

ESCAPED ALONE & COME AND GO

STUDY GUIDE



BY CARYL CHURCHILL
& SAMUEL BECKETT

DIRECTED BY TONY ESTRELLA

GAMM
EDUCATION

GAM
theatre

SEASON
2018 - 2019

34

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This study guide was prepared by Beth Pollard, Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, Tracy Reilly, and Jon Del Sesto

ACT I

WELCOME



Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *Escaped Alone* by Caryl Churchill and *Come and Go* by Samuel Beckett. In this guide you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside look at our production, as well as activities for your classroom and questions for discussion. We recommend using this study guide before your visit to The Gamm, as well as after to debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will whet students' appetites for the performance and encourage them to question and explore the themes of the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Most student matinees are followed by a talkback with the production team and offer students the opportunity to debrief the performance immediately and ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length but we encourage you to stay and participate in the dynamic discussion.

We also offer longer workshops that will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication, as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Below, we have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide.

We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

Susie Schutt,

Education Director, susie@gammtheatre.org

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THEATRE AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

What is so exciting about attending the theatre - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theatre is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

TIP:

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theatre is different from film, television and sporting events.

COMMON CORE GUIDE.

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.4] *See our Activity for the Classroom*

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9] *See our Resident Scholar's essay.*

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3] *See our Activity for the Classroom*

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

ACT II

PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT



ABOUT CARYL CHURCHILL

Caryl Churchill was born on September 3, 1938 in London and grew up in the Lake District and in Montreal. She was educated at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, England. *Downstairs*, her first play written while she was still at university, was first staged in 1958 and won an award at the Sunday Times National Union of Students Drama Festival. Caryl Churchill's plays include: *Owners*, *Traps*, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*, *Cloud Nine*, *Top Girls*, *Fen*, *Serious Money*, *Ice Cream*, *Mad Forest*, *The Skriker*, *Blue Heart*, *This is a Chair*, *Far Away*, *A Number*, *Drunk Enough To Say I Love You?*, *Seven Jewish Children*, *Love & Information*, *Here We Go*, and *Escaped Alone*. Music theater includes *Lives of the Great Poisoners* and *Hotel*, both with Orlando Gough. Caryl has also written for radio and television.

ABOUT “ESCAPED ALONE”

Over a summer of afternoons in a suburban backyard, four 70-something women chat amiably about topics big and small: grandchildren and lost keys, insomnia and a crippling fear of cats, chemical leaks and famine. By turns hilarious and unsettling, Churchill's newest play explores the solace of community amid everyday fear and looming catastrophe. The Observer calls it “an intricate, elliptical, acutely female view of the apocalypse” by one of Britain's most innovative living playwrights.



ABOUT SAMUEL BECKETT

Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) is widely recognized as one of the greatest dramatists of the 20th century. His plays are often categorized as elliptical, forbiddingly mysterious, hyperintellectual and willfully obscure. Yet the world of Beckett is richly comic, deeply moving and profoundly human. His plays *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame*, and *Happy Days* have provided some of the most enduring theatrical images of the last century. His later works including *Come and Go* became increasingly minimalist and spare, exploring the landscape of the interior. Other examples are *Not I*, in which only a mouth is seen on stage, and *That Time*, featuring only the head of an elderly man. Though his plays seem not of this world and resolutely apolitical, they are in fact deeply empathetic explorations of everyday human experience. The Irish playwright, novelist and poet received a Nobel Prize for literature in 1969.

ABOUT “COME AND GO”

Come and Go is a short play by Samuel Beckett. It was written in English in January 1965, first published in French by Editions de Minuit, Paris in 1966, and first performed in German at the Schiller-theater, Berlin on January 14, 1966. Its English language premiere was at the Peacock Theatre, Dublin on February 28, 1966, and its British premiere was at the Royal Festival Hall in London on December 9, 1968.

Wikipedia succinctly describes this play with: *Some critics consider this one of Beckett's most “perfect” plays: Beckett agonized over each individual line until they exactly matched his creative vision. The play varies between “121 and 127 words” in length, depending on the translation (his notes are significantly longer than the actual play), and as such is rarely performed on its own.*

ACT III

OUR PRODUCTION

SETTING

Escaped Alone: Now. England. Sally's Backyard.
Come and Go: Now. Anywhere. A bench.

THE COMPANY

Sally/Ru **Karen MacDonald***
Vi/Vi **Marya Lowry***
Lena/Flo **Carol Drewes**
Mrs. Jarrett **Debra Wise***

CREATIVE TEAM

Director **Tony Estrella**
Set & Production Design **Jessica Hill**
Costume Design **Amanda Downing Carney**
Lighting Design **David Roy**
Sound Design **Charles Cofone**
Stage Management **Kristen Gibbs***
Technical Director **Max Ramirez**
Technical Production Supervisor **DJ Potter**
Assistant Stage Managers **Jessica Chace, Jessica Corsentino**
Dialect Coach **Candice Brown**
Electricians **Kimberlee Beggs, Patrick Boutwell,
Mike Cline, Alex Landers, Chris Marshall,
Andrew Russ, Cam Waitkun**
Construction Crew **Michael Araujo, Justin Carroll, Alex Eizenberg,
Renee Fitzgerald, Reka Moscarelli,
Christine Redihan, Cody Reed**

Set mural photography by Richard Buettner.

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

TIP:

Before coming to the theater, discuss with your students the various professions in the theater. It takes more than just actors! When they arrive, ask them to notice evidence of those professions at work.





GAMM EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



While actors, directors, and playwrights are the most well-known, there are many jobs and careers that make theater successful. Each of our study guides focus on a different theater career by highlighting a Gamm employee.

JESSICA HILL KIDD | PRODUCTION MANAGER / SET DESIGNER

What does your job entail?

My job is to help all of the design and technical departments within production successfully produce each show of the season. This means I do everything from developing and maintaining the budget to meeting deadlines for each production to designing props, scenic painting and laundry. It's a varied list of things I do!

Why is your job important to The Gamm's success?

My job is important because I act like the glue for each production. I make sure directors are talking to designers and designers are working well with each other and the technicians and materials are arriving on time.

What led you to your position at The Gamm?

I worked for many years as a project manager for architecture firms. I was also set designing. Production Management is a great way to combine the skills I learned in architecture school and in the field with my love of theatre.

Why theater?

Because always theater.

What, if any, other professions are you curious about?

I am an interior architect as well.

What special skills does your position entail?

I think the ability to problem solve is the number one skill I have to have. Things come up all the time that require creative thinking and collaboration.

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Coffee

BY TONY ESTRELLA

**In Greek myth, the prophetic daughter of King Priam and Queen Hecuba of Troy.*

DRAMATURGICAL NOTES

BY RACHEL WALSH



*Caryl always manages to have her pulse on the moral, social, and political issues that are current in our society. She is and has consistently been throughout her career, a formal adventurer in terms of her theatrical language....She's constantly challenging not just literally the language in which theatre is spoken, but also the context, the theatricality, and the dramatic landscape in which she works. In that sense she is one of the great innovators of post-war British drama. (Stephen Daldry, Royal Court Artistic Director, 1992-1998, from *The Royal Court Theatre: Inside Out*)*

Born in London in 1938, Churchill wrote her first play at 20 (*Downstairs*, for which she won a national award), and by age 34 received her first professional production at the Royal Court Theatre no less (*Owners*, 1972). In 1974, Churchill assumed a full-time residency at the Royal Court and spent much of the next two decades collaborating with Britain's Joint Stock Theatre Company. The work she penned in the 1970s and 80s confirmed her status as one of the greatest playwrights of the English language: *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* (1976), *Cloud Nine* (1976), *Top Girls* (1982) and *Serious Money* (1987).

Many of these early plays use the historical past to investigate the present in wildly creative, often playful ways. Plays like *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* explode the formal constraints of time and character, doggedly re-imagining not only narrative content but also form, or the way in which a story is told. In *Cloud Nine*, the play's two acts are separated by an entire century, yet its characters age only one generation. Actors also play roles outside of their race and gender. In *Top Girls*, power-drunk Marlene, head of an employment agency, gathers iconic women from history to a time-bending dinner party. Featuring rapid-fire, high-octane dialogue, these "top girls" are unapologetic in their fight for supremacy.

Churchill's consequent plays, including *Blue Heart* (1997), pivot from tales of history to domesticity but are no less inventive in their form. If *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* are epic in their approach to time and language, *Heart's Desire* and *Blue Kettle*, the one-acts comprising *Blue Heart*, are richly distilled. Churchill called them her "anti-plays." They are rigged to implode. In *Blue Kettle*, language gradually deteriorates and eventually, two characters are reduced to using just the syllables "b-k-k-k." In destroying language, Churchill amplifies the power of communication by demanding that actors rely on universal modes of expression. She both erodes and nourishes a sense of human connection.

Far Away (2000) combines the scope of earlier plays like *Cloud Nine* with the scale of later plays like *Blue Heart*, painting an apocalyptic future...or is it the past, or the present? It is hard to dismiss this dystopian tale in which the natural world wages war on the human world as a formal experiment. As wildfires consume Northern California and the Polar vortex deep-freezes the Midwest, *Far Away* feels eerily like Realism.

From this same, stunning imagination springs *Escaped Alone*—an unmistakably Churchillian drama in which four 70-something women take tea in an English garden, chatting about grandchildren and the end of the world. In these characters live the searing women of *Top Girls*, the dizzying wordplay of *Blue Kettle*, and the piercing alarm-bell warnings of *Far Away*. *Escaped Alone* premiered in 2016. The author was 79. Now in her 80s, Caryl Churchill's thumb remains firmly on the pulse of our world's most pressing concerns.

ACT IV

THEMES, ACTIVITIES AND QUESTIONS



TIP:

Assign these questions for homework or in-class writing and then discuss your students' answers before and after the show.

THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING

1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, sound, and music?
3. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
4. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? How does the title relate to the story?

ONE STAGE TWO PLAYS

Escaped Alone by Caryl Churchill and *Come and Go* by Samuel Beckett are two plays, each written by a different playwright at a different time. They bear no direct relationship in terms of character or setting, yet the Gamm has decided to produce them as one cohesive production. When a strong choice like this is made, two main questions come to mind: why are they being united and how will they put them together?

Putting two plays together is an artistic challenge. The director has to think of how to make a coherent vision, an obvious transitional connection between the two plays, and assure that the audience can recalibrate to understand the new artistic formation. However, the director also has to make sure that design elements like the set, costume changes, and lighting design can collaborate to work through the transition.

Activity: Collaborative Vision

Gather in small groups (3-5 people) and come up with ideas about how you all might want to have an artistic transition between the two plays (movies, songs, books, etc. also work well!). What connection do you want to highlight? What elements would you like to stay the same? What elements would you like to either subtly or dramatically change?

(Activity continued on page 10)

Once you've collaborated on some ideas for putting the pieces together, assign specific roles to each team member like director, set designer, costume designer, lighting or sound designer, maybe one of you wants to be an actor! Draw, perform, or write out how your role's personal vision is unique, yet still fits into the collaborative framework your team previously discussed. After coming back together, has the collective vision changed? How so? What inspirations and compromises were struck? What types of communication do you think need to happen in order for a collaboration like this to be successful onstage?

SURREALISM

Surrealism emerged with the goal of questioning our artistic conventions. This movement came well before the creation of *Escaped Alone*, yet the playwright, Caryl Churchill, rebrands this style to suit her modern audience. A key factor of surrealism lies in creating irrational combinations of easily recognized elements to create a sense of unease within our unconscious mind. Churchill takes this idea and goes one step further, to not only bring nonsensical images together, but to collapse our conventions of time. Churchill's brand of surrealism is using the historical past to investigate the creative present. As she does this, she blends the imagery of our current world with the historical fears that, all at once, both ground us and disturb us.

Questions

1. What elements of this performance can you see as "realistic"? What elements seem completely absurd and implausible in relation to the world you experience? How does combining the two concepts of rational and irrational make you feel?
2. The image of three mysterious older women is not new to audiences. The three fates of Greek mythology inspired the three witches of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* which in turn inspired the three women of *Come and Go*. How does this new representation of three mysterious women question or reinforce your preconceived notion of the characters? Can you think of any other literary or historical traditions that this play builds on?
3. How do the two plays build on each other? Do you think they have the same surrealist images or feelings? Why or why not?
4. Though surrealism is most famous for its impact on the visual art world, it also affected many other artistic realms like music, dance, theatre, and literature. What visual surrealism exists onstage (in the set, costumes, lighting, etc.)? What musical or auditory surrealism? Can you think of any surrealism in this play that is not strictly categorized into one mode of perception?

Activity: Creating Experimental Surrealism

The American Art History Foundation describes how "the original Surrealists used art as a reprieve from violent political situations and to address the unease they felt about the world's uncertainties." But how did they form these creative ideas? Many drew inspiration from dreams, where they believed the subconscious mind roamed freely.

(Activity continued on page 11)

Others drew their ideas by psychotherapeutic analysis. Others found inspiration by identifying the abstract thoughts on which they frequently fixated. However, the only tried and true method of creating surrealism was to just try it, to experiment. Choose an artistic medium that calls to you (visual art, music, dance, etc.) and experiment with manipulating the ideas or images that may cause anxiety or fixation. Think of a way to combine these elements with everyday objects or situations. Is this hard? Easy? Do you find yourself easily connected to a friend's work or not? Has this expression changed your perception of the original image?

MEMORY: PAST / PRESENT / FUTURE

A central component of both of these plays is time--- or lack thereof. Everything seems to take place without any temporal context that could really help the audience try to place these events in a history with which they are familiar. Furthermore, as the scenes break between conversation and soliloquy, the audience feels ungrounded, as they probably didn't expect such sudden changes and can't place the horrific images in the timeline of the other scenes. However, even with this eerie manipulation of linear time, there are still more personal temporal elements that dramatically shape this story such as aging, waiting, and memory.

Questions:

1. The women in this show are all supposed to be at least 70 years old. How does their age affect the telling of this story? How might it be different if they were younger or at the beginning of their lives?
2. What do the characters reveal about their past? Their present? Their future? How does our knowledge, or lack thereof, of their memories shape our perception of their characters? What do their future fears reveal? Does memory or fear give us more insight into their characters? Why?
3. In *Come and Go*, the two first lines are "When did we three last meet?" and "let us not speak". In denying the audience the context of these characters' pasts, their story becomes disconnected from memory. How is this role of memory different from the role of memory in *Escaped Alone*? How is it similar?

Activity: Timeline

The more standard, realist, American narratives that we're accustomed to normally depict time in a linear fashion. You could draw out events, causes, and effects on a straight line. That is not the case here. Try drawing out your interpretation of how time operates in this performance. Does the alternative structure of time unnerve you? Why or why not? Is there a better way to visually represent time than by lines? How does this manipulation of time question our interpretations of time in real life?

FEAR

Fear is a central tool in this performance. The audience is always wrought with anticipation for the next horrific soliloquy. The characters express their deepest fears of cats and kitchens and apocalypses. Though fear emerges to the surface in brief moments of isolated speech, even in the banter of conversation fearful tension serves as an undercurrent. With such a constant presence, this play asks the audience to question the role of fear within our own lives.

Questions:

1. Most of the apocalyptic depictions are filled with images and anxieties that we are familiar with in 2019. However, the cultural idea of the apocalypse wasn't always the same, and has had significant change over generations. For example, during the Cold War, the popular idea of apocalypse was nuclear warfare. When we began space exploration, we worried our demise would be brought about by aliens and UFOs. What does the depiction of apocalypse in *Escaped Alone* reveal about the age and culture we live in?
2. When you think of the apocalypse, what do you imagine? What differences and similarities does it have with the content of this play?
3. We're often taught that a healthy way to manage fear is to examine if the fear is rational or irrational. What fears expressed in this play do you think are rational? Irrational? Which fears do not align with these strict categories? Why? Which categories do your own fears fall into? How does this conversation tie into our previous discussion of surrealism?
4. When fear comes to the surface of *Escaped Alone* and the women launch into monologues, what happens? Do the characters forge deeper connections, or become more isolated? Does their fear dissipate or strengthen? Does each character's relationship with the audience change?



COMPASSION

The director of this performance, Tony Estrella, mentioned at the first read-through that though this play may be filled with fear and morbidity, it is still beautiful as it highlights the inherent presence of human compassion. He said that as we wait for the end of the world, “we can wait together hand in hand and keep on. And that’s not nothing”. With this idea, Estrella thinks it’s not only our ability to connect to each other that breeds compassion, but also our ability to endure hardship together.

Questions:

1. The director sees compassion as a central element in this show. Can you identify moments of compassion? Which ones? If you can’t find any, do you think there is any optimism within the show? How so?
2. How do the communication styles of monologues and confusing dialogue contribute to the idea of compassion? Does compassion require listening?
3. Can compassion be expressed in other modes of communication? How so?
4. What is the difference between kindness and compassion? Which do you see more of onstage (if either)?
5. What is a recent example of compassion that you have experienced or witnessed recently? How is this compassion different than the compassion expressed onstage? How is it similar?
6. Do you think that compassion is an inherent human quality? Is it cultural? Generational?
7. Do you think that people all share some sort of non-physical quality that unites us? Why or why not? How do you think it expressed or experienced?



ACT V

EPILOGUE

GAMM
EDUCATION

THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *Escaped Alone* and *Come and Go* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend our performance.

Our Education Department provides classes for students of various grade levels, as well as a month-long Gamm Summer Intensive for summer time theatre fun. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

To book a matinee, contact Drew at drew@gammtheatre.org or 401-723-4266 ext. 112. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach Susie Schutt at 401- 723- 4266 ext. 121.



COMING NEXT

APR 11 - MAY 5

TRUE WEST

BY SAM SHEPARD

In suburban California, estranged brothers Austin and Lee reunite unexpectedly in their mother's home. Austin, a family man and budding screenwriter, is at work on a new script. Lee, a drifter with a plan to rob the neighborhood of household appliances, drops in and stays. Soon he is pitching his own idea for a trashy Western to Austin's Hollywood agent . . . and the battle is on. Challenges are issued, drinks are downed, and the seemingly opposite brothers find they are more alike than they want to admit. Brutal and hilarious, this modern-day Cain and Abel story tackles the absurdity of archetypal America head on.

DIRECTED BY JUDITH SWIFT

"A great American play, arguably Mr. Shepard's finest."

New York Times



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