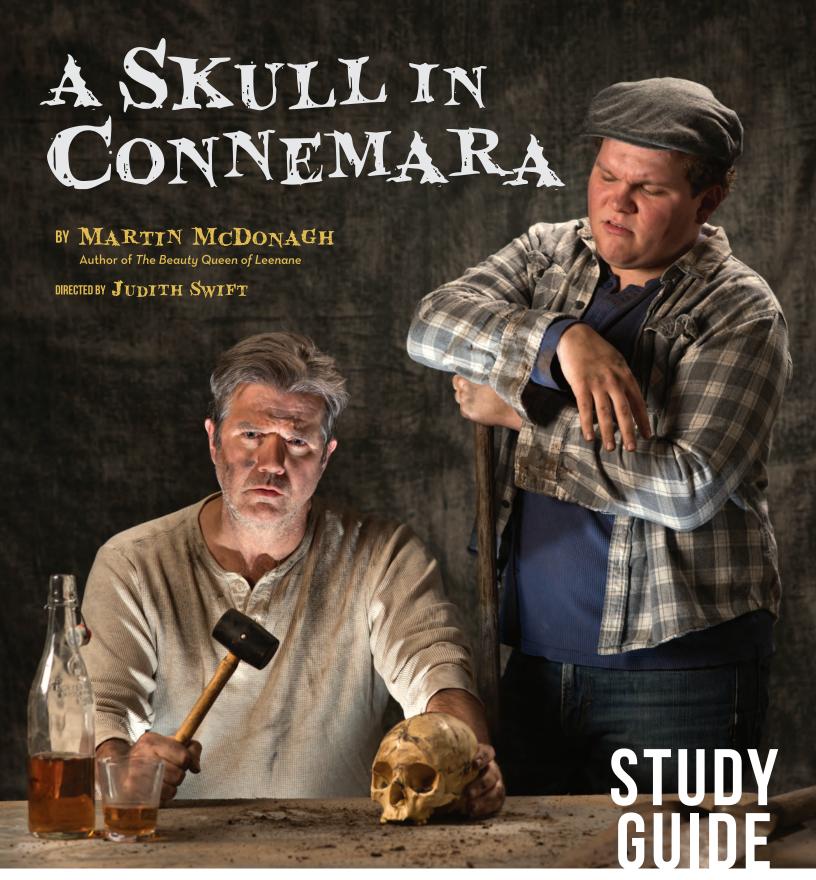
THE SANDRA FEINSTEIN-GAMM THEATRE



GAMM EDUCATION theatre

S E A S O N THIRTY-ONE 401.723.4266

GAMMTHEATRE.ORG

172 EXCHANGE STREET PAWTUCKET, RI

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2.....ACT I: WELCOME

- Theater Etiquette / pg 3
- Guide to Common Core Standards / pg 3

4.....ACT II: PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT

- · About Martin McDonagh / pg 4
- About A Skull in Connemara and The Leenane Trilogy / pg 4

5.....ACT III: OUR PRODUCTION

- Who Made It Happen? / pg 5
- Director's Note, Judith Swift / pg 6
- Dramaturgy Essay / pg 7

8.....ACT IV: TOOLS AND QUESTIONS FOR

DISCUSSION & WRITING

- Questions for Discussion / pg 8
- · Activities for the Classroom / pg 9

11.....ACT V: SUPPORTING MATERIALS

• Links to Online Articles & Videos / pg 11

12.....EPILOGUE: THANK YOU!

- Student Matinee Information / pg 12
- A Look at The Gamm's 31st Season / pg 13

We thank the following individuals and organizations for their support of PLAY in our 31st Season: The Rhode Island Foundation, The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, a Community Development Block Grant from the City of Pawtucket, the Norman and Rosalie Fain Foundation, the Otto H. York Foundation, Shakespeare in American Communities, Hassenfeld Family Charities Foundation, and Andrade Faxon Charities for Children.

This study guide was prepared by Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, Tracy Morreo and Courtney Martin.

ACT 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 A Skull in Connemara by Martin McDonagh. 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 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. Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. Their strategies and models for learning continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming, including our PLAY (Pawtucket Literacy and Arts for Youth) in-school residencies.

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 our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

Susie Schutt

Education Director, susie@gammtheatre.org

Kate Hanson

Education and Outreach Coordinator, kate@gammtheatre.org



What is so exciting about attending the theater - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theater 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!*

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

COMMON CORE GUIDE -

Here is a list of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards that align to the information and activities in our 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.

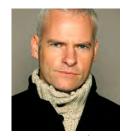


PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT

ABOUT MARTIN MCDONAGH:

Martin McDonagh is an Irish playwright, filmmaker and screenwriter born in March of 1970 in Camberwell, London, England to Irish parents. Despite living in London his entire life, McDonagh is considered to be one of the most important living Irish playwrights.

His first six plays are separated into two trilogies: The Leenane Trilogy, consisting of The Beauty Queen of Leenane, A Skull in Connemara, and The Lonesome West. His second trilogy consists of The Cripple of Inishmaan, The Lieutenant of Inishmore and The Banshees of Inisheer, the last of which was never published. Both trilogies take place in and around County Galway where he spent his childhood vacations.



Martin McDonagh
Photo: Getty Images

The Pillowman, McDonagh's first non-Irish play premiered at the National Theatre in 2003. He has also written prize winning radio plays, including The Tale of the Wolf and the Woodcutter. Next he wrote, A Behanding in Spokane, a play about a killer looking for the hand he lost in his youth, premiered in New York in 2010. Christopher Walken, the lead actor was nominated for a Tony Award for his performance.

McDonagh also has an interest in film. In 2006, he won an Academy Award for Best Live Action Short Film for *Six Shooter*. In 2008 he wrote and directed his first full-length feature, *In Bruges* and received an Academy Award nomination for Best Original Screenplay and a BAFTA Award for Best Original Screenplay. His latest film, *Seven Psychopaths* came out in October 2012.

His newest play, Hangmen, follows England's second best hangman after the abolition of hanging in Great Britain in 1965. Hangmen is his first UK play in over ten years and is currently running in London.

ABOUT A SKULL IN CONNEMARA AND THE LEENANE TRILOGY:

Characters and Setting:

A Skull in Connemara takes place in rural Galway in Connemara. Some of the characters from the other two plays are mentioned in A Skull in Connemara as a way to link the stories and the town in which they take place.

Mick Dowd, fifties.
Maryjohnny Rafferty, seventies.
Mairtin Hanlon, late teens/early twenties.
Thomas Hanlon, his brother, thirties.

A Skull in Connemara, written in 1997 and first performed by the Druid Theatre Company, is the story of a Connemara man, Mick Dowd that has the job of exhuming skeletons in an overcrowded graveyard. His newest customer is his wife, whom he was accused of killing years before.

The Lonesome West, also written in 1997 was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play in 1999. It tells the story of two bickering brothers, Coleman and Valene Connor, in the aftermath of a supposedly accidental fatal shooting of their father. The Gamm staged The Lonesome West during Season 21 in 2006.

The Beauty Queen of Leenane, written in 1996 and receiving six Tony Award nominations, winning four, is the story of the dysfunctional relationship between a spinster and her domineering mother. The spinster faces her last chance at love and her mother faces a rather grim end. The Gamm staged The Beauty Queen of Leenane during Season 28 in 2013.



OUR PRODUCTION

WHO MADE IT HAPPEN:

ON STAGE:

Jim O'BrienMick DowdJonathan FisherMairtin HanlonWendy OverlyMaryjohnny RaffertySteve KiddThomas Hanlon

BEHIND THE SCENES:

Judith Swift

Michael McGarty

Marilyn Salvatore

David Roy

Alex Eisenberg

Normand Beauregard

Jamie K. Hansen

Director

Set Design

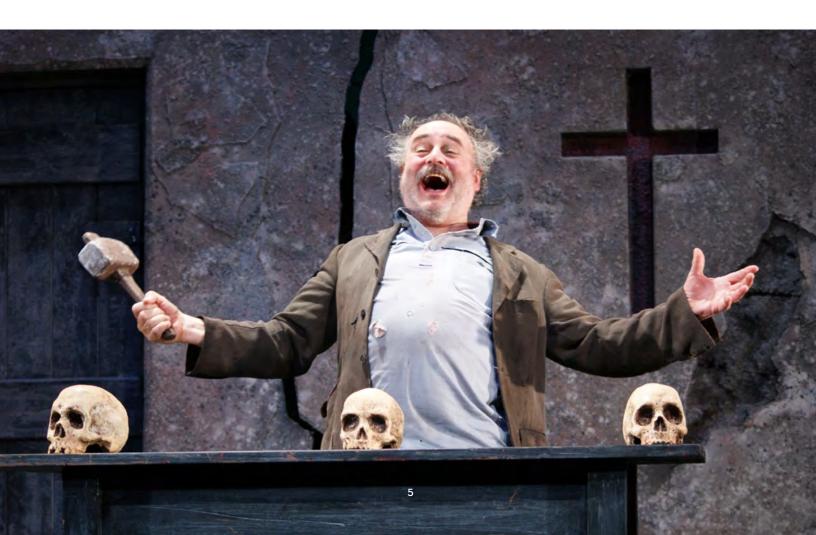
Costume Design

Lighting Design

Sound Design

Fight Choreography

Stage Management



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Directing BINGO!

Truth be told, there are Connemaras all around us if we just dare to look. My cousins and neighbors in rural Canada fit the bill with a throwback to Leenane-like gossip couriers—in which I delight by the way. My 87-year-old aunt could fill 12 bingo cards simultaneously, even when up against an automated ping-pong ball machine at the local fire hall. My husband's relatives, nestled in the mountains of Acri, Italy, kept donkeys in the ground level of their stone houses and carried a large statue of the Virgin Mary down perilous mountain-sides while women in black wailed and beat their breasts with rosary-wrapped fists. What a delight to behold. Even as a child, I relished the eccentric when my step-grandmother juiced my life up with a 7&7 every morning of my first-grade school year and walked me to the bus in her slip. (In the Deep South, a slip is like a morning gown—perfectly acceptable before luncheon.) Here in Little Rhody, there is a street, which shall remain nameless, near a former textile mill that houses characters out of A Confederacy of Dunces. And in all these places, there are whispers of dark deeds that curl 'round and about the wisps of words spoken in hushed tones.

There are two things I believe to be true of us humans: We lust after tales of misdeeds—the more horrific the better, and these deeds are all the sweeter if we know the perpetrator. It is these truths I hold to be self-evident that suffuse me with gratitude when invited to direct a Martin McDonagh play. This is my winning Powerball without having to move to the Midwest.

I am a recidivist when it comes to directing McDonagh. A suicidal priest, a young lass selling hooch, an evening with Cain and Abel shouting each other down as "virgin gayboy"— all this and more made for the delight of *The Lonesome West*. Staging their vicious and even tender(ish) moments was a joy. Then came Beauty Queen of Leenane in which the most fun was figuring out how credibly to torture a dirt-mean old woman by burning her hand on a stove and ensuring her final moment showed a nice chunk of skull hanging by a thread from her head. (Honestly, I am opposed to waterboarding.)

And now comes A Skull in Connemara. Such promise. If you're feeling squeamish, well, what did you expect with an Irish playwright and skull in the title? I'll tell you what: some of the most hilarious dialogue ever to echo off the Gamm bricks. We're looking at a bipolar community with no hope of lithium in the groundwater. Perhaps it's time for a serious bout of communal psychotherapy, but is there a cure for aching poverty to endure, the legacy of alcoholism with drowning by "sick," an armory of aspersions to be cast, and a medieval roundabout of insults honed to a sharp point? Truth be told, an army of psychiatric social workers could not sway this riffraff; a population of army ants would take a detour 'round this rural bog hole.

And yet, the residents endear themselves to us if we allow ourselves to join the presumed cruelty of laughing with, but mostly at, them. We have a boiling pot out of Fatal Attraction but with no motive of passionate retribution or loss of a beloved innocent. Cruelty is bone deep. Religious studies are as much mystery plays and mysticism as anything. School is a Lord of the Flies gathering. Sure and we might be enticed to visit by tourist brochures of quaint whitewashed cottages (white as bones) set on peaty land surrounded by mists thick enough to conjure up rainbows. The people are in actual fact most likely quite glorious, but I for one plan on wearing a helmet.

Judith Swift

WELCOME BACK TO LEENANE

by Jennifer Madden, Gamm Resident Scholar

"....On on the the beard the flames the tears the stones so blue so calm alas alas on on the skull the skull the skull in Connemara..." –Lucky, Waiting For Godot, Samuel Beckett

"A great parish it is you run, one of them murdered his missus, an axe through her head, the other her mammy, a poker took her brains out." –Valene Connor, *The Lonesome West*

Mick Dowd, gravedigger for the small Irish town of Leenane, has the unenviable task of routing a number of the town's dead from their graves every autumn to make room for new tenants. The rotating schedule of seven years and out-you-go takes on a special intrigue this fall, as Mick must exhume the remains of his late wife, Oona, whom town gossips say Mick may have murdered with an axe.

Called the "forgotten sister" of the "Leenane" trilogy, A Skull in Connemarra takes us back to familiar environs of the "murder capital of Western Ireland." This is The Gamm's third visit following The Lonesome West (2006) and The Beauty Queen of Leenane (2013). What is it about this misbegotten corner of Ireland that McDonagh and audiences around the world find so irresistible? The playwright repeatedly returns to this desolate corner of Ireland, much like Stephen King's rural Maine. Connemara, a region not unlike our own Midwest, is Ireland's heartland—fetishized as the wholesome locus of authenticity where the supposedly "real" country can be found. But in actuality it sees more than its fair share of mayhem and bloodshed. The region is primarily Irish speaking, or Gaeltacht. Connemara's official website describes it as "the real emerald of Ireland...situated on the very edge of Europe."

Indeed, it is a stunning region with an abundance of natural beauty, boasting sloping mountains, a rugged coastline, peat bogs, and Ireland's only fjord. For the visiting tourist it is a paradise. Its long-term denizens, however, can feel like inmates doing hard time in prison with no hope of parole. For them, the breathtaking landscape is about as remarkable as faded wallpaper. The land, while gorgeous, is ravaged by famine. For generations, the young and vigorous have fled the region as soon as they are able. Work, opportunity, and the future have always lain elsewhere. There is a debilitating sameness to the weather. The annual temperature hovers around 50 degrees, raining about every second day. It is said that the only way to tell the time of year is by the temperature of the drops.

This is the riotous, dark, hilarious and foreboding context of McDonagh's trilogy. If the name of Mick Dowd sounds familiar it is because he has been gossiped about in the other plays. It is a tight-knit but badly fraying community where everyone knows (or thinks they do) everyone else's business. You'll hear about Mag Folan's funeral freshly murdered by her daughter Maureen, the ironically nicknamed title character of *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*. You'll also be reminded of *Beauty Queen* Ray Dooley's extralegal exploits as well as the ministrations of the young priest Father Welsh ("Walsh? Welsh!"). The latter is so despairing of his flock in this God-forsaken place that he drowns himself after having burned his hands to "skitter" in the molten wax of boiling Catholic figurines—a last desperate measure to get the violent Connor bothers to stop beating the hell out of each other after the murder of their father in *The Lonesome West*.

Yes, it's a dark, dark place. Nothing but poteen (the village version of moonshine) offers any comfort or joy; not family, church, or culture. Certainly not community. In the hothouse atmosphere, the residents turn on each other with savage brio. The sole amusement is to physically, verbally, and psychologically eviscerate everyone within one's sweaty, desperate grasp. Welcome back.

ACT IV

TOOLS AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION & 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 and sound?
- 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?

The Unreliable Protagonist

The unreliable protagonist, or "unreliable narrator" is a term that was coined by Wayne C. Booth, an American literary critic, in 1961. The term refers to a narrator or protagonist whose credibility has been seriously compromised. The main character, Mick Dowd, has been accused of killing his wife. The audience is not given any evidence to prove his innocence or guilt. Since the main character cannot be trusted, the audience is in a state of suspense throughout the play.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- Give some examples of unreliable protagonists that you know of from other plays, books, tv, etc.
- · Why do you think writers use unreliable protagonists in their stories?
- · What parts of this story led you astray?

It's a Small World After All

Rural Galway in Connemara is a small town where everybody knows everybody. These types of farming communities are built upon supporting each other, but news also travels fast and gossip is a common pastime. This makes it difficult for Mick to move on after his wife's death. The town's suspicion of his involvement has followed him for the past seven years.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- · How does news travel in your community?
- In what way does your community support each other? Or is your community more isolated?
- Has gossip ever affected your life? If so, how?

Dialects

In order to make the play as authentic as possible, the actors worked with a professional dialect coach (who also played the role of Maryjohnny Rafferty) to perfect their accents. With characters being from Connemara, Ireland, the actors had their work cut out for them. Performing with an accent adds a whole new level of difficulty for the actors, but when done correctly, it can make the performance feel even more immersive.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- · How would this production have been different without the use of accents? Explain.
- · What speech patterns, accents, or dialects do you notice in your own life?

The Dark Side

Martin McDonagh has been described as a soft spoken man who is very easy to get along with, yet his plays are extremely dark. In 1998, the New York Times described McDonagh's plays as "a darkly comic and violent

world of misfits, grotesques, and haunted lonely people." Nicholas Hytner, the artistic director of the National Theatre in London, who staged the first production of McDonagh's *The Cripple of Inishmααn*, in 1997 explains, "The Martin I know is quiet, genial, funny, courteous, extremely easy to get on with. That cruel imagination is an interior affair. It comes from somewhere that's not accessible to anyone else."

This juxtaposition of the two sides of a personality can also be seen in A Skull in Connemara's main character, Mick Dowd, who appears to be a kind and funny man. Though his personality seems to be gentle, his profession as a grave digger forces him to do things that many others would find grotesque. Mick Dowd also has horrible allegations against him, despite his non-offensive demeanor.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- What other contradictions do you notice in the characters of A Skull in Connemara?
- Why do you think McDonagh writes such dark plays that so severely contrast his personality?
- Do you have interests or traits in your life that others would not expect based on your personality? If so, what are they and why are they unexpected?

ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM ACTIVITY #1: SET DESIGN

The play takes place in two locations: in the main room of a cottage and in a graveyard. McDonagh describes these places as such:

"The fairly Spartan main room of a cottage in rural Galway. Front door stage left, a table with two chairs and a cupboard towards the right, and a lit fireplace in the centre of the back wall with an armchair on each side of it. A crucifix hangs on the back wall and an array of old farm tools, sickles, scythes and picks, etc., hang just below it."

"A rocky cemetery at night, lit somewhat eerily by a few lamps dotted about. Two graves with gravestones atop a slight incline in the centre. At the start of the scene, the grave on the right is in the process of being dig up by MICK, standing down inside it to waist height, shoveling the dirt out."



DESCRIPTION: Have your students read the two location descriptions. Ask them to think about and map out how they would design the set to seamlessly accommodate the two locations on a limited budget. The play's director, Judith Swift, explained that she had a very clear idea of what she wanted the set to look like. After meeting with the set designer, she was very pleased to see that he had come up with a set almost exactly like what she imagined. After seeing the play, have your students discuss how The Gamm's set was similar to or differed from their set concepts.

ACTIVITY #2: DIALECT/ACCENT WORK

As was previously explained in the Questions for Discussion, the actors in our production worked with a dialect coach throughout the rehearsal process. Below are some guidelines that the actors followed to ensure that their accents were as authentic as possible.

The Irish (Galway) Accent is a more musical dialect than Standard American. It has both a strong lilt and fair amount of breathiness to it.

CONSONANTS: The final /g/ (as in: ending) is dropped

Example words: going, banging, longing, singing

Try it with these sentences:

My uncle was asking about visiting England.

The call is ending and the people are leaving.

I'll be calling you either in the morning or evening.

VOWELS: The /oi/ sound (as in: point) moves toward a long /i/ (as in: find)

Example words: boy, voice, coin, oyster

Try it with these sentences:

My boy was annoyed at having to toil.

A strong boycott can destroy the oyster industry.

Her appointment to royalty limited her choices.

The long /i/ sound (as in: fight) rounds in the lips (similar but not as drastic as the /oi/ sound)

Example words: kind, try, thigh, guide, island

Try it with these sentences:

The Irish will fight along all five miles of the line.

My reply tonight was silence.

The sign outside was a sight for sore eyes.

The /ee/ (as in: three) sound changes to /ay/ (as in: may)

Example words: feed, theatre, beater, cheat

Try it with these sentences:

Neither could agree to treat the scene seriously.

She put her receipts for the green machine in a neat pile.

The green beans and peas are in a sealed jar in the freezer.

DESCRIPTION: Have your students work through all of these examples. Then have them recite following short excerpt from A Skull in Connemara to see how great their Irish accents are!

Mick (Scene 1): And if I insulted you or your mam or your mam's dinners by casting aspersions you pick the meat off cows five years dead and can't tell the differ, then I take it all back and I apologise.



SUPPORTING MATERIALS

ONLINE ARTICLES

A MIND IN CONNEMARA: THE SAVAGE WORLD OF MARTIN MCDONAGH | NewYorker.com http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/03/06/a-mind-in-connemara

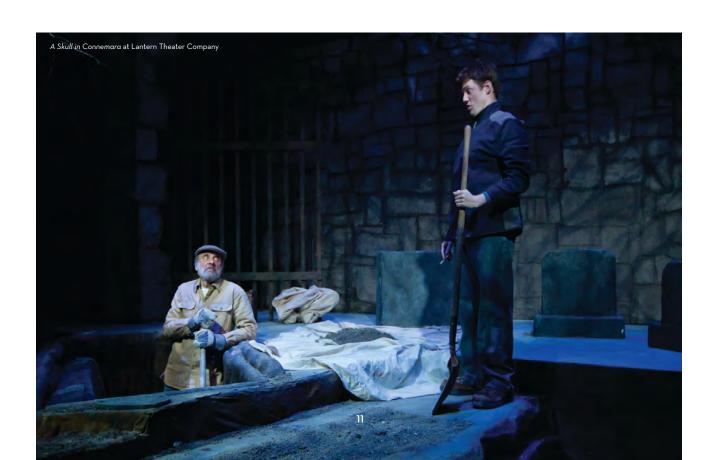
7 STEPS TO MARTIN MCDONAGH | IrishTimes.com http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/stage/seven-steps-to-martin-mcdonagh-1.548074

MARTIN MCDONAGH INTERVIEW:

'THEATRE IS NEVER GOING TO BE EDGY IN THE WAY I WANT IT TO BE' | TheGuardian.com http://bit.ly/10DMM6Y

GAMM INSIDER MAGAZINE: SPOTLIGHT ON "A SKULL IN CONNEMARA"

An email-based collection of reviews and articles gathered from across the web. Email susie@gammtheatre.org to request it be sent to your email address.



MORE TO COME

EPILOGUE

THANK YOU for joining us for A Skull in Connemara 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 A Skull in Connemara.

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!

MATINEES STILL TO COME:

THE WINTER'S TALE

by William Shakespeare

- Friday, April 22, 2016
- Thursday, May 5, 2016
- Thursday, May 12, 2016
- Friday, May 20, 2016
- Thursday, May 26, 2016

TO BOOK A MATINEE

contact Tracy at tracy@gammtheatre.org or 401-723-4266 ext. 112.



ATTENTION TEENS! AUDITION FOR SUMMER THEATER CAMP!

GSI: GAMM SUMMER INTENSIVE

GSI is a professional theater training program for high-school students focused on studying and performing Shakespeare. It is for serious young actors looking to expand their skills in a professional setting, with high goals and expectations. Campers attend rigorous daily rehearsals, participate in workshops taught by working theater professionals in various fields, and perform in two Shakespeare productions. GSI is by audition only.

GSI Dates:

Monday - Friday, June 27 - July 24, 2016 | 10am - 5pm

GSI 2016 Auditons:

Friday, March 18th, 2016 | 3pm-6pm Saturday, May 14th, 2016 | 10am-2pm

GSI 2016 Tuition: \$860

Scholarships and financial aid are available.

To reserve a 10 minute audition slot, contact Kate Hanson at (401) 723-4266 ext. 122 or kate@gammtheatre.org. Please bring a headshot and resume and prepare a 1-3 minute classical or Shakespearean monologue.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GAMM EDUCATION

find us on the web at gammtheatre.org or reach Susie Schutt at 401 723 4266 ext. 121.

A LOOK AT THE GAMM'S 31ST SEASON

This promises to be another unique, surprising, and remarkable year at The Gamm, with provocative, bold, stylistically varied works and the best writing old and new that the theatre has to offer. You'll see the greatest of American dramas, one of Shakespeare's most moving and magical plays, two up-to-the-minute works about how we live publicly and privately today (both new to our audience!), and the dark comic genius of Martin McDonagh with our final production of his award winning "Leeane Trilogy" —Tony Estrella, Artistic Director

sandra feinstein-



heatre

The season closes with William Shakespeare, marking the 400-year anniversary of his death in April 2016 with *The Winter's Tale*, an uplifting story of jealousy and redemption.



COMING NEXT

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► LEARN MORE AT GAMMTHEATRE.ORG

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