

THE GAMM THEATRE



IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A LIVE RADIO PLAY

ADAPTED BY JOE LANDRY
DIRECTED BY DAMON KIELY

STUDY GUIDE

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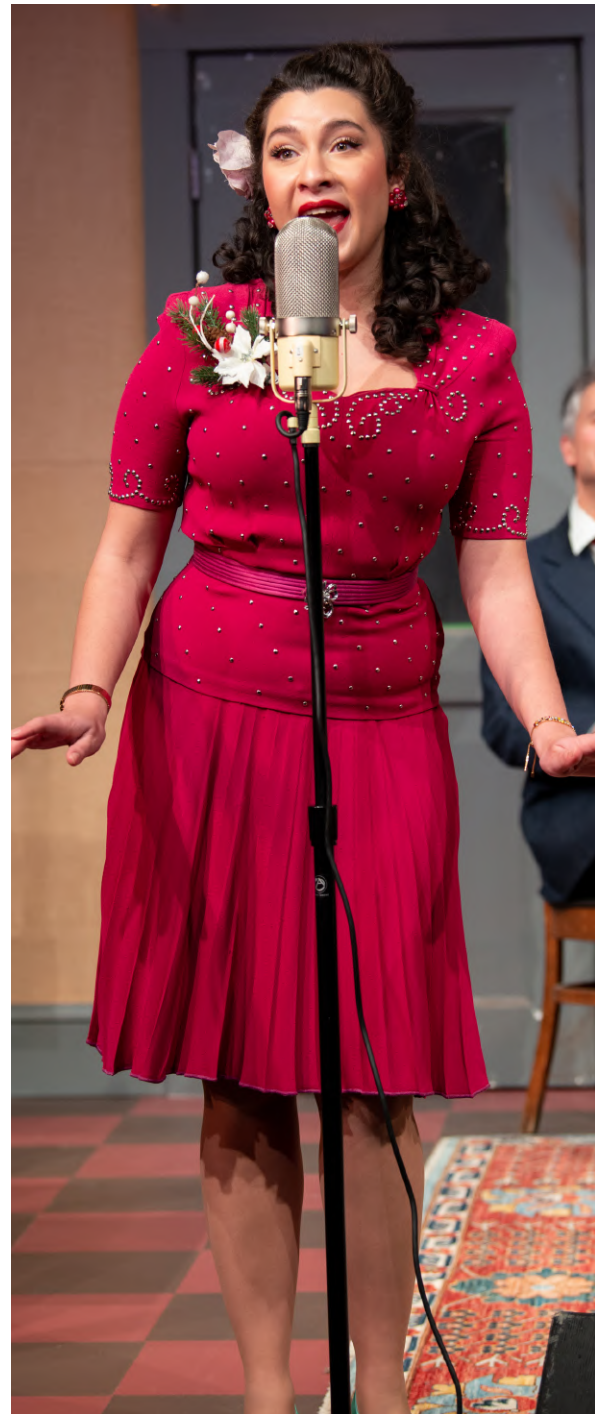
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GAMMEDUCATION

We thank the following foundations and corporations for their support of PLAY during our 37th Season: Rhode Island Foundation, Fain Family Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Mabel T. Woolley Trust, Ramsey-McClusky Family Foundation, Carter Family Trust, Providence Shelter Fund, and June Rockwell Levy Foundation.

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

ACT I

WELCOME



Dear Educator,

We are so excited to be back! It was difficult for us to be dark, as we say in the business, after shutting down *Assassins* mid-run in March 2020. While we have been busy teaching classes online, nothing beats being in the theatre with you and your students. Thank you for continuing to support our work. We are so glad to have you back!

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, adapted by Joe Landry. 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. 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,

Director of Education & Drama Therapist, susie@gammtheatre.org

Kate Hanson,

Associate Director of Education, kate@gammtheatre.org

HEALTH & SAFETY

For performances through December 24, 2021, guests will need to be masked as well as fully vaccinated (or provide a verifiable negative COVID-19 test result) in order to be seated. Proof of vaccination or testing must be presented at time of entry (a paper/electronic card or RI DOH test result).

“Fully vaccinated” means your performance date is:

- at least 14 days after your second dose of an FDA/WHO authorized two dose COVID-19 vaccine
- or at least 14 days after your single dose of an FDA/WHO authorized single dose COVID-19 vaccine

Guests who are unvaccinated (including children under 12) must provide proof of either:

- negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 72 hours of the performance start time, or
- negative COVID-19 antigen “rapid” test taken within 6 hours of the performance start time

For all guests:

- Masking will be required for all in attendance except while actively eating or drinking.
- Please consider mitigating risk factors before the event, and after you leave. While vaccinated people are much less likely to become very sick from COVID-19, recent data has shown some vaccinated people experiencing “breakthrough” infections.
- If you are sick or have COVID-19 symptoms (fever, sore throat, chills, cough, shortness of breath, congestion, nausea, or vomiting), please do not attend your ticketed performance. You may contact the box office to reschedule. If you are unable to attend a different performance of the same show, your ticket may be donated back to The Gamm as a tax-deductible contribution.

Other ways The Gamm is committed to your health and safety:

- Our staff, performers, and volunteers are all fully vaccinated.
- We have adopted contactless mobile ticket scanning to reduce physical touchpoints.
- Face masks are available for those who require them.
- We have installed air filters in our lobby, theater spaces, dressing rooms, and offices.
- Our HVAC system has been serviced and upgraded, as required by Actors’ Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.
- Drinks only (not food) will be allowed in the theater. You may enjoy food and drink in the lobby.
- Hand sanitizers are available in common spaces, and enhanced cleaning protocols are being implemented.

Thank you for your support and cooperation.



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.*

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 JOE LANDRY

Joe Landry's plays have been produced across the country and internationally, and include *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*, *Reefer Madness*, *Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio Play*, *Eve & Co.*, *Beautiful*, *Hollywood Babylon*, and *Numb*. Mr. Landry attended Playwright's Horizons/NYU, founded Second Guess Theatre Company in Connecticut and is a member of the Dramatists Guild of America. He is currently developing new projects for the stage and screen. More at www.joelandry.com

ABOUT IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY

This holiday season, the Gamm is presenting a theatrical adaptation of Frank Capra's film *It's a Wonderful Life*. Originally produced in black and white in 1946, its initial release didn't turn too many heads, but after five Academy Award nominations, the public certainly took notice. Today, it is heralded as a classic American Christmas staple, depicting wholesome family themes and golden age film aesthetics. The plot follows the life of George Bailey and his plethora of selfless good deeds, through the eyes of an apprentice angel sent on a mission to stop George from taking his own life. In 2006, playwright Joe Landry adapted the classic film to be performed onstage, with a key twist in the storytelling style, in homage to the popularity of radio plays in the 1950's. The Gamm first produced *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* in 2019. The following year, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, The Gamm converted the play to be streamed on the radio! Though this was an exciting new way for audience members to engage with the production, The Gamm is thrilled to welcome audience members back into the theatre this holiday season.



ACT III

OUR PRODUCTION

adapted by **JOE LANDRY** directed by **DAMON KIELY⁺**

SET DESIGN
Michael McGarty

COSTUME DESIGN
Jessie Darrell Jarbadan

LIGHTING DESIGN
Noah Beauregard

MUSIC DIRECTION
Emily Turtle

PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT
Jessica Hill Kidd

STAGE MANAGEMENT
Robin Grady*

THE COMPANY

George Bailey	Tony Estrella*
Mary Hatch/Rose Bailey	Lynsey Ford
Henry F. Potter/Clarence/others	Fred Sullivan, Jr.*
Harry Bailey/Earnie Bishop/others	Jeff Church*
Violet Bick/Janie Bailey/others	Helena Tafuri
Joseph/Billy Bailey/others	Richard Noble
Announcer/Zuzu Bailey	Emily Turtle
Foley Artist	DJ Potter

CREATIVE TEAM

Assistant Director	Madison Cook-Hines
Technical Director	Max Ramirez
Technical Production Supervisor	DJ Potter
Assistant Technical Director	Alex Eizenberg
Assistant Stage Manager	Jessica Corsentino
Electrician	Alex Landers

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.

AMY GRAVELL | MANAGING DIRECTOR

What does your job entail?

My job is to provide leadership of the theater, to ensure that we are living our mission and values, and meeting our annual and strategic goals. My specific areas of oversight are human resources, finance, marketing and communications, fund development, and our education programs. I also serve as an ambassador for The Gamm to all of our audiences - patrons, donors, funders, and the community at large.

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

I work very closely with my co-leader, Tony Estrella, The Gamm's Artistic Director. Tony is responsible for all things artistic - and my role ensures that we support the artistic vision by making thoughtful decisions about revenue generation (earned and contributed), building relationships and partnerships across the state (and beyond), and creating a sense of belonging that welcomes folks to our theater.

What led you to your position at The Gamm?

Over the course of my career, which spans nearly twenty-five years in the non-profit sector, my positions have largely focused on fundraising, marketing, and staff and program development. While my previous roles were not in the arts sector, the skills I honed and the relationships I have built in the community are very well matched with this position. When I saw it posted, I immediately knew it was the perfect pairing of my professional experience and personal passion!

Why theater?

The performing arts were a huge part of my life and personal identity into young adulthood. While I never pursued it professionally, I am a strong believer in the power of art to change lives and have always admired The Gamm as an organization. I count myself very fortunate to have been welcomed to The Gamm!

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

When I was younger I would love to have been a midwife.

What special skills does your position entail?

Relationship building is key to my work - both internally and externally. And of course, believing deeply in our mission and values as an organization.

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Coffee chip from Gray's in Tiverton.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

BY DAMON KIELY

Why do I watch *It's a Wonderful Life* every year? Why do I laugh in the same places? Why do I cry at the end, and the beginning, and the middle? Why do I repeat lines from the movie non-stop from about Thanksgiving until New Years until I drive my family crazy?

I think it's because I want to connect with the truth every year.

I have a slightly different reaction to the story of George Bailey every time I watch it. When I was that weird teenager watching the movie on endless loops at this time of year, I think I identified with young George who was going to go out and conquer the world. When I had my own kids, I started to see the way the entire family drives each other crazy and also supports and loves each other no matter what. As I suffered the inevitable losses that life deals you, I started to connect with each of the different people in Bedford Falls. I felt like an honorary town member.

I guess I return to *It's a Wonderful Life* every year to see how I've changed.

And my, how much has changed since 2019, when we were last in a room together with this production. It feels like we've gone through an entire lifetime of love, loss, forgiveness, trials, errors, and heartbreak in just the last 20 months. The Gamm itself lost a long-time collaborator and friend, *Wonderful Life* composer Charles Cofone. We'll think of him nightly as we sing his lovely music and remember his warm spirit. We've changed, but the story of this play hasn't, and it feels more important than ever to get back in touch with the essential questions *It's a Wonderful Life* asks:

- How do we balance the needs of the individual and those of the community?
- What is a life worth?
- How do you become the richest person in town?

Two years ago, I had such a joyous experience working at The Gamm Theatre and connecting with audiences here. I loved seeing them enjoy this story in their own ways, hearing them belt out Jingle Bells, and listening to their heartfelt "instant messages" to loved ones. It seemed like we captured the true meaning of the holiday season together, through a collective act of imagination and belief. Last year, when asked if I could lead the Gamm troupe in recording a version for the radio, I jumped at the chance. It was a slightly bizarre feeling, connecting through our screens and trying to recreate a sense of camaraderie while we were all safely away in our own bedrooms and studios, but we found some of the same magic. When asked to bring the story back to life for a live audience, I couldn't have been happier.

We hope that by gathering this holiday season, singing a few traditional carols, connecting with neighbors, and experiencing this timeless story together, we can once again experience the true importance of family and community. Thanks for coming out to live theater.

Damon Kiely

ACT IV

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

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?

FROM SCREEN TO STAGE

While adapting any story from the big screen to the small stage can be difficult, *It's a Wonderful Life* comes with its own set of unique challenges as a radio play. The creative team walks the line between imitating the famous movie and innovating their own version of the story. From a black and white film classic to the visual (and auditory!) performance of a radio play, consider some of the obstacles artistic developers face, and how they choose to tackle them.

Questions

- What are key differences between theatre productions and films? Consider the environment, interactivity, and aesthetic presentation.
- Why would an artist chose to recreate stories in different forms of presentation?
- What can audiences experience through theatre that they cannot through film (and vice versa)?

FROM RADIO TO STAGE

Joe Landry chose to adapt *It's a Wonderful Life* into a radio play. Radio plays hit their peak popularity shortly after the release of this movie, during the 1950s, but have not lasted as a prevalent art form in our current time period.

Questions

- Before seeing this play, consider why the playwright might have chosen to use this unique presentation style?
- What are some ways this might draw audience members in to the story in a new way?
- What is advantageous about a radio play set onstage instead of a radio play that's just in audio form, like a podcast?

AMERICAN VALUES

In the first read through for this production, director Damon Kiely talked to the team about why the message of *It's a Wonderful Life* remains vital even today. While America has certainly changed since 1946, we still face some of the same questions about what it means to live a worthwhile and noble life. In the wake of World War II, in which many American lives were lost overseas, Frank Capra and the original writers of the film wanted to reframe the importance of individual lives in the wake of all this loss. They focused on the appreciation of family, local good deeds, and kindness above money. Do you think these same values are accurate in defining the American character now?

Questions

- What do you think are some American values of 2021? How (if at all) have values changed throughout the pandemic?
- In your view, what makes a life worthwhile? If you believe in some kind of judgement in the afterlife, what criteria for judgement do you think will be used?
- Why do you think this story has stayed alive in our holiday traditions for 70+ years?



ACTIVITY: BE A FOLEY ARTIST



All the sound effects used in a radio play are created live by the foley artist using some very clever techniques with a wide array of objects. While seeing these sounds created, the audience is forced to lean in with their imagination and fill in the gaps between the actions they are seeing and the intended sonic effect. It increases audience engagement and allows them to fill in the blanks themselves.

For this activity, you'll get to be creative in producing some live sound effects, just like The Gamm's foley artist for this production, DJ Potter. Here are some examples of what is used in the show:

- Ice cracking : Break lasagna noodles
- Tire screeching: Drag a rubber hot water bottle (pictured above) along a flat surface
- Walking in the snow: Squeeze a box of corn starch to the beat of footsteps.

Try creating some of these sounds yourself, and choose 2-3 of the following sound effects to come up with your own creative reproductions.

- Cork pop
- A slap in the face
- Running footsteps
- Water splashing
- Creaky door
- Coins dropped in a cash box
- Spooky graveyard sounds

ACT VI

EPILOGUE

THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* 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 *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*.

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 gammtheatre.org or reach Susie Schutt at susie@gammtheatre.org





COMING NEXT

WINNER OF THE OBIE AWARD
BEST NEW AMERICAN PLAY

AN OCTOROON

BY BRANDEN JACOBS-JENKINS

DIRECTED BY JOE WILSON, JR.
JANUARY 27 - FEBRUARY 20, 2022

