

THE SANDRA FEINSTEIN-GAMM THEATRE

GOOD PEOPLE

BY PULITZER PRIZE WINNER
DAVID LINDSAY-ABAIRE

DIRECTED BY
RACHEL WALSH



STUDY GUIDE

GAMM
EDUCATION 

sandra feinstein-
GAMm
theatre

SEASON
29
2013
2014

401.723.4266

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172 EXCHANGE STREET
PAWTUCKET, RI

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*This study guide was prepared by
Tracy Morreo, Susie Schutt and Steve Kidd*

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Prologue

Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to share with your students designed to prepare them for our production of *Good People* by David Lindsay-Abaire.

This Study Guide is broken into five acts. In the first act, you will find a few more reminders for you and your students about the nature of performance and what is expected of all audience members attending the theatre. In the second act, you will find a biography of David Lindsay-Abaire, the history of the plays, and a breakdown of the characters. In act three, Director Rachel Walshe articulates her vision and ideas behind our production, Gamm Artistic Director Tony Estrella explores the American Class divide, and Resident Scholar Jennifer Madden looks in depth at Playwright, Lindsay-Abaire's road to *Good People*. Act four offers background and historical information and defines terms and slang used in the play. Finally, we will close our Study Guide with act five, which examines the dominant themes in the play and offers questions for discussion or personal writing. At the end of our study guide, you will be able to find information on how to learn more about The Gamm's Educational offerings.

As part of our Core Prep program, I would like to offer a workshop with your classroom/school before your visit and help prepare your students for the play. In these workshops, I will not only discuss the play and our production concept(s), but we will also get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, motifs and the language of the play. This type of kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and the sort of 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. I had the good fortune to work with "ArtsLit" and the strategies and models for learning developed by the organization continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming.

Some benefits of ArtsLiteracy learning include:

- **Community Building in Your Classroom** (Applied Learning New Standards: A1; A2; A5)

- **Inspiration and Background on the Artist** (English Language Arts New Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5; E6; Applied Learning New Standards: A2; A3; A5)
- **Entering and Comprehending Text** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Creating Text for Performance** (English Language Arts Standards: E1; E2; E3; E5)
- **Performing in Your Class** (Applied Learning Standards: A1; A2; A3; A4; A5)
- **Reflecting on Your Performance** (E2; E3; A1; A2; A5)

Moreover, the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) has developed GSE's (Grade Span Expectations) and GLE's (Grade Level Expectations) to help "capture the "big ideas" of reading that can be assessed."

We believe that all of our Literacy through Performance work helps to develop the following literacy skills.

WRITING

- W-2: Writing in Response to Literary Text (showing understanding of ideas in a text). A "text" covers not only books and plays, but film and other kinds of media.
- W-3: Making Analytical judgments about text (how good was it? What stuck out?)
- W-4: Creating a Storyline
- W-5: Applying Narrative Strategies (how did they tell the story?)
- W-14: Reflective Essay

ORAL COMMUNICATION

- OC-1: Interactive Listening (how well students listen; how much information they pick up hearing something once – asking a student to write a comprehensive account of a play certainly works)
- OC-2: Making Presentations (each senior in Rhode Island will be asked to put on a senior exhibition, capstone project or portfolio that includes a public demonstration on a particular subject. Learning about public performance is an obvious tie-in).

READING

- R-4: Initial Understanding of Literary Texts (where is the climax in a story? How would you set this play in contemporary society?)
- R-5: Analysis and Interpretation of Literary Text/Citing Evidence

- R-11: Reading Fluency and Accuracy (part of the benefits of reading a script out over and over in rehearsal is an increase in reading fluency and accuracy)

Furthermore, attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Reading: Literature Standards, Speaking and Listening Standards, and, of course, Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication.

Please see more exercise and strategies for ArtsLiteracy learning at www.artslit.org. 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.

Steve Kidd
Resident Actor/Education Director
The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre

A Look at the Gamm's 29th Season:

"Past, present and future collide in our 2013-14 season," says Artistic Director Tony Estrella. "Taking our cue from our centerpiece Shakespeare production, *Macbeth*, we offer five plays that examine time as defined by the Scottish king himself: "all our yesterdays" to "this petty pace from day to day," then looking forward to "tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow." I am incredibly excited to return to Shakespeare after the hiatus that followed last season's hit production of *Hamlet*, and also to present the Rhode Island premiere of four varied and powerful contemporary works that have already excited audiences the world over.

The pairing of Caryl Churchill one-acts, *A NUMBER* and *FAR AWAY*, ushered in the new season and put a provocative science-fiction slant on a not-so-distant future. Season 29 now continues with *GOOD PEOPLE*, South Boston native David Lindsay-Abaire's Tony Award-nominated play illuminating the gap between rich and poor in today's America. Dan LeFranc's innovative 2012 off-Broadway hit *THE BIG MEAL* follows, tracing five generations of a typical American family as they live their lives—from first kiss to final goodbye—without ever leaving the dinner table! Next, The Gamm reunites with its signature playwright for what promises to be a gripping production of William Shakespeare's timeless *MACBETH*. The season concludes with David Harrower's controversial *BLACKBIRD*, a darling of the Edinburgh International Fringe Festival, as well as a West End and Off-Broadway hit, about the fallout from an illicit affair between a girl and a much older man.

ACT I: 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 are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors. Thus, you the audience, play an active role in the experience. The actors can see and hear you and any distracting behavior (talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc) 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!

The Nature of Performance

Controversial British playwright Sarah Kane once observed: "There's always going to be a relationship between the material and that audience that you don't really get with a film... People can walk out or change channels or whatever; it doesn't make any difference to the performance... It's a completely reciprocal relationship between the play and the audience."

The performance you see will never be precisely the same, for it will never have the same audience; every performance is unique. Theatre scholar Robert Cohen observed the essential paradox of live performance:

- It is unique to the moment, yet it is repeatable.
- It is spontaneous, yet it is rehearsed.
- It is participatory, yet it is presented.
- It is real, yet it is simulated.
- The actors are themselves, yet they are characters.
- The audience is involved, yet it remains apart.

"Theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings... It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence..."

-Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic and Playwright
(From Robert Cohen's *Theatre: Brief Version*)

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.

ACT II: David Lindsay-Abaire and *Good People*



About David Lindsay-Abaire:

David Lindsay-Abaire was born in November 1969 and is an American playwright, lyricist and screenwriter. He studied theatre at Sarah Lawrence College and graduated in 1992. From 1996-1998, he wrote under the tutelage of playwrights Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang in the American Playwrights Program at Juilliard.

His first theatrical success was *Fuddy Meers*. Other plays include *A Devil Inside* (1997), *Snow Angel* (1999), *Dotting and Dashing* (1999), *Wonder of the World* (2000) and *Kimberly Akimbo* (2000). In 2006, his play *Rabbit Hole* was produced in New York with Cynthia Nixon, Tyne Daly, and John Slattery and won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. It was also nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play, with Cynthia Nixon winning the Tony for Best Actress.

Lindsay-Abaire has written a number of screenplays, including the film adaptation of his play *Rabbit Hole*, *Robots* and most recently *Oz the Great and Powerful*. He wrote the movie adaptation of *Rise of the Guardians* for DreamWorks Animation and the book and lyrics for *Shrek the Musical* and *High Fidelity the Musical*.

About *Good People*:

Good People opened on Broadway on March 3, 2011 with Frances McDormand and Tate Donovan in the lead roles. It was nominated for a Tony Award, Drama League Award, Drama Desk Award, Outer Critics Circle Awards, and received the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Frances McDormand received the Tony Award, Drama Desk Award, and Outer Critics Circle Awards for her performance in the play.

Synopsis: When Margie Walsh, a single mother with a severely disabled adult daughter, loses her job at a South Boston dollar store, she looks to her high-school-boyfriend-turned-successful-doctor for a new job. But her attempt to hit up "Dr. Mike," who left working-class "Southie" for the manicured lawns of Chestnut Hill, takes a surprising turn when Margie realizes the power of a secret from her old flame's past.

Characters and Setting

Good People takes place in South Boston's lower end and Chestnut Hill Massachusetts.

Margaret (Margie), white, about fifty

Stevie, white, in his twenties

Dottie, white, mid sixties

Jean, white, about fifty

Mike, white, about fifty

Kate, African American, in her thirties

ACT III: Our Production

Who Made It Happen:

On Stage:

Margaret Jeanine Kane

Stevie Marc Dante Mancini

Dottie Margaret Melozzi

Jean Casey Seymour Kim

Mike Bill Mootos
Kate Mia Ellis

Behind The Scenes:

Directed by Rachel Walshe
Set Design by Jessica Hill
Costume Design by Amanda Downing Carney
Lighting Design by Matthew Terry
Stage Management by Stef Work

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Assistant Director: Steve Kidd
Production Manager: Jessica Hill
Assistant Stage Manager: JonPaul Rainville
Production Assistant: Siobhan Reddy-Best
Props Master/Scenic Artist: Carrie Capizzano

Production Notes:

Directors' Notes:

By Rachel Walshe, *Director of Good People*

Twelve going on thirteen, we moved which meant I had to attend a new school, smack in the middle of the wrought years of junior high. The "new kid" in a solidly working-class public school, I was sick with anxiety about making friends. On the first day, a gum-snapping girl who smelled of cigarettes and Aquanet – let's call her "Tara" – offered to be my locker partner. I jumped at the chance. A friend! But before locks were distributed, the teacher said there had been some sort of mix-up and our pairing wouldn't be possible after all. I was assigned to bunk with "Kristy," a wholesome girl in a soccer uniform. A small event in the grand scheme of life? Perhaps. But whenever I think about that last minute change-up, I see a place where the road forked and – thanks to sheer luck – I befriended an academically ambitious soccer player as opposed to "Tara" who ended up pregnant by ninth grade and had dropped out by tenth.

The notion that *luck* has more to do with one's life trajectory than anything else flies in the face of our nation's most prized core value: that hard work will set you free; that if you pull yourself up by your proverbial bootstraps and make good *choices*, you're a shoe-in for upward mobility.

Good People is a meditation on this luck-versus-choice dichotomy. Margie Walsh, a lifelong resident of Boston's solidly Irish-Catholic working-class neighborhood of Southie, is but a missed paycheck away from homelessness with her mentally disabled adult daughter. When local-boy-

done-good Mikey Dillon returns home a successful doctor, this dichotomy is thrown into startling relief.

On the surface, Mikey and Margie were born into the same difficult circumstances: rough neighborhood, widespread poverty, and racially charged local politics. So how did Mikey make it out but Margie couldn't? The conventional wisdom on this – inherited largely from past immigrant generations who worked tirelessly towards middle-class status despite a bevy of social disadvantages – is that hard work, sacrifice, and good choices are the keys to forging a financially solvent life. This is the philosophy to which Mikey appeals when he argues, "I worked my ass off. That's the only way out of there," implying that Margie didn't make it out because she didn't *work* hard enough.

Margie eviscerates Mikey's philosophy on this by exposing its fatal flaw: Most of those "good choices" people like Mikey make when climbing their way out of places like Southie are really nothing more than *luck* masquerading as choice. When Margie scratches the surface of the difficult circumstances Mikey claims they share, key distinctions emerge that are far from irrelevant and have nothing to do with choice, like the type of parents you end up with, or like having good teachers who look out for you. Mikey has revised his own history to see personal choice at play where Margie sees dumb luck.

But *Good People* cannot be reduced to a simple valorization of the working-class hero in Margie Walsh or the demonization of privilege in Mikey Dillon. In the hands of Lindsay-Abaire, these characters are too complicated and nuanced to label "hero" or "villain." Where Mikey subscribes to the myth that "hard work" and "good choices" are the only reasons he "got out," Margie's fierce clan loyalty undermines her at every turn. She repeatedly puts "Southie pride" ahead of her own best interest. *Good People* insists we examine that pride closely – is clan loyalty truly noble? Or is it an excuse for lack of ambition?

Looking back on that fateful first day of 8th grade, it occurs to me that the "mix-up" my teacher cited was probably pure fiction. Maybe she saw something in me worth protecting from "Tara." Too bad no one was looking out for her in the same way. Lucky me.

Everybody Knows

By Tony Estrella, *Gamm Theatre Artistic Director*

*"Everybody knows the dice are loaded
Everybody rolls with their fingers crossed..
Everybody knows the fight was fixed*

*The poor stay poor, the rich get rich
That's how it goes, Everybody knows...
Everybody knows it's coming apart
Take one last look at this Mighty Heart
Before it blows..."*

~ Leonard Cohen

I grew up here in Pawtucket. I spent the early years of my childhood among the largely Catholic descendants of Portuguese, Irish and Italian immigrants. While perhaps not as homogeneous as the South Boston or "Southie" of David Lindsay-Abaire's brilliant *Good People*, both hardscrabble neighborhoods share a fierce insularity and an uneasiness with notions of social mobility. My Dad was a Teamster as was my grandfather. We didn't have a whole lot but then again we didn't want for much either. We had a decent home and healthcare and had our cavities filled without fearing bankruptcy or homelessness. I was undoubtedly, even proudly working class and, if I'm honest, incredibly lucky. I had a strong, caring family and really great timing. As I made my way from grammar school to junior high and high school, educational opportunities unavailable to my parents presented themselves and earned me a life.

Nowadays we are all *middle*-class. There is no longer a *working*-class in America. Of course, workers still exist and despite ever diminishing ranks so do the trade unions that gave them an identifying consciousness along with a sense of pride in their labor's contribution to society not to mention the financial recompense that provided them and their families with living wages and adequate health benefits. Today, our prevailing third-world narrative of a binary America pits the 1% (the mega-rich) against the 99% (the rest of us). Are 99% of us actually middle class? Or, perhaps, are none of us? Aren't we all rugged individuals? Well then, ipso facto, there can be no such thing as class. As Americans we are all created equal and allowed the same opportunities, so all any of us needs is the will, right? Because where there's a will there's a... The dirty (not so) secret is everybody knows that for many hard-working, good people there is no *way*. A significant portion of the 99% continue to struggle in poverty, income inequality increases, our transformation from an industrial to a service economy means a former Teamster now has to make ends meet at the local Walmart while dirt cheap technologies from cellphones to flat-screens soothe us with the trappings of *abundance*, all sorts of cool *stuff* that obscures the *scarcity* of meaningful economic progress.

The 2008 crash brought collapse, foreclosure and despair to much of the country and, though we seem to know how and why it occurred, we have yet to make a serious reckoning with its architects or, for that matter, the reckless risk taking that will surely blow the bubble up to

bursting all over again. The anger, the “We’ve had enough already” energy that birthed Occupy and other serious protest movements, has all but disappeared. It seems that no one in America is poor anymore, we’re pre-rich, just a scratch ticket, Bingo game or craps throw away. And don’t call it luck, it’s *will*. We just have to pick the right numbers or play the smart odds. Pay no attention to my rabbit’s foot and crossed fingers.

Good People stares into the chasm that separates the haves and the have-nots. In refusing to traffic in the stereotypes that so often lampoon both sides of this struggle, Lindsay-Abaire has created a supremely humane work of art that tells us what everybody knows but is afraid to say: The chasm can only become so wide before the fault starts to give and the whole edifice crumbles. By asserting the common humanity of Margie and Mike, Lindsay-Abaire suggests that we are not quite that far gone. That just maybe this mighty American heart has some blood left in it yet.

Dramaturgical Notes:

Boot Straps at The Bingo

By Jennifer Madden, *Gamm Theatre Resident Scholar*

What does Barack Obama talk about all the time? The middle class... Since when in America do we have classes? Since when in America are people stuck in areas or defined places called a class? That’s Marxism talk. ~ Rick Santorum, former U.S. Senator Santorum and Republican presidential candidate

If you don’t have a job and you are not rich, blame yourself. ~ Herman Cain, Tea Party activist and former Republican presidential candidate

Admittedly, the epigrams above are low-hanging fruit but the obtuse logorrhea of Santorum and Cain underline the uniquely American paradox of the class tensions in David Lindsay-Abaire’s *Good People*: How to fix a problem that many people refuse to believe exists? Margie Walsh, a single mother of an adult disabled daughter has just been fired from the local Dollar Store in her rough South Boston neighborhood. Desperate and potentially facing eviction, Margie seeks the help of an old high-school fling, Michael (Mikey) Dillon, a successful doctor she hasn’t seen in thirty years. Michael escaped the projects and now lives in affluent Chestnut Hill. He’s moved less than ten miles as the crow flies but to all but the luckiest of his Southie neighbors he has made a virtually untraversable journey. Working-class Margie and wealthy Michael endure an uncomfortable reunion simmering with tension and resentment. Margie mocks Michael’s “lace-curtain Irish” pretensions while Michael bristles at

her assumptions. They glare across the class divide, alienated and unknowable to the other.

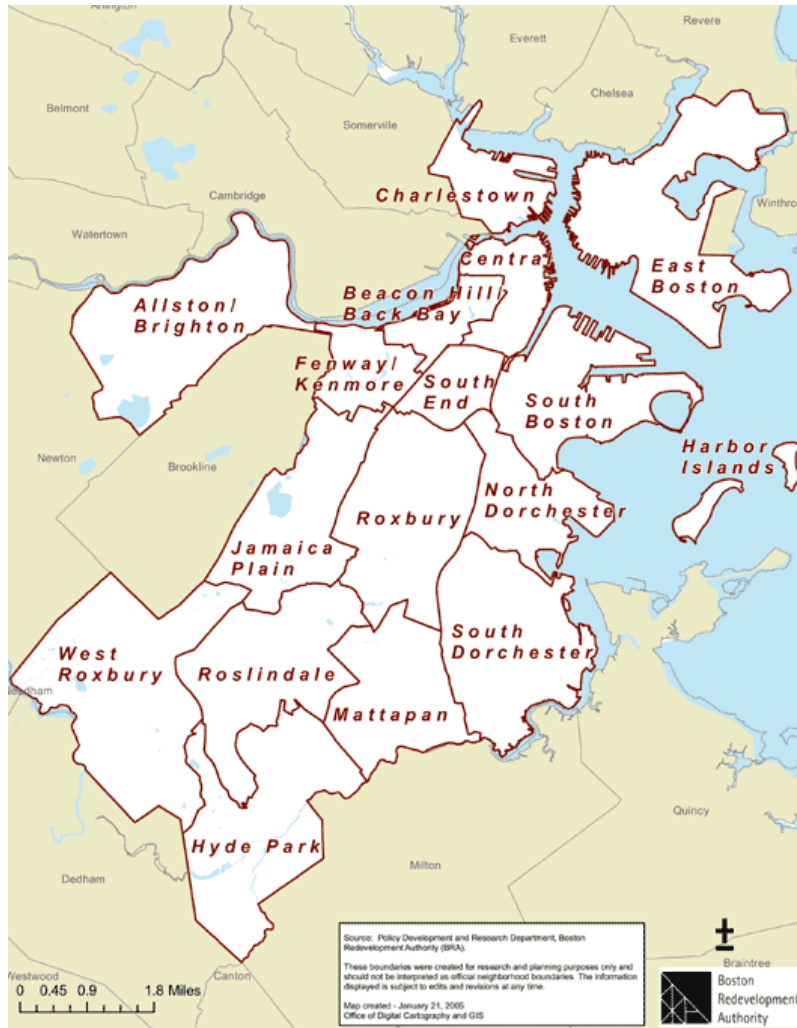
Playwright David Lindsay-Abaire understands both Margie and Michael's viewpoints, neither making excuses for nor idealizing one side. A Southie native and the child of a fruit peddler and factory worker, Lindsay-Abaire received a scholarship to prestigious Milton Academy prep school. This provided him a unique perspective of the "haves" and the "have-nots" as he commuted from Southie (site of the explosive busing crisis in the 1970s and home of notorious organized crime figure Whitey Bulger) to Milton (named second best place to live by *Money Magazine*). The Milton scholarship offered Lindsay-Abaire with a priceless opportunity for an excellent education, and altered the course of his life. He later attended Sarah Lawrence College and Juilliard and won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for his play *Rabbit Hole* in 2007. "There were kids who were just as smart as I was," Lindsay-Abaire observes, "who didn't have that luck."

As a writer Lindsay-Abaire doesn't rely on easy stereotypes (the inherently noble poor or corrupt clueless rich), however as *New York Times* critic Ben Brantley observes, "*Good People* refuses to shy from the clichés that its characters would normally use." His characters often rely upon ill-informed assumptions and facile prejudices. Margie's friend Jean assumes Margie's twenty-something boss Stevie is gay because he enjoys bingo, which doesn't fit into her narrow expectations of gendered behavior. Anyone behaving outside that frame is automatically suspect. Conversely, when Margie visits Michael's home, his wife Kate, a professor at Boston University, initially mistakes her for hired help because she doesn't resemble a Chestnut Hill denizen. Kate is from an affluent family but as an African-American is no stranger herself to the indignity of others' easy assumptions. Considering Southie's history of explosive racial tension, the give and take in this scene simmers with underlying cultural tension and dark irony. But for Lindsay-Abaire, Kate's class is more significant than her race. "He plays the race card here," writes Ben Brantley, "only to suggest that for his purposes it's irrelevant."

Initially Lindsay-Abaire worried that his Southie milieu might be too specific and insular for audiences outside the Boston region, but the issues and themes of the play are universal and sadly all too relevant with continued socio-economic disparity, high unemployment rates, and the increasingly devalued college degree. So is geography necessarily destiny? Unlike the ancient Greeks, we tend to think of fate as metaphor rather than literal, inexorable force. However the circumstances of birth and upbringing can relentlessly determine the trajectory of a life as much as any Delphic oracle. One wrong decision or one bit of good luck can send a life spiraling in an unimagined direction. "There's this idea out there that you can accomplish anything if you just work hard enough," says

Lindsay-Abaire, "Of course you have to work hard, but you also need opportunity, life skills and luck."

ACT IV: Background



About South Boston:

South Boston or "Southie" is a densely populated neighborhood in Boston Massachusetts. It abuts Dorchester Bay and is located south and east of Fort Point Channel, the waterway which separates it from downtown Boston. South Boston is one of the oldest, most historic neighborhoods and is home to some of the oldest public housing projects in the United States. Southie is popularly known as a working class Irish American neighborhood, although its demographics are rapidly changing. It is also known for being a tight knit community with a history of organized crime.

Films about Southie and the class divide:

- *Good Will Hunting* (1997)
- *The Boondock Saints* (1999)
- *Mystic River* (2003)
- *Gone Baby Gone* (2007)
- *The Departed* (2006)-look out for a cameo from our own Artistic Director, Tony Estrella!
- *The Fighter* (2010)

About Chestnut Hill:

Chestnut Hill is an extremely affluent village located six miles west of downtown Boston. It encompasses parts of three towns, **Brookline**, **Newton** and the city of Boston itself. Its borders are only roughly defined by the Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts zip code of 02467. It is best known as the home of Boston College and as part of the Boston Marathon route.

Definitions of Slang & Terms used in *Good People*:

Boston Busing Crisis: A series of protests and riots that occurred in Boston, Massachusetts in response to the passing of the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act, which ordered public schools in the state to desegregate. In 1974 W. Arthur Garrity Jr. of the US District Court of MA used a State Board of Education plan for busing of students from predominantly white areas. Under this law, any school with 50% nonwhite students had to become racially balanced, which led to the busing of Irish American students from South Boston to schools made up of mostly African American students. This created a conflict that lasted for a decade and led to protests and violence. Margie and Mike discuss this racial tension and the public school busing crisis in South Boston, as they were both in school at that time. This would have affected their education and their understanding of race.

Columbia Point: An area of Southie that was once home to a housing project. It now houses the UMass Boston campus. Margie tells a story about kids from that housing project fighting with kids from the Old Harbor Projects.

Cracker Barrel Cheese: An inexpensive brand of cheese. Margie jokes that this is the only kind of cheese she has ever had.

Djembe: An African drum. Kate jokes that she only used to date djembe players.

Gillette: Gillette brand shaving products are produced in a factory located in South Boston, with over 3,000 employees. Everyone suggests Margie look for work here.

Humboldt Fog: A brand of expensive cheese. It can cost as much as \$140. Kate offers this cheese to Margie.

Lace curtain: A person of Irish descent who is accepted into WASP society because of family money or education. The term originally refers to Irish immigrants who would hang lace curtains in the windows of their tiny shacks, so as to appear better off than they actually were. It can be considered a derogatory term depending on the context. Margie tells Mike he is now "Lace Curtain"

Morgan Memorial: The local Goodwill. Mike brings this up as evidence that he grew up lower class.

Old Harbor Projects: The first public housing development in New England, built in the 1930's. Located opposite Carson Beach in South Boston and now known as the Mary Ellen McCormack Projects. It remains one of the largest housing projects in New England and is most known for being the housing project where James "Whitey" Bulger grew up. Mike grew up in these projects and Margie tells Kate a story about Mike beating someone up in the courtyard there.

Reproductive Endocrinologist: A doctor who treats infertility, which is what Mike does.

Saint Vincent DePaul's: A Catholic international organization that serves the needy of any religious background free of charge. Cookie, the homeless woman Margie knows from school used Saint Vincent DePaul as a source for food.

The "T": Referring to the train/subway system in the Boston area. Also known as the MBTA, which stands for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Margie takes the "T" to visit Mike and Kate, which takes Kate by surprise. For Kate, the T is a distinctly lower class mode of transportation.

Upton Sinclair: A famous Twentieth Century writer who wrote investigative books like *The Jungle*. Kate brings him up in reference to Mike and how he tells stories about his childhood.

Walpole: Massachusetts Correctional Institution-Walpole, which has since been named MCI-Cedar Junction, is a maximum security prison with an average daily population of approximately 800 adult males. It is located on both sides of the line between the towns of Walpole and Norfolk. Margie and her friends refer to it as Walpole, where many of their classmates have ended up.

Welly Cheese: Also known as “government” cheese or “welfare” cheese. It is a processed cheese that was distributed between 1960 and 1990 to welfare, food stamp recipients and the elderly. Mike brings this up as evidence that he grew up lower class.

Whitey Bulger: A former organized crime leader from South Boston. He has recently been in the news after being found after 16 years hiding from the law. Everyone in Southie supposedly has a Whitey Bulger story, which Margie references when meeting Kate.

ACT V: Themes and Questions for Discussion

1. What is the meaning of the title *Good People*?
2. Why does setting matter? How would this play be different in another part of the country or the world?
3. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? How would you have changed it?
4. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting and sound design?
5. What does the Gamm poster tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
6. How do the three themes listed below relate to one another?

Cycle of Poverty

The cycle of poverty is defined as a set of factors or events by which poverty, once started, is likely to continue unless there is outside intervention. Further, once a person or community falls below a certain level of resourcefulness, a chain of events starts to occur that tends to

perpetuate the situation: progressively lower levels of education and training leading to lack of employment opportunities, leading to criminal activity for survival, leading to addiction, shattered health, early death, and breakup of family, leading to an even bleaker future for the next generation. This cycle continues until someone intervenes by providing worthwhile means (not handouts) for people to climb out of destitution, and by ensuring children's health and education. Margie feels trapped in the cycle of poverty whereas Mike has changed his class from lower class to upper class (see Upward Mobility).

Questions for Discussion

- *What factors have led to Margie's poverty? How do Margie's choices affect her daughter?*
- *Would Mike's help break Margie out of the poverty cycle? Why or why not?*

Upward Mobility/Success Stories

Upward mobility is a change in a person's social status that results in that person rising to a higher position in their status system. For example, Mike manages to get "out" of the housing projects of South Boston and become a doctor living in the affluent Chestnut Hill area. Margie says to him, "At least you managed to get out" and Jean describes running into Mike at a function benefiting the Boys and Girls Club by saying he was being honored "Because [he was] in the clubs when [he was a kid], so [he's] like the success stories."

Questions for discussion

- *Do you believe Margie really wants to leave Southie? How does she feel about Mike leaving?*
- *What does it mean to be a "success story" in Southie? What would that look like in your own community?*
- *How did Mike become a success story? What does his success mean to his peers?*
- *What prevents Margie from becoming a success story? What is her Achilles heel?*

Luck v. choice

Luck is an event which occurs beyond one's control, without regard to one's will, intention, or desired result. Choice consists of the mental process of judging the merits of multiple options and selecting one or more of them. Margie argues that her poverty has been caused by a string of bad luck. It's appropriate that she plays Bingo, which is a game of luck, as an attempt to improve her life. It is also fitting that she sees Mike's "escape" from Southie as completely based on luck claiming that his father checking his homework and breaking up his fights was the luck that allowed him to get out. Mike, on the other hand, believes destiny is

caused by choices and argues that Margie had choices just as he did. He sarcastically says to her "I'm sorry you made bad choices in your life" and she responds "What choices did I have?"

Questions for discussion

- *How does Margie's outlook affect her life path?*
- *Whose outlook is most like your own? Why?*
- *Do you believe luck and choice are mutually exclusive (is it either one or the other)?*
- *What were Margie's choices?*

Activity for the Classroom: The Basic Tableau

Description:

A **tableau** is a frozen image of an event, activity, or concept. Students create tableaus to represent their varied interpretations of a given text. Students work from words, phrases, or larger narratives where they form images of the "big events."

Preparation:

Select themes, concepts or phrases from the play or this study guide for students to work from or have students brainstorm words relating to "STATUS". The words should be up for interpretation. For example, a tableau representing "HAPPY" will differ from group to group, but a tableaux representing "PHONE CALL" will all be very similar.

Procedure:

1. Explain to students the concept of a tableau. Tell them they will be creating a tableau either as a cooperative group or with one "sculptor" and a group of "clay." Offer a simple set of guidelines suggesting that everyone in the tableau is physically connected or positioned at different levels (sitting, kneeling, standing) in space. Remind students these are interpretations of words and that there are no right or wrong answers.
2. Break students into groups of four to six students.
3. Have students form a tableau that either reflect the vision of a single "sculptor" or a collective creation of the group. Give students about 3 minutes to create a tableau based on a word of their choice or an assigned word.
4. When all the groups have completed their tableaus, have them take turns sharing them for the class. Debrief each tableau immediately following each group presentation.

Questions for Discussion:

- *Where did you see similarities across the images? Where did you see variations?*
- *What is visually interesting to you about these tableaux?*
- *How was your tableau different than those of your classmates?*
- *How does the word you inhabited relate to Good People? Does this give you insight into how the actors feel on stage?*

Epilogue

Thank you for joining us for *Good People* 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 *Good People*.

Our education program also provides classes for students in elementary, junior high and high school. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

Still to come:

THE BIG MEAL

by Dan LeFranc

- Friday January 10th, 10am

MACBETH

by William Shakespeare

- March 7th
- April 9th, 15th, 17th

To learn more, find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach Steve Kidd at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.