



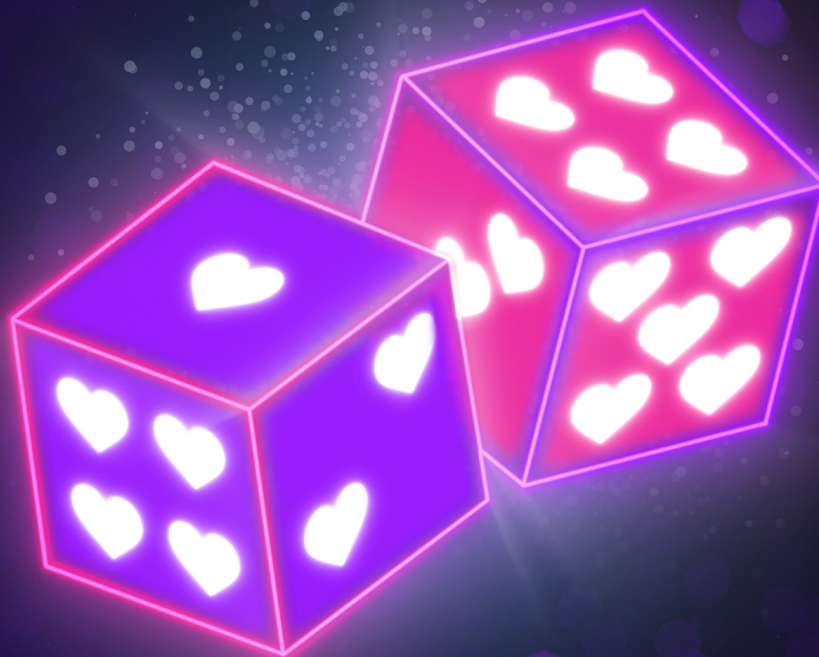
INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

CHRISTEL DEHAAN

STUDENT MATINEE PROGRAM

at the Indiana Repertory Theatre

STUDY GUIDE



GUYS AND DOLLS

BASED ON A STORY AND CHARACTERS BY DAMON RUNYON
MUSIC AND LYRICS BY FRANK LOESSER
BOOK BY JO SWERLING AND ABE BURROWS
DIRECTED BY LILI-ANNE BROWN

APRIL 7 - MAY 9

Original artwork by Jake Lebowitz.

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Program Site 2026

GUYS AND DOLLS



Content Spotlight

Contains mild profanity and violence; blasphemy; verbal and sexual innuendo; guns, and other weapons; depictions of alcohol and tobacco consumption, gambling; references to Christian theology and gender stereotypes; flashing, bright lights and haze

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INDIANA
REPERTORY
THEATRE

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golden-age Broadway musical

In the bustling streets of New York, a smooth-talking gambler wagers he can charm an uptight missionary, and another high roller desperately fights to keep his game alive—while trying to avoid marrying his fiancée of 14 years. Will luck be a lady tonight? Filled with songs you love and exhilarating dances, the award-winning classic *Guys and Dolls* has often been called “the perfect musical comedy.”

Recommended for students in grades 5-12

The performance will last approximately
2 hours and 30 minutes including one 15-minute intermission

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PLANNING YOUR VISIT



You, the audience, are one of the most important parts of any performance. Experiencing the theatre is a group activity shared not only with the actors, but also with the people sitting around you. Your attention and participation help the actors perform better, and allow the rest of the audience to enjoy the show.

Here are a few simple tips to help make each theatre experience enjoyable for everyone:

- Leave mobile phones, cameras, and other distracting and noise-making electronic devices at home or turned off.
- You may think texting is private, but the light and the motion are very annoying to those around you and on stage. Do not text during the performance.
- The house lights dimming and going out signal the audience to get quiet and settle in your seats: the play is about to begin.
- Don't talk with your neighbors during the play. It distracts people around you and the actors on stage. Even if you think they can't hear you, they can.
- Never throw anything onto the stage. People could be injured.
- Remain in your seat during the play. Use the restroom before or after the show, or during intermission.
- Focus all your attention on the play to best enjoy the experience. Listen closely to the dialogue and sound effects, and look at the scenery, lights, and costumes. These elements all help to tell the story.
- Get involved in the story. Laugh, cry, sigh, gasp—whatever the story draws from you. The more emotionally involved you are, the more you will enjoy the play.
- Remain at your seat and applaud during the curtain call; this is part of the performance too. It gives you a chance to recognize a job well done and the actors a moment to thank you for your attention.

STUDENT MATINEE ARRIVAL & PARKING INFORMATION

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

IRT is located one-half block west of Circle Centre Mall on Washington St., between north bound Illinois St. and southbound Capitol Ave.

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

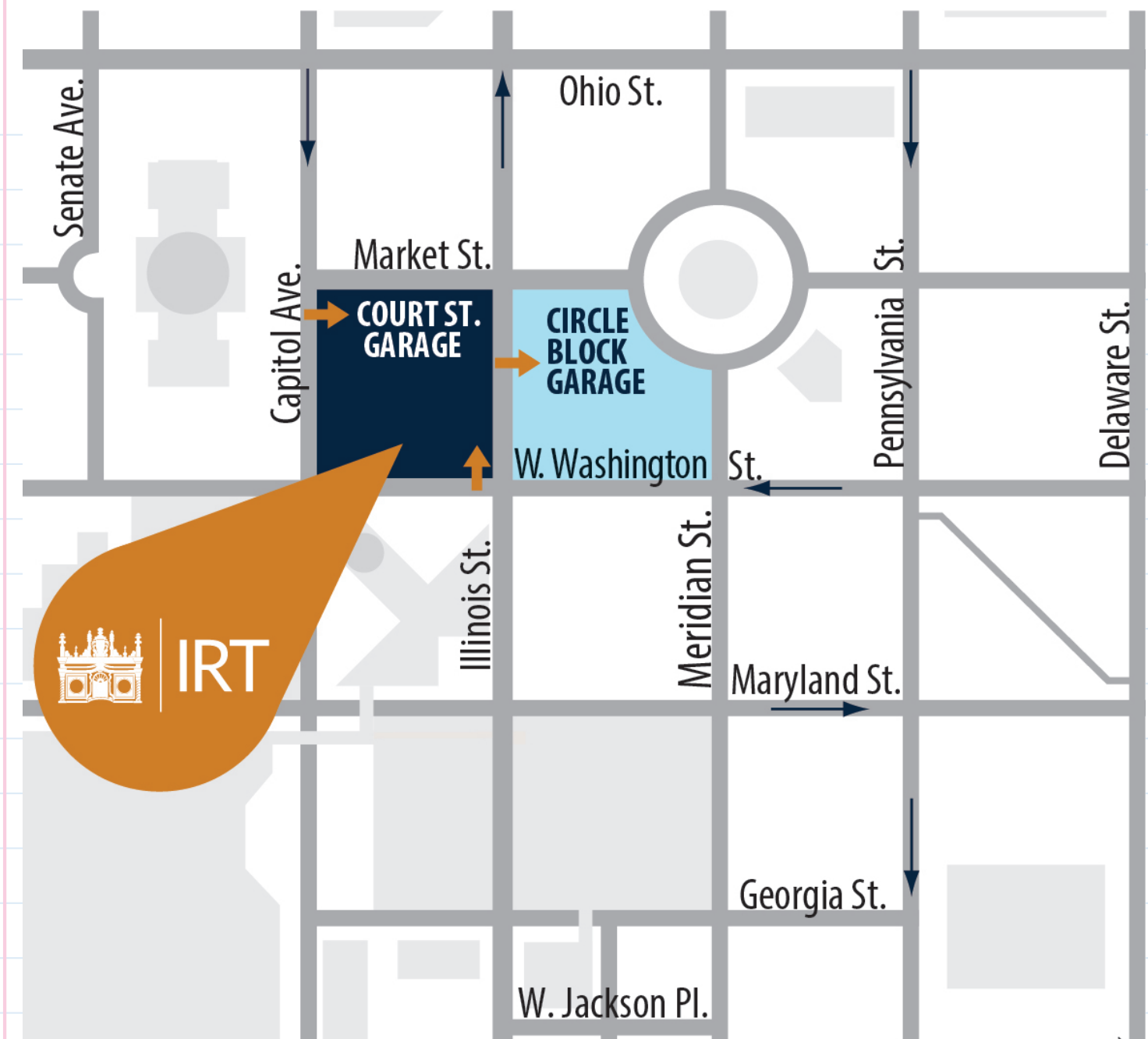
LATE ARRIVAL

If you believe that you are going to be late, please contact the IRT House Manager, Katy Thompson at 317.916.4803. Provide them with a phone number and the name of the school so that Education staff may be in contact with you.

- You can contact IRT Education (education@irtlive.com) with non-emergency information on the day of the show.

PARKING

- Buses may park for free at Victory Field unless they are having an event - we will inform you if that is the case. The House Manager will give you a parking pass for each bus when you arrive at the theatre. It should be displayed in the windshield.
- Continue east on Washington St. past the JW Marriott and turn left across Maryland St. into the Victory Field lot.
- **PLEASE NOTE that Victory Field no longer has public restroom spaces available. We apologize for any inconvenience.**
- For car, and van parking information, please visit irtlive.com for the most up to date information
- **While IRT will make every effort to communicate parking information in advance, it is the responsibility of schools and drivers to make alternate arrangements.**



INDIANA STATE STANDARDS

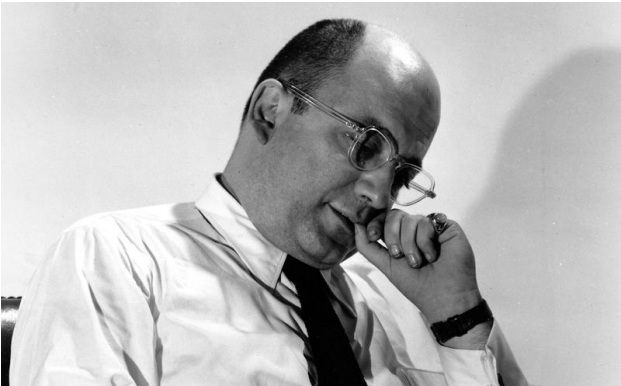
Seeing a performance of *Guys and Dolls* at Indiana Repertory Theatre is a great way to help make connections for students and facilitate their understanding of a text. Some key academic standards to consider on your trip can be found by scanning this QR Code:



ABOUT THE CREATORS

Frank Loesser *Music and Lyrics*

One of America's great composer/lyricists, Frank Loesser began his songwriting career during the Depression as a lyricist, contributing songs to Broadway revues and nightclub acts. His work with composer Irving Actman in the 1936 revue *The Illustrator's Show* led to a songwriting contract in Hollywood, where he spent the next eleven years working with such composers as Burton Lane, Jule Styne, Arthur Schwartz, and Hoosier native Hoagy Carmichael. Some of his film songs from that period include "Two Sleepy People," "Jingle Jangle Jingle," and "I Don't Want To Walk Without You." The first song for which Loesser wrote both words and music was "Praise The Lord And Pass The Ammunition," written during his World War II service. His Hollywood work after the war included the hit songs "Spring Will Be A Little Late This Year," "A Slow Boat To China," and the 1949 Oscar-winning song "Baby, It's Cold Outside." In 1948, Loesser was approached by fledgling Broadway producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin to write music and lyrics to George Abbott's libretto for an adaptation of the classic Brandon Thomas play *Charley's Aunt*. The musical, which starred Ray Bolger, was called *Where's Charley?* and was a hit. This led to Loesser's next show, the hugely influential and successful *Guys and Dolls* (1950), also produced by Feuer and Martin, with a script was by Abe Burrows and Jo Swerling. In 1956, Loesser wrote the libretto, music, and lyrics for his next show, *The Most Happy Fella*, adapted from Sidney Howard's play, *They Knew What They Wanted*. This impressive score contains over 30 musical numbers and makes extensive use of operatic techniques and forms, including recitative, arias, duets, trios, and choral numbers. In 1960, he provided the score and was co-librettist for *Greenwillow*. In 1961, Loesser wrote the score for the Pulitzer Prize-winning *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*. His last show, *Pleasures and Palaces*, closed in 1965 during out of-town try-outs.



Abe Burrows *Co-librettist*

After studying to be a doctor and an accountant, Abe Burrows had a career in sales before becoming a successful radio script writer and writer/performer of musical parody numbers. His first Broadway libretto was *Guys and Dolls*, co-written with Jo Swerling, with a score by Frank Loesser. Among the musicals for which he provided librettos are *Make A Wish*, *Can-Can* and *Silk Stockings* (both with scores by Cole Porter), *Say, Darling*, and *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (which he also directed; score by Frank Loesser). His non-musical plays include *Cactus Flower* (wrote and directed) and *Forty Carats* (directed).

Jo Swerling *Co-librettist*

Born in Russia in 1897, Jo Swerling was a playwright, screenwriter, and vaudeville sketch writer. Mr. Swerling's long career began as a reporter and feature writer in New York and Chicago.

ABOUT DAMON RUNYON

Alfred Damon Runyan was born in Manhattan, Kansas, in 1884. His grandfather and father both ran newspapers and printing presses. His family moved to Pueblo, Colorado, and in his early teens Runyon began working at Pueblo's *Evening Press*, writing feature stories about children and dogs, covering courthouse and police news, and writing light verse, some of which was published in the paper. A printer misspelled his name as Runyon on one of his stories; he liked the change, and it stuck.

At the age of 14, during the Spanish-American War, Runyon enlisted in the army and was sent to the Philippines. After being discharged in 1899, Runyon rode the rails from San Francisco back to Colorado. He said later that his experiences with hobos (migrant workers who secretly rode in empty freight cars) marked the beginning of his association with criminal lore and slang. Various newspaper jobs later led him to San Francisco, and in 1911 he moved to New York City. He obtained a job in the sports department of William Randolph Hearst's *New York American*. His sports writing quickly gained him recognition as a writer with a personal style, and in 1914, he began writing his own column.

In 1920, his popularity allowed Runyon to sign a very lucrative contract with Hearst. This gave him the freedom to write whatever he wanted in his column, including human-interest stories from the world of sports and the racy side of Broadway, which paved the way to the characters of *Guys and Dolls*. Many of his stories were published in collections, the best known of which is *Guys and Dolls*. A remarkable number of these stories have been transferred to the stage and screen, the most famous being the musical *Guys and Dolls* (based on "The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown") and the Shirley Temple movie *Little Miss Marker* (based on the story of the same name).



SYNOPSIS (CONTAINTS SPOILERS)

Act 1

Guys and Dolls opens in Times Square, New York City, which is brimming with tourists, street vendors, pickpockets, and policemen. We meet three gamblers, Benny Southstreet, Nicely-Nicely Johnson, and Rusty Charlie, who offer varying opinions on who they think will win that day's horse race. Nearby, Sergeant Sarah Brown, of the Save-a-Soul Mission, approaches, delivering a sermon on the evils of gambling.

Nicely-Nicely and Benny are joined by Harry the Horse and Nathan Detroit, fellow gamblers. Nathan, who runs a traveling dice game called 'craps,' has not had luck securing a location for their next game. He needs \$1,000 to host the game at a nearby garage. He figures that he can get Sky Masterson, a well-known and wealthy gambler, to loan him the money for the garage. Nathan unsuccessfully attempts to trick Sky into winning the money from him in a bet.

Sky, a confirmed bachelor, tells Nathan that Nathan's fiancée, a nightclub singer named Adelaide, has trapped him. Nathan bets Sky \$1,000 that Nathan can pick a woman Sky can't convince to accompany him on his upcoming trip to Havana, Cuba. Sky accepts the bet—and Nathan chooses Sarah Brown.

At the Save-a-Soul Mission, Sky presents himself to Sarah as a gambler eager for redemption, asking her to dinner. He impresses her with his accurate knowledge of Bible verses. Seeing that the mission is empty, he proposes a trade: If he can bring twelve sinners to the mission, Sarah must agree to go to dinner with him at his favorite restaurant—in Havana. Sky asks Sarah about the man of her dreams, they kiss, and Sarah slaps him, surprised. Elsewhere, Nathan reassures the owner of the garage that the money to hold the craps game is coming.

Adelaide and her chorus girls perform at the Hot Box. After the show, she meets up with Nathan, suggesting that since she just got a raise, perhaps they should finally get married. She reveals to Nathan that, over their fourteen-year engagement, Adelaide told her mother not only that they had gotten married but also that they now have five children. She discovers that Nathan, who is not ready to get married or give up gambling, has been planning another crap game, which sends her into a sneeze fit. She

laments that her cold-like symptoms are caused by her frustration from not being married yet.

Back at the Mission, Sarah's grandfather, Arvide Abernathy, encourages her to soften to Sky. Just then, General Cartwright, the head of the Save-a-Soul Mission, enters, announcing a plan to close this branch of the mission due to poor performance. Sky appears, protesting the closing. He promises to bring twelve "genuine sinners" to the mission the next night.

That night, the crap shooters gather, donning red carnations to signal their admission to the crap game. Big Jule, an infamous gambler and gun-toting gangster from Chicago, arrives to join the game. Nathan and the crapshooters do their best to evade police attention, Adelaide and the Hot Box dancers arrive. Benny tells the police that the carnations are for Nathan's bachelor party—and Adelaide is thrilled.

Meanwhile, Sky and Sarah arrive in Havana. They enjoy dinner, drinks, and dancing at a nightclub. However, after seeing Sky dance with someone else, Sarah gets jealous and inadvertently starts a brawl. Sky and Sarah escape, they kiss, and Sarah tells him how wonderful the night has been. Sky realizes he is falling in love with her and starts to feel guilty about the bet he made with Nathan.

Sarah and Sky return to New York. They share a quiet moment together, he reveals his real name to her—Obediah Masterson—and they sing, professing their love. They are met by Arvide, coming home from a long night of mission work. Police sirens ring: Benny, Nicely-Nicely, Nathan, and the other gamblers emerge from the mission, rushing to escape the police—they have been gambling in the Save-a-Soul Mission while Arvide and Sarah were away.

Act 2

Adelaide performs a number at the Hot Box with her dancers. Meanwhile, Nicely-Nicely and Sky meet up. Nicely has been sent by Nathan to tell Adelaide they won't be getting married that night after all. Nathan is still playing a craps game against Big Jule, who won't allow the game to end while he is losing. Adelaide realizes Nathan is still gambling and asks Sky to tell Nathan she never wants to see him again.

Back at the mission, Sarah is convinced the only reason Sky took her to Cuba was so Nathan could host a crap game in the mission. Arvide comforts her. Just then, Sky and Nicely-Nicely pass by on their way to the crap game. Sky tells Sarah and Arvide that he wants to honor his promise to bring twelve sinners to the mission. Then, Sky and Nicely-Nicely leave, open a manhole cover in the street, and enter the world of the crap game, which is being held in a sewer.

The game wears on. Big Jule demands everyone stay until he wins back all the money he has lost, and then some. Using his own blank dice—allowing him to call the outcome of each throw—Big Jule "plays" against Nathan, planning to extort everything Nathan has.

As Sky and Nicely-Nicely enter, Sky attempts to convince all the crapshooters to go to the mission, but Big Jule protests and threatens him. Sky knocks Big Jule out with a single punch. Then, Sky proposes a bet with all the gamblers on one throw of the dice: If Sky loses, he will pay everyone \$1,000, but if he wins, they all must go to a meeting at the mission. He wishes for luck, and wins the dice throw.

Back above ground, Adelaide approaches Nathan, ready to hold him accountable for all the lies and broken promises. She storms off.

Just past midnight, the gamblers arrive at the mission. The General asks the gamblers to share their experiences and what has brought them to the mission, without much success until Nicely-Nicely recounts a dream he had—all through energetic song. Nathan reveals the details of the bet to Sarah, telling her that Sky lost the bet, not realizing that Sky took Sarah to Havana. Sarah realizes Sky purposefully lost the bet.

Sarah and Adelaide meet on the street and

commiserate about their troubles with Nathan and Sky, finding strength in their shared experience.

Later, Adelaide appears in a wedding gown, approaching Nathan, who has given up gambling and now operates a newsstand. Nathan admits that he still hasn't found a location for their wedding. Sarah and Sky enter, leading the mission band together. Nathan asks them if he and Adelaide can get married in the mission, and Arvide agrees to marry them, since he has already agreed to do so for Sarah and Sky.

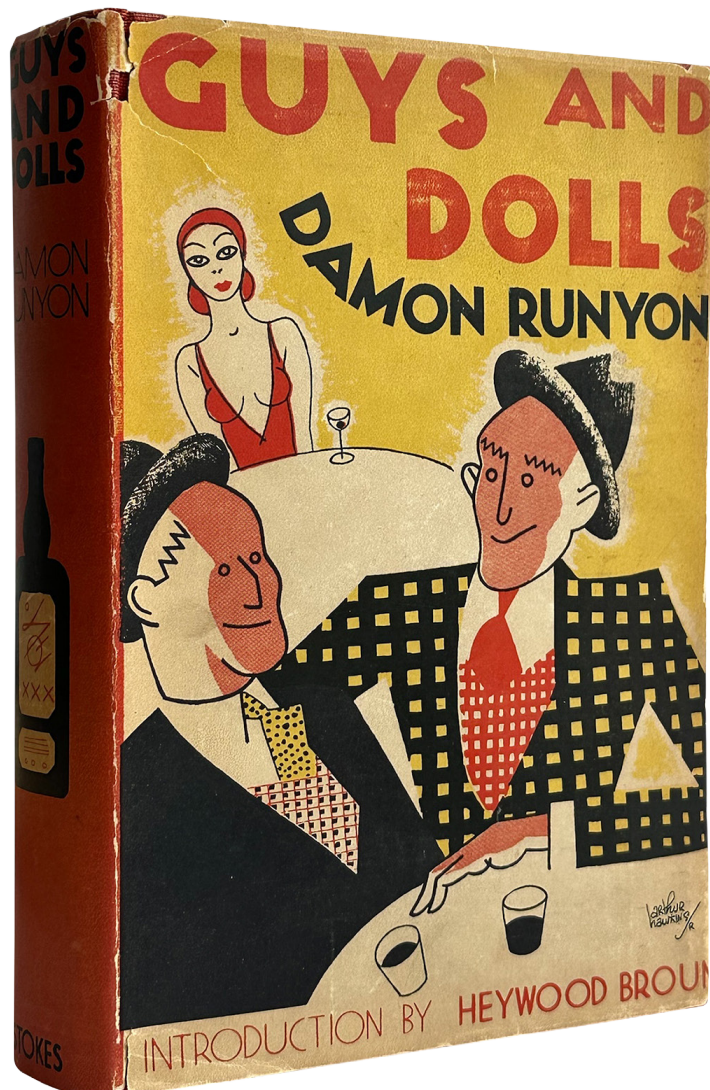


NEW YORK CITY AND THE FABLE OF BROADWAY

source: godspeed.org

Guys and Dolls has been called one of the great triumphs of musical theatre. The show has managed to resonate with audiences for more than 65 years and New York provides a vibrant background for the lovable caricatures of gamblers, showgirls, and missionaries that populate the world of *Guys and Dolls*. New York City is a study in contrasts as it reflects both innocence and danger much like the show itself, and no one captured this duality better than Damon Runyon.

Runyon's Broadway borrowed heavily from the lives of true Broadway characters, however, the harmless gangsters featured in his short stories and the musical *Guys and Dolls* were a long way from truthfully portraying their counterparts in reality.



According to biographer Jimmy Breslin, Runyon “gave off a reflection of more than three decades of the city of New York, and it has almost become the official record of the times. He had everybody believing that his street, Broadway, actually existed.Go to any library and the illusion is there as fact. The Roaring Twenties, the Golden Age of Sport, Broadway, the warmhearted guys and dolls.”

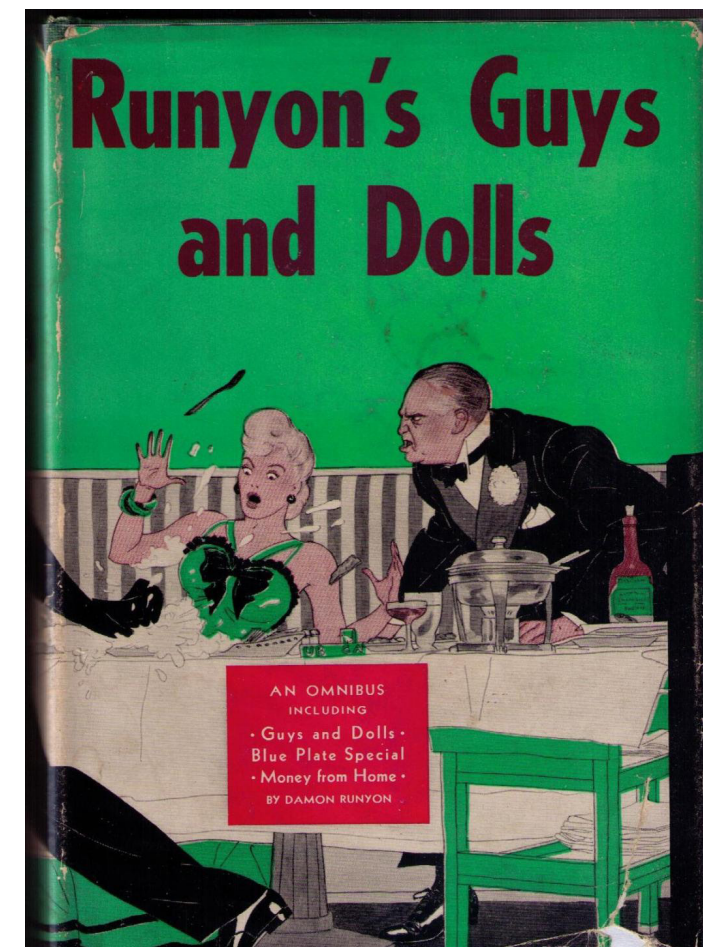
Guys and Dolls is set in New York City during the 1940s. Gone was the darkly glamorous New York City of the Prohibition era when gangsters like Big Jule ruled the city; what remained was a middlebrow Broadway, neither graceful nor disgraceful. Writer Jan Morris, explains that Times Square in the 1940s contained “a frank and jolly air to it, and there was an impudent naiveté even to its naughtiest activities.” One of the defining events of the 1940s was America’s involvement in WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. The sudden plunge into war left the American public reeling and inspired an increase in patriotism throughout the country. Food, gas, and clothing were rationed as part of the war effort and by the mid-1940s the percentage of women in the American workforce had expanded from 25% to 36%. When WWII ended on August 7, 1945 a sense of relief and joy swept nation, however the landscape of Broadway had been irrevocably altered. 42nd Street had become lined with all-night cafeterias, arcades, and gimmick shops; while most of the grand theatres in the area were converted to movie houses.

Despite the closing of many New York theatres during the 1940s, Broadway producers Cy Feuer and Ernest Martin both agreed that they had found their next show when they stumbled upon an anthology of Damon Runyon stories entitled *Guys and Dolls* in the spring of 1949. Frank Loesser, Abe Burrows, and George S. Kaufman were

the final members to join the *Guys and Dolls* creative team and were equally enchanted with Runyon’s Broadway.

Each man was a native New Yorker and felt a connection to Runyon’s boisterous interpretation of New York during Prohibition, yet also realized that the golden-hearted gangsters with their descriptive slang were idealized, which led them to the full title of the original show, *Guys and Dolls: A Musical Fable of Broadway*. Damon Runyon’s tame gangsters were further softened for the musical theatre stage while the female characters in *Guys and Dolls* reflected the opposite treatment. In Runyon’s original stories, women were background noise to the male-centric world of gambling and gossiping at Mindy’s Delicatessen. The women in Runyon’s world could only serve one of two purposes, victim or prize; however, the women in *Guys and Dolls* are

one of the driving forces of the show. Sarah Brown provides the moral center for the world of *Guys and Dolls* whereas Adelaide provides the show with vulnerability, comic relief, and heart. By making the women the mind and heart of the musical, Loesser and Burrows altered the tone and the balance of power in the original short stories by allowing the female characters to become fully defined human beings. The detailed “dolls” provide a balance to the rough and ready male characters in the story, making the largest gamble in the show the risk that the characters take on relationships as opposed to the monetary risks they take in a craps game. The emotional gamble that was added to the story and the gleeful celebration of the idealized New York City allowed audiences to connect to the show and revel in the memory of a city that never truly existed.



KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

“Follow the **fold** and stray no more”

To follow the fold means to join the group and live by its ideology.

“I wonder why a refined doll like her is mixed up in the **Mission dodge**”

slang for scam or trick.

crap game: a dice game on which players can gamble on the numbers that are rolled.

shooters: people who play craps, specifically by rolling or throwing the dice.

“The **heat is on**”

the police are watching closely.

mink: an animal used for its luxurious fur to make coats and accessories.

Gideon Bible: The Gideons are a group named after Gideon, a biblical figure. This group's mission is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ by providing bibles to hotel rooms, hospitals, and other establishments that reach many people at once.

“I once won 5 **G's** on a **parlay**”

a series of bets in which winnings accruing from each transaction are used as a stake for a further bet.

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego: In the Bible, these were three Hebrew youths who were cast into a fiery furnace but remained unharmed.

“You have wished yourself a **Scarsdale Galahad**, the breakfast-eating, **Brooks Brothers** type”

Scarsdale was the richest suburb of New York, at the time of *Guys and Dolls*' release. Galahad was known as a gentle, courteous knight. Brooks Brothers is a menswear store that carries suits and other conservative clothing. In short, Sky is telling Sarah her dream man is boring and predictable.

Studebaker: a type of large car that is no longer in production



“All we need now is our license and our **blood test.**”

Between the 1930's and 1980's most states required couple to get a blood test before marrying to screen for syphilis. Initiated as a public health measure to curb the spread of venereal disease, these mandatory tests aimed to protect partners from infection and prevent congenital disabilities in children.

Bromo Fizz: Bromo Seltzer, a fizzy antacid from the 1940s, like Alka-Seltzer. Used to treat colds and headaches.

Saratoga: Referring to Saratoga, NY, a city that has a very large horserace track.

La Grippe: an old-fashioned term for the flu, specifically the Spanish flu.

Platinum Folderol: Platinum is a precious metal, and folderol is a term for useless things or trinkets, so platinum folderol is cheap stuff made to look expensive.

Vitalis and Barbasol: brands of hair tonic and aftershave.

Elope: to get married secretly, without announcements or fanfare.

Bacardi: a brand of rum.

sheep's eye and lickerish tooth: A “sheep's eye” is a shy or amorous glance; the way one looks when in love. “Lickerish tooth” is Frank Loesser's playfulness with the word “lecherous” (being full of excessive/unattractive desire). Loesser's version felt more mischievous, rather than dangerous.

welcher: slang for a person who refuses to pay a debt.

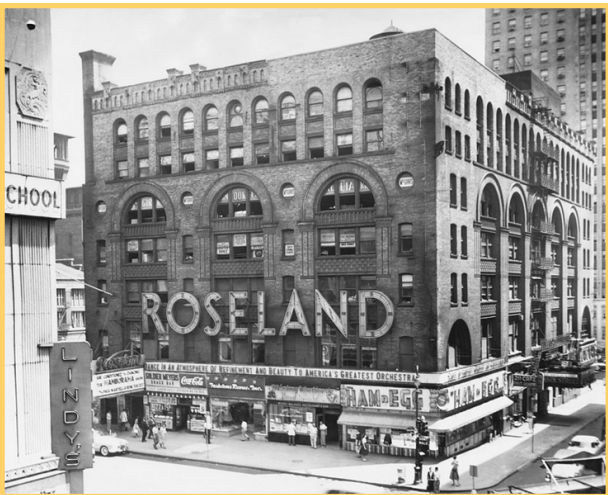
paint cards: slang for face cards – Jacks, Queens, and Kings.

“We'll have a home, a little white house with a green fence, just like the **Whitney colors**”

White and green were the livery colors of the Whitney Family, founders of the Whitney Museum, home of the largest collection of American art, as well as owners of many race horses

“This is a Mission, not **Roseland**”

Roseland was a well-known ballroom in Manhattan from the 1920s to the 1950s that often hosted dances, parties, and prizefighting.



KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS CONTINUED

*“I am appointing Nathan Detroit **major domo** in my place.”*

The major domo is the person in charge.

*“Nathan, anybody who does not conduct himself according to **Hoyle** will answer to Sky Masterson in person”*

Hoyle refers to Edmund Hoyle, a writer who established the playing rules of many popular card games. This quote is using the slang to refer to people who do not act according to the rules of the group.

stool pigeon: Pigeon used as a decoy to draw others within a net; a person used as a decoy or informer, especially one who is a spy for the police.

Guy Lombardo: popular band leader in NYC from the 1920s-1970s.

Rogers Peet: a men’s clothing company.

Ovaltine: a milk flavoring mix made with malt extract, sugar, whey, and usually chocolate flavoring.

*“I paid half a buck for this **Mesentheorum**”*

Not actually a word. When Harry the Horse uses the word, he is trying to say “chrysanthemum.”



DAMON RUNYON: HOW TO TALK LIKE A GANGSTER

Created May 26, 2013 by The Hitchiker's Guide to the Galaxy: Earth Edition (h2g2.com)

‘In fact,’ Sam the Gonoph says, ‘I long ago come to the conclusion that all life is six to five against.’

– Damon Runyon, ‘A Nice Price’.

When you say, ‘they brought in the dream team’, you’re using his slang. Did your boss give a co-worker the ‘heave-ho’? Was the rejected proposal a case of ‘no dice’? Does your favourite TV star have charm ‘in spades’? You’re talking Runyonesque, you know.

He drank. He gambled. He once ran into Pancho Villa in a bar. Later, he followed Black Jack Pershing around, while Pershing followed Villa in a vain attempt to catch him. He turned baseball into poetry and gunsels and taxi dancers into laugh-out-loud comedy and handkerchief-wringing pathos. He changed the way we think of gangster talk, and he inspired a literary prize.

His name was Damon Runyon, and even if you’ve never heard of him, you’ve probably heard of something that he wrote.



NICKNAMES FOR MONEY IN GUYS AND DOLLS

POTATOES **DOUGH**
BUCKS **C’S**
LETTUCE **G’S**
A BUNDLE **FIN**
GRAND



A Western Upbringing, Sports Failure,
and Heading East

“This horse thief is called Horsey for short. And he is not called by this name because he ever steals a horse but because it is the consensus of public opinion from coast to coast that he may steal one if the opportunity presents.”

– Damon Runyon, ‘A Piece of Pie’.

Albert Damon Runyan (original spelling) was born in bustling Manhattan. Manhattan, Kansas, that is, in 1880. The population of Manhattan, Kansas, at the time was 2,104. Albert’s editor father had to sell the newspaper, though, and the family moved further west when the boy was two, to Pueblo, Colorado, where he grew up to become a newspaperman like his father and grandfather (a printer) before him. The spelling of his last name was changed by a printer’s error – he left it that way. In later life, he was just as complacent about an editorial change of his name from ‘Albert Damon’ to plain ‘Damon’. So from now on, we’ll call him Damon Runyon.

Runyon enlisted in the US army for the Spanish American War in 1898. They put him to writing newspaper copy. Afterwards, he tried to manage a minor baseball league. He wasn’t good at it, so he

moved to New York City in 1910 and covered baseball and boxing for the Hearst newspapers. Runyon changed the way those sports were covered – he added the poetry and excitement. Then Runyon did more: he created unforgettable fictional characters that forever changed our view of life in New York City.

The Other Manhattan

“When you look at the gray tapioca that American newspapers have become, it’s hard to believe they ever spawned Damon Runyon, who covered his first hanging at 11 and grew up to create Broadway...”

– John Schulian, sportswriter, reviewing Jimmy Breslin’s *Damon Runyon: A Life*

Runyon was a colourful character himself, fond of drinking (though he learned to cut back), smoking, and gambling. He ran a small horse stable of his own. He advised entrepreneur Leo Seltzer to turn Roller Derby into the full-contact spectacle it became. He married twice – once to Ellen Egan, the mother of his two children, and once to Patrice Amati del Grande, whom he’d met in Mexico while running around after Pancho Villa. Runyon left Ellen, who was drinking herself to death, and Patrice left him for a boxer in 1946, the year he was dying, and refused to visit him on his deathbed. That was a scene Runyon himself could have written. There would not have been a dry eye in the house.

Not only was Runyon colourful, but he hung around with colourful people – like gangster Bugsy Siegel. Runyon knew Ben Siegel well enough not to call him ‘Bugsy’. Because it drove the gangster, well, ‘bugsy’, which could be bad for one’s health. Runyon was good friends with Otto ‘Abbadabba’ Berman, the mathematical genius responsible for Dutch Schultz’s phenomenal success in the numbers racket. Runyon was protective of his friends: when Berman was gunned down in Lepke Buchhalter’s deadly attack on Schultz, newspapers described Berman as Schultz’s bodyguard. Runyon, who knew the man well, scoffed that Berman would have been ‘about as effective a bodyguard as a two-year-old.’

Runyon’s biographer, Jimmy Breslin, is himself a New York writer of great renown and recipient of the Denver Press Club’s Damon Runyon Award. In his book, *Damon Runyon: A Life*, Breslin attributes at least part of the incredible skill and detachment of Runyon’s writing to the harsh disappointments of his own life. Breslin wrote, ‘He appeared to have insides made of plate glass. He saw everything and felt nothing.’ For someone who ‘felt nothing’, Runyon was able to make his readers feel a great deal.

In his hardness against the world, Runyon sounds like one of his own characters – Sorrowful Jones, the protagonist of one of his most famous stories:

“Now while all this gab is going on, Sorrowful never glances at them. He is just sitting there looking at Marky’s door. And now as he is looking at the door a very strange thing seems to happen to his kisser, for all of a sudden it becomes the sad, mean-looking kisser that it is in the days before he ever sees Marky, and furthermore it is never again anything else.”

– Damon Runyon, ‘Little Miss Marker’.

Runyon turned his own experiences and his acquaintance with gangsters into short stories that were entertaining and sometimes gripping. Underlying the humorous tone, however, there could be genuine heartbreak. Readers often forget the tragedy, choosing only to remember the funny bits. This may partly be due to the success of the musical *Guys and Dolls*, the perennial favourite about gambler [Sky Masterson’s] love for a Salvation Army officer, first chronicled in the story ‘The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown’. The tale of ‘Little Miss Marker’ has spawned at least four Hollywood films with happy endings – quite unlike the bleak and bitter original. The earliest version was a vehicle for Shirley Temple.

In the end, though, perhaps the most lasting influence of Damon Runyon’s gangsters has been on the language itself. After all, Runyon was a personal friend of Abbadabba Berman, who is credited with the saying, ‘It’s not personal. It’s business.’ Runyon quotes are used 231 times in the Oxford English Dictionary.

Damon Runyonesque

“Well, while waiting around Miami, trying to think of some way of making a scratch, I spend my evenings in the Shark Fin Grill, which is a little scatter on Biscayne Boulevard near the docks that is conducted by a friend of mine by the name of Chesty Charles.”

– Damon Runyon, ‘A Job for the Macarone’.

Just as the comic gangsters who sing ‘Brush Up Your Shakespeare’ in Cole Porter’s *Kiss Me, Kate* are often described as ‘Runyonesque’, so there is a language that can be called ‘Runyonesque’. Runyon used this language to create his unique style: his stories are told in first-person by an unspecified narrator who uses only the present tense and avoids contractions. This Data-on-the-holodeck approach, combined with a tendency to circumlocution (‘characters of the female nature’), lend a comic pomposity to gangster verbiage. It also disarms the reader and deflects criticism of their violent lifestyle.

Runyon’s stories are a crash course in goniff talk. He doesn’t usually explain – you have to guess the meaning from context. ‘Goniff’ is a Yiddish word meaning ‘thief’. A ‘pan’ is a face – the Yiddish word is ‘poynim’ or ‘punim’, depending on dialect. There’s a lot of Yiddish in New York gangster slang. One reason is that there are Jewish New York gangsters – Runyon’s friend Abbadabba, Dutch Schultz himself, to name two. Another reason is that Yiddish was one of the most-heard languages in certain New York neighbourhoods at the time. Yiddish words, however, formed only part of the ‘insider talk’ Runyon wrote so fluently. A ‘fin’ (from ‘finif’, Yiddish for ‘five’) was a five-dollar bill, sure, but a C-note (from Latin ‘centum’) meant 100 dollars. When you get into high numbers, Runyon’s imagination takes over – he gave us ‘zillion’.

In addition to reporting genuine thieves’ cant, Runyon invented his own phrases. A phrase you might think was British in origin came from Runyon. He invented the phrase ‘Hoorah Henry’ to describe an upperclass fool. Runyon made us familiar with dames and speakeasies, croakers (doctors), dolls who might be ‘classy’, but more often are ladies of negotiable affection, suckers like Waldo Winchester (a play on reporter Walter Winchell), mugs, lobs and wise guys who are out to make scratch, with or without firearms or shivs.

We read, we learn. Perhaps we think about it, perhaps we merely chuckle and shed a tear or two. New Yorkers, though, will attest: that was a real world once, on those streets. And Damon Runyon walked them, listening. He hung out in the speakeasies with the wise guys. And he told us all about it.



Guys and Dolls by Al Hirschfeld

RESOURCES

Read:

- *Guys and Dolls—the Stories of Damon Runyon*, by Damon Runyon
- *Damon Runyon: A Life*, by Jimmy Breslin
- *The Making of ‘Guys and Dolls’*, by Keith Garebian
- *A Most Remarkable Fella: Frank Loesser and the Guys and Dolls in His Life*, by Susan Leosser
- [The real-life gangsters and gamblers behind Damon Runyon’s Guys and Dolls](#)

Watch:

- *Lady for a Day* (1933)
- *Little Miss Marker* (1934)
- *The Lemon Drop Kid* (1934)
- *The Big Street* (1942)
- *Kiss Me Kate* (1953)
- *Guys and Dolls* (1955)
- *Bugsy Malone* (1976)
- *Bloodhounds of Broadway* (1989)
- *Dick Tracy* (1990)
- *Agent Carter* (Television Series)

Listen:

[Damon Runyon Theater OTR 1940’s “The Idyll of Miss Sarah Brown” Old Time Radio](#)

[Ch, 12- GUYS AND DOLLS | Fifty Key Stage Musicals: The Podcast](#)

[Famous Stories: Damon Runyon Theater - Podcast - Apple Podcasts](#)

UNDERSTANDING THE GAME OF CRAPS

(The IRT does not condone gambling for underage patrons. If you or someone you know has a problem with gambling there is help at the Indiana Council on Problem Gambling. <https://indianaproblemgambling.org/>)

Craps is a game similar to Yahtzee played with two, six-sided dice in which one player (the shooter) tries to roll a 7 or 11. If the shooter is successful, they win; if they roll a 2, 3, or 12, they lose. If they roll a 4, 5, 6, 8, or 10, the game continues. It is often played for money, where the spectators wager whether the shooter will or will not roll a 7 or 11. This game is derived from a very old western European game called Hazard. A French variation called “Krabs” ultimately became craps in English. Since a person only needs two dice to play, it is an easy game to play anywhere.

						
	Snake eyes	Australian yo	Little Joe From Kokomo	No field five	Easy six	Six one you're done
	Ace caught a deuce	Ballerina	The fever	Jimmie Hicks	Benny Blue	Easy eight
	Easy four	Michael Jordan	Brooklyn Forest	Big Red	Eighter from Decatur	Nina from Pasadena
	Little Phoebe	Lumber number	Skinny McKinney	Square pair	Railroad nine	Big one on the end
	Sixie from Dixie	Skinny Dugan	Easy eight	Jesse James	Puppy paws	Yo
	The Devil	Easy eight	Lou Brown	Tennessee	Six five no jive	Midnight

QUESTIONS, ACTIVITIES, AND WRITING PROMPTS

- Do Nathan and Adalaide have a healthy relationship? Will their marriage last? What about Sky and Sarah?
- Did Sky win the bet? Why did he tell Nathan he did not?
- Street gambling is illegal during the time of the play and some of the characters see it as immoral. Was Sky right to break the law to pay his marker to Sarah?
- Is the Save-a-Soul Mission effective? How else could they get their message to the people of New York?
- All of the characters live by their own code of ethics. Pick a character and define what is right and wrong to them. What is your code of ethics? With which character do you most identify.
- Loesser uses influences of popular nightclub music, hymns, and Cuban rhythms to score the musical set in mid 20th century New York. Chose a playlist that would showcase the musical influences of your school or town.
- Debate whether Sarah should or should not have gone to Havannah?
- *Guys and Dolls* is sometimes referred to as a modern fable. Using the 12 Jungian archetypes, create a display that depicts the characters with their associated archetypes. Does everyone in class agree on where each character fit? Defend your choices.



- Watch the 1955 film version of *Guys and Dolls*. Write an essay comparing and contrasting the film and the play you saw? Which do you like better? Why?
- Using the probability chart below, determine the likelihood you will roll a 7 or an 11 on your first roll of the dice. Determine the probability of rolling a 2,3, or 12 with one roll.

2	1/36 (2.778%)	8	5.36 (13.889%)
3	2/36 (5.556%)	9	4/36 (11.111%)
4	3/36 (8.333%)	10	3/36 (8.333%)
5	4/36 (11.111%)	11	2/36 (5.556%)
6	5/36 (13.889%)	12	1/36 (2.778%)
7	6/36 (16.667%)		

- Write a paragraph using Runyonesque language. Tips to remember:
 - Do not use contractions
 - Write only in the present tense
 - Use a combination of formal words and slang
- Read a Runyon short story other than the ones in which *Guys and Dolls* is based. What characters repeat in that story. What similarities do you encounter? What are the differences?
- Create a short story using characters you know.
- Assign colorful nicknames to your family or classmates. Remember Runyon’s names are not mean spirited. They recognize positive or neutral traits of the characters.
- Research New York City in the 1920’s and 30’s. Create a multi-media presentation on the world that Runyon’s characters lived in. Topics to consider:
 - Politics
 - Great Depression
 - Mob and corruption
 - Women’s rights
 - Famous landmarks
 - Racial inequality
 - Industrialization
 - Transportation

- Rewrite the lyrics to “**Guys and Dolls**” replacing the 1950’s slang with modern terms.

What’s playing at the Roxy
I’ll tell you what’s playing at the Roxy
A picture about a Minnesota man, so in love with a Mississippi girl
That he sacrifices ev’rything and moves all the way to Biloxi
That’s what’s playing at the Roxy.

When you see a Joe saving half of his dough
You can be there’ll be mink in it for some doll

When a bum buys wine like a bum can’t afford
It’s a cinch that the bum is under the thumb of some little broad.

When you meed a mug, lately out of the jug,
And he’s still lifting platinum folderol

Call it hell, call it heaven,
It’s a probable twelve to seven
That the guys only it doing it for some doll.

When you see a sport and his cash has run short
Make a bet that he’s banking it with some doll.

When a guy wears tails with the front gleaming white
Who the hell do you think he’s tickling pink on a Saturday night?

When a lazy slob takes a good steady job
And he smells from vitalis and barbasol

Call it dumb, call it clever,
Ah, but you can give odds forever
That the guy’s only doing it
For some doll, some doll, some doll,
The guy’s only doing it for some doll!

What’s in the daily news
I’ll tell you what’s in the daily news
Story about a guy who bought his wife a small ruby,
With what otherwise would have been his union dues
That’s what’s in the daily news.

What’s happening all over?
I’ll tell you what’s happening all over.
Guys sitting home by a television set,
Who once used to be something of a rover.
That’s what’s happening all over

Love is the thing that has licked ‘em
And it looks like Nathan’s just another victim.

Yes sir,
When you see a guy, reach for stars in the sky,
You can be that he’s doing it for some doll.

When you spot a John waiting out in the rain
Chances are he’s insane as only a John can be for a Jane.

When you meet a gent paying all kinds of rent
For a flat that could flatten the Taj Mahal!

Call it sad, call it funny,
But it’s better than even money
That the guy’s only doing it for some doll.

- Mindy’s restaurant is a fictional deli based on the New York restaurant called Lindy’s that was a staple of Manhattan dining from 1921-69. Try making their famous cheesecake!
<https://www.saveur.com/article/Recipes/Lindys-Cheesecake/>
- Write a review: A well-rounded review includes your opinion of the theatrical aspects—scenery, lights, costumes, sound, direction, acting—as well as your impressions of the script and the impact of the story and/or themes and the overall production. What moments made an impression? How do the elements of scenery, costumes, lighting, and sound work with the actors’ performances of the text to tell the story? What ideas or themes did the play make you think about? How did it make you feel? Did you notice the reactions of the audience as a whole? Would you recommend this play to others? Why or why not? To share your reviews with others, send to: education@irtlive.com