chandlerville,
And played snap-out at Winchester.
One time we changed partners,
Driving home in the moonlight of middle June,
And then I found Davis.
We were married and lived together for seventy years,
Enjoying, working, raising the twelve children,
Eight of whom we lost
Ere I had reached the age of sixty.
I spun, I wove, I kept the house, I nursed the sick,
I made the garden, and for holiday
Rambled over the fields where sang the larks,
And by Spoon River gathering many a shell,
And many a flower and medicinal weed—
Shouting to the wooded hills, singing to the green valleys.
At ninety-six I had lived enough, that is all,
And passed to a sweet repose.
What is this I hear of sorrow and weariness,
Anger, discontent and drooping hopes?
Degenerate sons and daughters,
Life is too strong for you—
It takes life to love Life.

61 **the Philo System**
An individual seller on Amazon.com is offering *The Philo System of Progressive Poultry Keeping* by E. W. Philo, 9th edition, 1909. Another seller on GoAntiques.com is offering a catalog from Cycle Hatchery Co., c. 1910, called *A Little Poultry and a Living* by E. W. Philo. The National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland, maintains the American Poultry Historical Society Collection; among its holdings is *The Intensive or Philo System of Poultry Keeping* - Dent – England - 78 pp – 1912.

61 **incubator**
In nature, birds sit on their eggs in the nest, providing the proper warmth and protection until the eggs hatch. Chicken egg incubation can be maintained artificially as well. Nearly all chicken eggs will hatch after 21 days of good conditions: 99.5° F and around 55 percent relative humidity (increased to 70 percent in the last three days of incubation to help soften the egg shell). Home incubators are usually large boxes (lead incubators are popular) and hold up to 75 eggs. Eggs must be turned three to eight times each week, rotating at least 180 degrees. If eggs aren't turned, the embryo inside will stick to the shell and likely will be hatched with physical defects. This process is natural; a hen will stand up three to five times a day and shift her eggs around with her beak.

66 **ice-cream soda**
a refreshment consisting of ice cream in any kind of soda, sometimes with the addition of a flavored syrup, served in a tall glass.

69 **State Agriculture College**
Perhaps the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts, founded in 1866 in Hanover, moved to Durham (near Portsmouth, about 60 miles east of Grover's Corners) in 1893. Classes began in Durham with 51 freshmen and 13 upperclassmen, which was three times the projected enrollment. In 1923 the college became the University of New Hampshire.

75 **sacrament**
a formal religious act conferring a specific grace on those who receive it.

75 **It's like what one of those European fellas said: Every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being.**
This may be a reference to the theory of natural selection, the genetic process by which favorable traits become more common in successive generations of a population, while unfavorable traits become less common. Natural selection is one of the cornerstones of modern biology. The term was introduced by English naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) in his groundbreaking 1859 book *The Origin of Species*.

80 **The March from *Lohengrin***
The traditional wedding march ("Here comes the bride") is from Richard Wagner's opera *Lohengrin*.

82 **rheumatism**
Rheumatism is a non-specific term for medical problems affecting the heart, bones, joints, kidney, skin, and/or lung. The term "rheumatism" is still used in colloquial speech and historical contexts, but is no longer frequently used in medical or technical literature. Sources dealing with rheumatism tend to focus on arthritis, but the traditional term covers a wide range of different problems, including various kinds of back pain, bursitis, and tendonitis. These disorders share two characteristics: they cause chronic (though often intermittent) pain, and they are difficult to treat. They are also, collectively, very common.

82 **Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"**
The wedding march from Felix Mendelssohn's incidental music to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is often used as a wedding recessional.

ACT III

86 **Lake Sunapee**
Lake Sunapee is located about 35 miles north of Grover's Corners. It is the fifth-largest lake located entirely in New Hampshire. Lake Sunapee is a glacial lake. The glaciers deposited large rocks scattered everywhere in the woods when the ice melted about 11,000 years ago. The Native Americans, probably Algonquins, called the lake Soo-Nipi or "Wild Goose Waters" for the many geese that passed over the lake during migration.

86 **Lake Winnipesaukee**
Located about 60 miles northeast of Grover's Corners, Lake Winnipesaukee is the largest lake in New Hampshire. It is approximately 21 miles long and from one to nine miles wide, covering 69 square miles. Lake Winnipesaukee has been a tourist destination for more than a century, especially for residents escaping the summer heat of Boston and New York City. The Native American name Winnipesaukee means either "smile of the Great Spirit" or "beautiful water in a high place."

86 **White Mountains**
The White Mountains are a mountain range that covers about a quarter of the state of New Hampshire (in the northern part of the state) and a small portion of western Maine in the United States. Part of the Appalachian Mountains, they are considered the most rugged mountains in New England.

86 **Mt. Washington**
Located 100 miles north-northeast of Grover's Corners, Mount Washington is the highest peak in the American Northeast at 6,288 ft. It is famous for its dangerously erratic weather, holding the record for the highest wind gust directly measured at the Earth's surface, at 231 mph on the afternoon of April 12, 1934. The mountain was known as Agiocochook, or "home of the Great Spirit," before European settlers arrived.

86 **North Conway and Conway**
North Conway and Conway are located about 90 miles north-northeast of Grover's Corners. Chartered in 1765 by Colonial Governor Benning Wentworth, Conway is named for Henry Seymour Conway, commander-in-chief of the British Army. Early settlers had named the area "Pequawket" (known colloquially as "Pigwacket"), after the local Abenaki tribe. The picturesque small village of North Conway is nestled directly in the heart of the White Mountains, and has long been popular with tourists and artists. North Conway is known as "the birthplace of American skiing."

86 **Mt. Monadnock**
Mount Monadnock is a 3,165 feet peak located about 7 miles west-southwest of Grover's Corners. The mountain has drawn attention for years by its relative isolation from other mountains. Monadnock, which comes originally from the Abnacki Native American word for "mountain that stands alone," is now a standard geological term for any singular mountain that rises above the surrounding plain. Herman Melville compared the hump of Moby Dick to Monadnock when describing Captain Ahab's final struggle with the whale. Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Rudyard Kipling are among those who climbed and wrote about the mountain. Monadnock is often described as "the second-most-climbed mountain in the world," with 125,000 climbers yearly, behind only Mt. Fuji in Japan, with about 200,000 yearly climbers. In the early ninetenth century, uncontrollable fires destroyed crucial vegetation, permitting severe erosion and creating a tree line that still persists, though the mountain is too low to have a naturally bare summit.

86 **Jaffrey and East Jaffrey**
Jaffrey and East Jaffrey are located about 7 miles southwest of Grover's Corners. Settled about 1758, Jaffrey was incorporated in 1773 and named for George Jaffrey, member of a prominent Portsmouth family. Beginning in the 1840s, the area's scenic beauty attracted tourists, and several summer hotels were built at the base of Mount Monadnock.

86 **Peterborough**
Grover's Corners was largely inspired by Peterborough.

86 **Dublin**
Located 6 miles west-northwest of Grover's Corners, Dublin was incorporated in 1771. The original settlers were Scottish colonists.

86 **Woodlawn and Brooklyn**
Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx is one of the largest cemeteries in New York City. It opened in 1863 at a time when the Bronx was still considered to be out in "the country." The cemetery covers more than 400 acres (half the size of Central Park) and is the resting place for more than 300,000 people. Built on rolling hills, its tree-lined roads lead to quite unique memorials, some designed by McKim Mead & White and other famous architects. Brooklyn has a number of large cemeteries where many famous people are buried.

87 **Daughters of the American Revolution**
The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is a lineage-based membership organization of women dedicated to promoting historic preservation, education, and patriotism. Membership in DAR is open to women at least eighteen years of age who can prove lineal bloodline descent from an ancestor who aided in achieving United States independence. Acceptable ancestors include various related categories of known historical figures, including: signers of the United States Declaration of Independence; military veterans of the American Revolutionary War; members of the Continental Congress and State conventions and assemblies; participants in the Boston Tea Party; prisoners of war, refugees, and defenders of forts and frontiers; doctors and nurses who aided Revolutionary casualties; and ministers, petitioners, and others who gave material or patriotic support to the Revolutionary cause.

87 ***Mayflower***
The *Mayflower* was the ship that transported the Pilgrims from Plymouth, England, to Plymouth, Massachusetts (which would become the capital of Plymouth Colony) in 1620. The Society of Mayflower Descendants is a hereditary organization comprised of individuals who have documented their descent from one or more of the 102 passengers who arrived on the *Mayflower.* The Society was founded at Plymouth in 1897. Today, tens of millions of Americans—approximately one in seven—has at least one ancestor who was among this group of early settlers.

87 **Crawford Notch**
Crawford Notch is a steep and narrow gorge of the Saco River in the White Mountains, located just south of Mt. Washington, about 95 miles north-northeast of Grover's Corners.

89 **Buffalo**
Buffalo, New York, is the state's second-largest city, after New York City, and is the county seat of Erie County. It is also the economic and cultural center of the Buffalo-Niagara Region. Buffalo lies at the eastern end of Lake Erie, at the southern head of the Niagara River, which connects Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. At the start of the twentieth century, immigrants from Europe came in to work in the local mills which used hydroelectric power generated from the river. The city got the nickname *City of Light* at this time because of the widespread electric lighting used. In 1881, Buffalo had deployed the first electric streetlights in the United States. In 1900, Buffalo's population was 350,000.

90 lumbago
backache affecting the lumbar region or lower back; it can be caused by muscle strain, arthritis, vascular insufficiency, or a ruptured intervertebral disc.

90 bereaved
sorrowful through loss or deprivation.

96 patent device
The term "patent" usually refers to a right granted to anyone who invents or discovers any new and useful process, machine, article of manufacture, or composition of matter, or any new and useful improvement thereof. A patent provides the right to exclude others from making, using, selling, offering for sale, or importing the patented invention for the term of the patent, usually 20 years from the filing date. The device that George and Emily have bought is a new invention for which the patent still applies.

101 Clinton
Clinton is a village in Oneida County, New York, between Syracuse and Utica, about 300 miles west of Grover's Corners. It was named for George Clinton, the first governor of the state of New York. The village was known as the "village of schools" because of the large number of private schools operating in the village during the nineteenth Century.

104 Hamilton College
Hamilton College is a private, independent, highly selective liberal arts college located in Clinton, New York. Founded in 1812, the college is known for its emphasis on writing and speaking. Hamilton is sometimes referred to as the "College on the Hill," because of the school's location on top of College Hill, just outside of downtown Clinton. Hamilton College is one of the top liberal arts colleges in the country, and is considered one of the "Little Ivies."

106 post-card album
The first postcard in the United States was created in 1893 to advertise the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. They quickly became popular. In 1908, more than 677 million postcards were mailed. In these early days, when travel was limited, people kept the postcards they received in albums, just as today we keep photographs.

107 manual-training class
shop class; woodworking, tools, etc.

BOOKS

***The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder** (1927)
Wilder's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that catapulted him to fame. In eighteenth century Peru, a bridge collapses and five people die. A Franciscan missionary happens to witness the tragedy, and he sets out to explore the lives of the five victims and to try to understand why they died.

***The Enthusiast* by Gilbert A. Harrison** (1983, Ticknor and Fields)
First full-length biography of Thornton Wilder.

The Letters of Gertrude Stein & Thornton Wilder (1996, Yale University Press)
Correspondence between literary colleagues and close personal friends.

***Our Town: An American Play* by Donald Haberman** (1989, Twayne Publishers)
A thoughtful critical analysis of the play.

***Readings on Our Town* edited by Thomas Siebold** (2000, Greenhave Press)
A short biography of the playwright and 14 essays by different authors on the play's format, themes, characters, and style.

***Thornton Wilder* edited by Harold Bloom** (2003, Chelsea House Publishers)
Part of Bloom's Major Dramatists series. A brief biography and a number of short excerpts by various authors discussing Wilder's work, with particular emphasis on *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth.*

***Thornton Wilder, Collected Plays and Writings on Theater* edited by J. D. McClatchy** (2007, Library of America)

VIDEO

OT: our town (2003, Filmmovement)
An enthralling and inspiring 80-minute documentary about high school students attempting to produce *Our Town* in Compton, California, an inner-city community near Los Angeles notorious for its poverty and gang activity. Winner of the Crystal Heart Award at the Heartland Film Festival.

Several versions of *Our Town* are available on video, including the 1940 film featuring William Holden as George Gibbs and Frank Craven as the Stage Manager, the role he created in the original stage production. Television versions include 2005 (with Paul Newman as the Stage Manager; see website below), 1989 (Spaulding Grey), and 1977 (Hal Holbrook).

WEBSITES

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ourtown/index.html
An excellent website for the PBS broadcast of *Our Town* in 2005, starring Paul Newman as the Stage Manager. Essays, interviews, a teacher's guide, and much more.

http://www.tcnj.edu/~wilder/biography/frame.html
The website of the Thornton Wilder Society, dedicated to "the twofold purpose of supporting efforts which expand the literary legacy of Thornton Wilder and of encouraging projects which emphasize the timeless importance of literature and drama to world culture."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Before Seeing the Play

Our Town takes place in a small town in New Hampshire between 1901 and 1913. What do you know about life 100 years ago? What are your assumptions about that era? How do you suppose things were different then? What might be similarities between then and now?

Discuss what makes a work of art a "classic." What plays, movies, books, visual artworks, or pieces of music do you consider to be classics? What qualities do these works have in common? What makes them stand out from the crowd? How do they reward repeated study? After seeing the play, revisit this question. How does *Our Town* compare with other works discussed? What does the play say to us today?

After Seeing the Play

In Act I, the Stage Manager talks about putting a copy of the *Our Town* script into a time capsule. Seventy years after it was written, and 100 years after it takes place, how does the play function as an historic artifact? What does it teach us about life in the past? What plays or movies would you place in a time capsule to help future generations to understand our life today?

What does a stage manager typically do in a theatrical production? Why do you suppose Thornton Wilder chose to bring the Stage Manager from backstage to center stage and make him the play's central voice? What is the Stage Manager's connection to Grover's Corners? What is his point of view about the people and events there? Who or what might the Stage Manager represent?

In Act II, Emily says to George, "The moonlight's so terrible." Moments later she says to her father, "The moonlight's so wonderful.") In Act III, Mrs. Soames says, "My, wasn't life awful—and wonderful." Why do you suppose these characters make such contradictory statements?

What is Simon Stimson's place in the community of Grover's Corners? How does he "fit in," and how does he not? Mr. Webb says, "he's seen a peck of trouble, one thing after another." What might those troubles be? What does Dr. Gibbs mean when he says, "Some people ain't made for small-town life"? What do you suppose Simon's epitaph means?

What does Thornton Wilder say about marriage in *Our Town*? How do the three couples—Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, and George and Emily—show different aspects of marriage and relationships? How are marriage and family life today different from how they are depicted in Grover's Corners? How are they the same?

Think about the moments in the play where characters talk about the neighborhood called Polish Town. How do attitudes about social segregation in Grover's Corners relate to today's debate about immigration?

In the first act of *Our Town* we are introduced to Charles Webb, the publisher and editor of the Grover's Corners *Sentinel,* who reports and comments about the town. Discuss the function and value of journalism in our world. What have we as a society gained because these efforts? What would we be missing without these documentations? In what other ways have societies chronicled their existence?

Much has changed since 1901 that has had a tremendous impact on the way we live. Even Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, doesn't escape time's innovations and industrialization during the 12 years of the play. Discuss these innovations, how they have evolved, and their impact on our lifestyle (for example, cooking, transportation, farming, clothing).

How do global issues (such as segregation or poverty) affect your local community? How do distant events (such as the war in Iraq, the 9/11 attacks, or assassinations) affect your local community?

WRITING PROJECTS

Write about your own hometown or local neighborhood. What is its history? What landmarks are worth visiting? Who are its most prominent citizens? Who are its most interesting inhabitants, and what makes them unique? What makes this place unique? How might this place be representative of everyday American life? What do you like best about this place? What do you like least?

Suppose you were writing a new, updated version of *Our Town* set in your own community. What elements of the play would you change? What would remain the same?

Compare *Our Town* to Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology*.

Compare *Our Town* to more contemporary visions of small town life such as John Mellencamp's song "Small Town" or the TV series "Smallville"?

Choose one of the central characters of the play. How does he or she change over the course of the play. What does he or she learn—or fail to learn?

At the top of each act, Thornton Wilder tells the audience the time and year of the scene by sharing with us a word picture of nature, those things that we often take for granted but are filled with beauty and poetry. Write a poem or paragraph or compose a song about the nature that surrounds you. Choose a season and time of day. Write about a sunset you saw on summer vacation in Arizona, or the view from your window every morning.

Interview a senior member of your town about what the town was like when he/she was your age. Ask about where he/she was born and how his/her family came to Indiana. How is life in the town different, and how is it the same?

Countless poets, composers, lyricists, and writers have used their gifts to express ideas about death. These works and eulogies of the famous are quoted in all media forms. You can see a few works of Indiana's own writers on the Crown Hill Website:

http://www.crownhill.org/education/index.html

Try writing a piece about death. It could be a poem about your fears or death's mystery, a eulogy, or an essay.

ACTIVITIES

Have one group of students read and act out the morning breakfast scene from Act I. Have another group of students improvise a typical morning getting ready for school in their own lives. Compare the two scenes. How are they alike? How are they different?

Have students draw pictures or maps of Grover's Corners as described in the play. Encourage them to use their imaginations to fill in places and things the play leaves out.

Create a visual collage of your view of your town either in print or video. This could include newspaper and magazine clippings, drawings, photographs, speeches, and spoken commentary. Consider the architecture, the citizens, business, the daily life, love, and death in your community. Think about how your town has grown in the last five years, or what has caused its decline.

These days, composers and sound designers are called upon for plays, films, TV, and even live sports. Music chronicles and accents our art, our entertainment, and our lives. Think about weddings, graduations, funerals, even being on-hold on the phone. Try your hand at soundtracking the play *Our Town*. Consider the sounds the play calls for as well as those moments when you might want to emphasize the themes to the audience.

Drama Activities and Arts Integration

These activities have been compiled with the drama class in mind; however, if you wish to integrate theatre elements into other curricula, several of these activities will work with minimal effort.

Tableaux in Three Acts: (Living statues)

Divide the class into groups with four to five students in each group. Ask each group to choose moments in the lives of a family, each depicting an act of *Our Town*.

Act One: Daily Life
Act Two: Love and Marriage
Act Three: Death

They should create six tableaux in all: one for each act depicting the turn of the twentieth century, and one for each act depicting life at the turn of the twenty-first century. Every student in the group must be in the tableau, whether he/she is the landscaper or the lawnmower, the grandmother or the rocking chair in which she sits.

The groups take turns showing their tableaux to the rest of the class as audience. The class identifies what story they believe is being shown. Who are the characters? Where are they? What are they doing? How do they feel, the actors in the tableau?

What Is IT?

This is a great warm-up activity that actors use to get their bodies moving and to wake up their creativity. This is a quick-paced pantomime game.

Choose some neutral objects in your classroom, or bring in some unbreakable objects. Things like a large plastic bowl, a roll of packing tape, a large wooden mixing spoon or ruler, a funnel, even a good-sized round sponge work well. (Hint: Get your items at the dollar store or second-hand shop.)

Each student takes a turn using the neutral item in the way he/she would use the "real" item. Example: holding and swinging the spoon as you would a **baseball bat**, or sweeping with the spoon like a **broom**, turning the bowl like a car **steering wheel...** The group is to guess **what the item is by how the actor uses it.** The actor should *not* hold up the roll of tape and say, "It's a donut."

Characters in My Town

Choose a person from your community and write a character monologue/piece of narration/soliloquy from his/her perspective in which that person shares a story about a personal experience. For example: I am the mayor, and on election day this is what happened to me. Or, I am a doctor, and here is what happened that made me want to become a doctor.

Have the students pair up and direct each other's pieces and then perform them for the class.

The Hot Seat

Divide your class into groups of no more than four students and choose a character from *Our Town* for each group. Have the students do a character profile by going through the script and writing down: everything the character says about him/herself, everything the character does, everything that is said about the character by others, everything the character says about others. Next they should go beyond that information and create more background and history for their character.

When that is completed, they are ready to be in the hot seat. Put a chair in the front of the classroom. Call one of the characters to sit in the chair. The group will have to choose which one of their group will start. The class then asks the character questions, and **the actor in the chair becomes that character and answers the questions as his/her character would.** Example: George is being hot-seated and they ask him, "Why don't you help you mother around the house?" "What is the best game you ever hit?" "Where did you and Emily go on your honeymoon?" "Did you ever wish you had a brother rather than your sister Rebecca?"

Let each actor in each character group have a chance to answer a couple of questions.

Pantomime in Two Parts

On individual pieces of paper, write out stage actions from the script, then fold the papers into quarters and put them in a hat or box from which the actors can draw. Next, give each actor a couple of pieces of paper and ask them to write down an everyday activity, fold them up, and throw them in with the *Our Town* actions.

Each actor takes a turn pulling out an action and presenting it. Remind them that mime is without sound but not without emotion.

After each actor has had a turn, then go around the group again and add sound, keeping it simple and necessary (meaning they should not need to do a monologue while milking the cow).

Examples of actions to use:

Our Town	Both Time Periods	2007
Chopping wood	Delivering newspapers	Loading the dishwasher
Driving a wagon	Hoeing a garden	Driving a car
Delivering the milk	Eating breakfast	Riding an elevator

Improvising the WHERE

Look at ***Improvisation for the Theatre, A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques*** **by Viola Spolin,** published by Northwestern University Press

Chapter IV – **Where**
There are many wonderful exercises in this chapter that are helpful to the student actor. Just pick a couple and have some fun.

Play by Play

Perform a scene from a play with a small-town atmosphere such as *The Diviners*, *Spoon River Anthology*, *Laundry and Bourbon*, or *The Rainmaker.* Compare the script with *Our Town*. How has American life changed? How have other playwrights captured this world?

Talking to the Audience

Take a look at some other plays in which characters talk to the audience throughout the play. Choose some of these speeches to perform and then discuss the tone, purpose, meaning, and desired effect.

Some suggested plays:
And A Nightingale Sang...
Cabaret
Henry V
I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me by a Young Lady from Rwanda
Neil Simon's autobiographical trilogy: *Brighton Beach Memoirs, Biloxi Blues, Broadway Bound*
Othello
Reckless
Richard III
Shivaree
The Skin of Our Teeth
The Boys Next Door
The Glass Menagerie
The Marriage of Bette and Boo
To Kill a Mockingbird
Wit

A Quicker Look at Thornton Wilder

The Angel That Troubled the Waters is a collection of three-minute, three-character plays by Thornton Wilder. Why not cast some of the plays, give the students a couple of days to rehearse them and then perform some!

Gender Roles at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

According to the 1900 census, men outnumbered women by more than one and one-half million. Masculine supremacy was an accepted fact, not only numerically, for nearly every man believed that men were superior to women. The lifestyle of the country supported that belief. Men were dominant politically and economically. They ran the nation's business and produced most of its art and literature. They were the unquestioning authority in their households and in social circles; they set the standards by which women were required to live. Women were not permitted in most clubs, saloons, or tobacco shops, and in some states an unescorted female could be refused a meal or a room at a restaurant or a hotel.

The work week for most men was six days; a day's work was usually between 10 and 14 hours. Average weekly pay was about $12. A man could buy a suit for $15 and a pair of shoes for $3. Men were usually seen in derbys during the winter months and flat straw hats or fine, fedora-shaped Panamas during the warmer months. Many men wore long underwear year-round under their three-piece blue serge suits. On Sundays and for special occasions the more affluent wore frock coats and silk hats. Collars were stiff, high, and starched, and fastened to the shirt by collar buttons. Shoes extending above the ankles were tightly laced or buttoned.

A man who showed emotion or concern for the unequal or socially unfortunate was suspect. Those who tried to venture into different social strata, for whatever reason, were met with distrust. It fell to writers and other intellectuals to call for needed social reforms. Most men believed their situations to be designed by destiny, either enjoyed or endured, according to circumstance.

As the 20th century dawned, most women were in the home, concerned with caring for their husbands and children, keeping their homes neat, clean, and comfortable, and relaxing with light reading.

The woman of the early 1900s began a typical day at 5 a.m., an hour or two earlier if she lived on a farm. Her constant companion seemed to be the kitchen "range," which was fired by wood and/or coal. The stove had to be polished and have its ashes sifted, even in the coldest weather. She baked her own bread, cakes, cookies, and pies, and in season canned fruits and vegetables, making ketchup, chili sauce, and apple butter. Store-bought goods labeled her a lazy woman, a stigma to avoid at all costs. From coffee beans she ground fresh coffee every day. She sewed garments by hand or on a primitive Singer sewing machine, were she fortunate enough to have one. The turn-of-the-century woman always wore a hat when she went out. Her dresses were often homemade, though the popular shirt-waist style was ready made and sold from 45 cents to $6.95. For laundering, she used a washboard or a hand-powered washing machine, and heated her heavy irons on the stove. She might have an indoor pump for water. If not, she carried water several times daily from an outdoor well. Water had to be heated for cooking, laundering, dishwashing, and bathing. Bathtubs were often cast-iron washtubs placed in front of the stove for the traditional Saturday night bath. A few families enjoyed early forms of central heating, but some believed furnace heat was not healthful.

By 1900, there were 200 A&Ps (Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company stores). Housewives became shoppers, buying in small quantities and visiting their neighborhood store several times a week. They also shopped at the butcher shop, and in larger cities at the five-and-ten-cent store, or at a real department store with a variety of goods under one roof. Advertising was in its infancy, but brand names such as Fairy Soap, Fels Naptha Soap, and Aunt Jemima were becoming familiar. Manufactured soap was a special treat after the arduous chore of making soap at home.

Since there was no electricity, the carpet sweeper was operated by woman power, and rugs were often hoisted over clotheslines and cleaned by using a carpet beater. The turn of the century woman's long day of responsibilities and duties demanded efficient planning and scheduling. Whether she could expect any time for leisurely light reading, recreation, or Sunday day-of-rest seems unlikely.

Home Life at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

The living room, usually called the parlor, quite likely had a rocking chair, a Morris chair, and a horse-hair sofa, later replaced by upholstered and overstuffed sofas and armchairs. There might also be an old-fashioned music box, an organ, or a piano. Every "cultured" family made sure their children took piano lessons from a teacher who came to the house for 50 cents a lesson. Elegant homes featured lampshades of glass, the more expensive created by Louis Tiffany. In the dining room, round oak extension tables were considered modern and fashionable.

The "convenience" was not yet indoors in every home, and so the "outhouse" remained an inelegant, but necessary feature of the homestead. Kerosene lamps were widely used for lighting, though a few homes had gas light. Telephones existed in only a few homes.

The milkman delivered milk to the house every day, even in small towns, for a cost of 5 cents a quart. In the summer months, the iceman delivered blocks of ice sized to fit the ice-box. Mailmen, called letter carriers, delivered mail two or three times a day. Postage stamps for letters cost 2 cents, post cards, 1 cent. A junk man, usually with a foreign accent, was a common sight in the alleys of towns both small and large. Doctors made house calls for $3 a visit. Dentists often served as barbers, even as veterinarians.

A drug store was a wondrous place which by 1900 sold a Brownie camera for $1. Chewing gum was first made by Zeno's, but Wrigley's followed quickly with its penny-a-stick in the slot machine. The flavors were assorted, and you had to hope your favorite was next. The drug store also sold ice cream, though ice cream parlors were appearing, and a refreshing drink called Coca-Cola was available for 5 cents.

Discussion Activity

After seeing the play and reading the attached articles about gender roles and home life, discuss how things have changed in the last 100 years. Compare how men's and women's roles have changed in the areas of profession, politics, fashion, society, and home life. How have men's and women's dreams and aspirations changed? In what ways have they remained the same? How have men's and women's roles become less rigid?

Name _____

Date _____

Budgeting Now and Then

Directions: Complete the columns for your topic area assigned by your teacher. Divide the topic within your group to complete research efficiently.

Topic assigned _____

Description of Necessary Items and Expenses Needed	Cost in 1905	Cost Today
Total		

Name _____

Date _____

Here are samples of the prices that the Webbs and Gibbs might pay as they shop in *Our Town*.

Department Store Prices

Ladies' Wear			
Tailor-made Suit	$10.00	Waist	$3.00
Skirt	$4.00	Corset	$.40
Chemise	$.50	Shawl	$.50
Bracelet	$.35	Silk Petticoat	$5.00
Shoes	$1.50	Bead Purse	$.59
Men's Wear			
Fancy Suit	$9.00	Coat and Vest	$7.00
Trousers	$1.25	Linen Collar	$.25
Shirts	$.50	Hat	$2.00
Woolen hose	$.15	Underwear	$.50
Suspenders	$.25	Work Shoes	$1.25
House Furnishings			
Blanket	$.35	Wallpaper	roll $.05
Carpet	$.12 yd.	42-Piece Dinner Set	$2.95
Hammock	$3.50	Sheet, Double Bed	$.58
Dress Goods			
Gingham	$.12 1/2 yd.	Sewing Machine	$12.00
Madras Cloth	$.10 yd.	Embroidery	$.08
Taffeta	$.85 yd.	Silk	$.50 yd.
Calico	$.06 yd.	Sewing Pattern	$.10
Pins	box $.05	Damask	$.40 yd.[1]

Grocery Prices

Produce and Dairy Products			
Red Apples	$.30 pk.	Dried Apricots	$.10 lb.
Seed Potatoes	$.35 bu.	Dried Prunes	$.05 lb.
Onion Sets	3 qt. $.25	Eggs	$.12 doz.
Oranges	$.20 doz.	Butter	$.18 lb.
Lemons	$.15 doz.	Swiss Cheese	$.25 lb.
Housewares			
Scrub Brush	$.15	Starch	$.10
Lye	$.05	Toilet Soap	3 for $.15
Garden Seed	2 for $.05	Candles	1 Box $.15
Canned Goods			
Golden Cream Corn	$.10	Boston Baked Beans	$.10
String Beans	$.10	Oysters	$.20
Tomatoes	$.20	Jams	$.10
Early June Peas	$.10	Green Turtle Meat	$2.75
Sliced Peaches	$.25	Sardines in Oil	$.05

[1]Ezra Bowen, ed., *This Fabulous Century* (New York: Time Inc., 1969), 144.

Name _____

Date _____

Staples

Tea	$.40	Sugar	100 lbs. $5.80
Coffee	$.15 lb.	Salt	100 lbs. $.20
Cocoa	$.25	Salad Dressing	$.25
Macaroni	$.10	Baking Powder	$.10
Hominy Grits	$.10	Gelatine	$.15[2]

Drugstore Prices

Soda Fountain

Ice Cream Soda	$.10	Grape Lemonade	$.15
Plain Soda	$.05	Orangeade	$.05
Root Beer Float	$.05	Lemon Phosphate	$.05
Sundae	$.10	Buttermilk	$.05
Cantaloupe Sundae	$.15	Egg Milk Chocolate	$.10
Egg Drinks	$.10	Coffee (iced or hot)	$.10
Tonic Water	$.10	Cakes	$.05

Drugs

Witch Hazel	$.25	Corn Plasters	$.10
Aruica Salve	$.10	Wart Remover	$.10
Bromo Seltzer	$.10	Castoria	$.35
Wine of Cardui	$1.00	St. Jacob's Oil	$.25
Cough Syrup	$.25	Hair Balsam	$.50[3]

Meat and Poultry Prices

Spring Chicken	$.97 lb.	Roosters	$.15 ea.
Beef	$.10 lb.	Hens	$.07 lb.
Sausage	$.12 1/2 lb.	Pork	$.10 lb.
Turkey	$.10 lb.	Veal	$.10 lb.
Duck	$.06 lb.	Breakfast Bacon	$.12 1/2 lb.
Duck, Dressed	$.10 lb.	Goose	$.05 lb.[4]

Dinner Menu

Appetizers

Cantloupe, half	$.10	Sliced Tomatoes	$.10
Sliced Orange	$.10	New Radishes	$.05
Young Onions	$.05	Sliced Cucumbers	$.10

Soup

Old Fashioned Navy Bean,	$.10

Main Course

Channel Catfish	$.20	Chicken Fricassee	$.20
Pork Tenderloins	$.20	Roast Beef	$.15
Omelet with Jelly	$.15	Pork and Beans	$.15
Roast Pork, Apple Sauce	$.20	Boston Baked Beans	$.10

[2]Ibid., 142.
[3]Ibid., 136.
[4]Ibid., 141.

Name _____

Date _____

Vegetables

Corn on the Cob	$.10	Pickled Beets	$.05
Buttered Beets	$.05	Cold Slaw	$.05
Mashed Potatoes	$.05	Salad	$.10

Dessert

Lemon Layer Cake	$.05	Raspberries and Cream	$.10
Ice Cream	$.10	Rhubarb Pie	$.05
Ice Cream and Cake	$.15	Green Apple Pie	$.05

Beverages

Coffee	$.05	Tea	$.05
Milk	$.05	Buttermilk	$.05[5]

[5]Ibid., 139.