

OUR TOWN

By Thornton Wilder | Directed by Brent Hazelton
April 10 - May 13, 2018 | Quadracci Powerhouse

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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SUGGESTED TEACHING & CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- 1.) Stage Management
- 2.) Playwriting
- 3.) Legacy

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *Our Town*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at <https://www.milwaukeeep.com/Tickets--Events/201718-Overview/Our-Town/Our-Town-PlayGuide/>

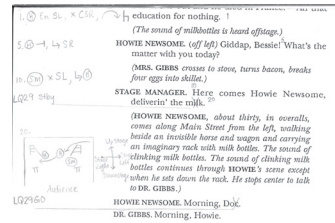
PRE-SHOW ACTIVITIES

STAGE MANAGER – IT'S YOUR CUE!

Our Town playwright Thornton Wilder chose to identify the narrator as the "Stage Manager". Although no one directly references the Stage Manager by name or title during the play, Wilder's choice reveals much about how this character operates in relation to other characters within the world of Grover's Corners.



Laura Gordon as the Stage Manager in *Our Town*. Photo by Michael Brosilow.



Example of shorthand / cues in *Our Town* promptbook.

KEY TERMS

- Stage manager (SM):** the person responsible for communicating, recording, coordinating and implementing every technical detail of a theatrical production: actor blocking, costume changes, sound and light cues, prop uses and movements, set changes, etc. During performances, they represent the director and orchestrate the technical cues recorded in the prompt book by "calling" the show over a headset to the other technicians. ("Sound 89 and actor standby, Sound 89 and actor, GO.")
- Prompt book:** an annotated copy of the script, which includes all production paperwork, cues, blocking, and stage directions; compiled and used by the SM during rehearsals and the run of the show.
- Blocking:** Detailed notes of actor movements and actions recorded in the prompt book by the SM.
- Stage directions:** instructions included in the text of a play, indicating suggested actor movements, positions, or tones, or technical elements such as sound effects; usually italicized within parentheses.
- Cues:** specific words or actions in the script that precede or coincide with sound, lighting, special effects, and actor entrances during the live performance; noted in the prompt book and called by the SM.

WATCH AND LEARN:

Materials: Blank paper, writing utensils
Time: 20-30 minutes

OBJECTIVE: Students will learn and practice common stage manager shorthand, including phrases and/or symbols recorded in a prompt book that are associated with particular movements or actions that occur onstage.

1. Find a partner. To begin, cast one person as the actor and the other as the stage manager. You will switch roles after the activity is complete.
2. Draw a line down a blank piece of paper dividing it into two sections. To create your set rendering, draw a bird's-eye view (from above) map of the classroom on the left side of the paper making sure to include desks, chairs, doors, any other large pieces in the room. Label where the audience would be seated if watching a play being performed in the classroom.
3. Work as partners to design a stage management shorthand on the right side of the paper. Create a key that includes stage right, stage left, upstage, and downstage.
4. When ready, the assigned actor will stand and walk about the room and interact with their desk/table, chair, the objects at their space, and if able, interact with other people in the room. The stage manager, using examples from above and the shorthand created, will attempt to record the actor's movements in as much detail as possible. Pay close attention to the direction the actor turns and walks and any "props" they use. If able and can remember their movements, invite the actor to walk through their movement again so you can record any actions missed.
5. When the blocking notes are complete, send the actor to their original position at the top of the scene. The stage manager will read the notes aloud and direct the actor and perform the scene again. The actor should follow the directions as they hear them, making no corrections in movement or direction. If the previous stage manager's blocking notes are accurate, the actor will be able to successfully perform the movement just as it was originally performed.

CROSS (WALK) X	ENTER En	EXIT Ex	STOP —
LOOK L	SIT S	RISE R	GO UPSTAIRS U
UPSTAGE OF (above) ↖	DOWNSTAGE OF (below) ↘	TO (forward) →	ON TOP OF ·
TABLE π	CHAIR h	GIVE G	PICK UP P

Example of stage manager shorthand.

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6. When finished, discuss the activity to correct what actions may have been recorded wrong and celebrate what was recorded right. Repeat step 3 and 4 using the same blocking shorthand, but the original actor is now the stage manager, the original stage manager is now the actor.

EXTENSION: Choose a clip from a favorite TV show. Pick an actor to watch and record their blocking. For an extra challenge, try recording blocking for multiple actors at the same time. Assign cues to words in actor's dialogue, note any sound effects or lighting changes seen and heard in the clip, and actor entrances and exits. Replay the clip a few times to check your accuracy.

Replay the clip a final time, and try "calling" the clip aloud, like a stage manager would during a live show (Ex. "Lights go, sound go, actor go.")

CONSIDER: What organization skills do you use as a stage manager? What communication skills are required as a stage manager? As an actor?

A WILDER KIND OF WRITING

Materials: Notecards, paper, writing utensils

Time: 20-30 Minutes

OBJECTIVE: *The fictional town of Grover's Corner is a collection of ordinary lives and stories that intersect with and influence one another. Students will create a shared story using daily tasks and realities as inspiration, which means to embrace and uplift these often over-looked moments.*

Thornton Wilder's fictional town of Grover's Corner is a collection of lives and stories that intersect and influence each other. Daily tasks and the realities of so called "ordinary" life may not seem glorious, but creating a story using those moments can be a challenging feat.

1. Divide into pairs or groups of three. Write one word on a notecard and pass it to a partner. They will then add an additional word that can be used to build a sentence. Continue passing the notecard and adding words for the next five minutes to create 2-3 cohesive sentences.
2. Next, each group should find another group and compare cards. Circle any words, phrases, or note any themes that are in common between those cards.
3. Combine those common words, phrases, and/or themes to write a short story on a separate piece of paper that has a beginning, middle, and end.
4. Come together as a class and share the stories. Create a master list visible to the class of all of the commonalities heard within each shared story.
5. Using those class commonalities, brainstorm what narratives could be written about your class as a whole that incorporates details from each shared story.
6. As a class, discuss what was most challenging about each step of this writing process. Did any commonalities surprise you? Where did the inspiration come from asked to write only a single word? Where did you draw inspiration when the stories were combined? What is the largest shared experience for the class?

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION

- With which *Our Town* character(s) do you most connect/identify? Why?
- What does each character contribute to their community, Grover's Corner?
- What are the themes of *Our Town*?
- Discuss the set and props used in *Our Town*. What connections do you see between those designs and the themes of the play?
- What similarities do you see between Grover's Corner and your neighborhood? Milwaukee?
- What differences do you see between Grover's Corner and your neighborhood? Milwaukee?
- What do you contribute to your own community?
- What do you wish could change about your neighborhood? Your larger community? About Milwaukee?

LEGACY – YOUR OUR TOWN CHAIR

Materials: Various art mediums, paper, writing utensils

OBJECTIVE: *Chairs are an integral part of the scenic and set design of Our Town. They are practical, easy to use and move, have specific uses, and come in an array of designs. Students will design a chair that most represents their personality, belief system, personal strengths, and community.*

CONSIDER: Community members often sponsor a bench, plaque, statue, or another publicly accessible landmark that is constructed and engraved to honor someone's memory or service to a community. The chosen design and location is significant to the commemorated person. If your community were to honor you, how would you want to be remembered? Or, if you were to create and dedicate your chair to someone important to you, who would that be?

- Utilize materials, color, pattern, phrases/quotes, and images that have meaning for you. Every design choice you make must be justified.
- Also consider location. Where will your chair be displayed? What meaning does that setting hold for you or for whom it is dedicated?
- When complete, share the designs with the class. Find any similarities the designs may share. If you feel comfortable, display the designs in a communal place.



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The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

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Common Core State Standards

SL 1,2,4,5 Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

SI. 8-12 Point of View

National Arts Standards

C. 1-3 Generate and complete

R. Perceive, Analyze, Interpret

C. 10-11 Relate, Analyze, and Interpret

CASEL Objectives

Social Skills, Self-Awareness, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills

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