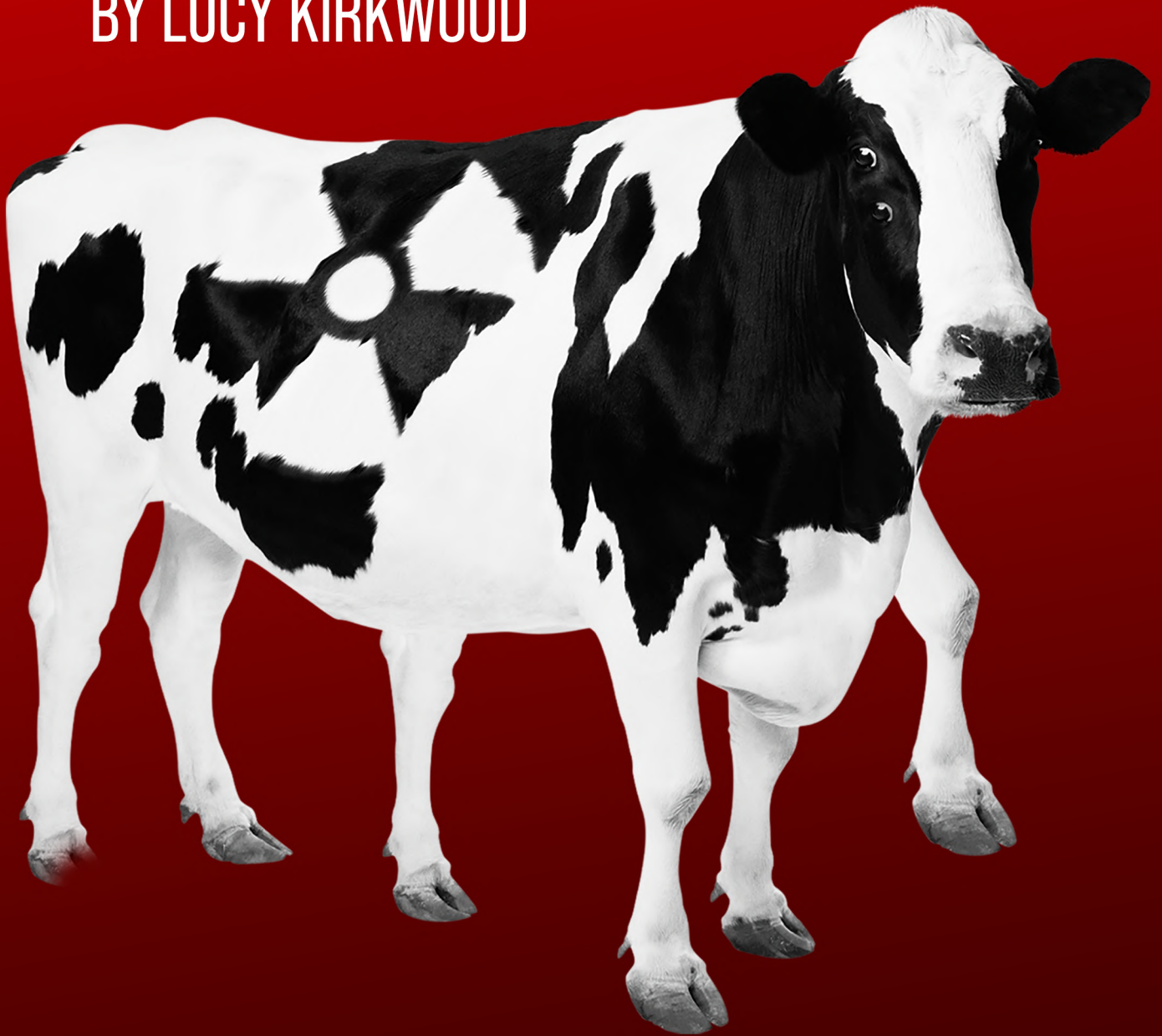


**GAMM**  
THEATRE

# THE CHILDREN

BY LUCY KIRKWOOD



**STUDY GUIDE**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## ACT I: Welcome

- Letter to Educators / pg 2
- Theatre Etiquette / pg 3
- A Guide to State & National Standards / pg 3

## ACT II: Play, Playwright, & Place

- About Lucy Kirkwood & *The Children* / pg 4
- From the Playwright / pg 5

## ACT III: Our Production

- Who's Who at The Gamm / pg 6
- Q&A with director Steve Kidd  
& Actor Phyllis Kay / pg 7-8

## ACT IV: Before The Show

- What happened at Fukushima? / pg 9

## ACT V: After The Show

- Extension Activities & Media Resources / pg 10

## ACT VI: Epilogue

- Thank You & Learn More / pg 11
- Up Next: Season 39 / pg 12



# GAMMEDUCATION

We thank the following foundations and corporations for their support of the GAMM Student Matinee program: Rhode Island Foundation, Fain Family Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, Mabel T. Woolley Trust, Carter Family Trust, TACO/White Family Foundation, Nordson Corporation Foundation, and June Rockwell Levy Foundation.

This study guide was prepared by Jon Del Sesto and Sarah Ploskina

# ACT I

# WELCOME

Dear Educator,

We are delighted that you've chosen to enliven your class and curriculum with live theatre this school year!

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *The Children*, written by Lucy Kirkwood and directed by Steven Kidd. In this guide, you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside conversation about 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 process the theatrical experience with your students.

We offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will stoke students' interest in the performance and encourage them to connect with the play. This visit will last about a half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Additionally, most student matinees are followed by talkbacks, which offer students opportunities to ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length and content, but we encourage you to stay and participate in these dynamic discussions.

Participation in our Student Matinee program addresses Core Standards in Theatre Arts through 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.

Prior to attending, please discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. **In particular, please note that *The Children* is performed without an intermission. Content involving animal loss, allusions to adultery, and existential threats to life and property are a part of this play.** Overall, it can help students prepare for live theatre to facilitate a brainstorm on how live performance is different from film, television and sporting events. We've included language you can use directly in our "A note on Live Theatre Audience Etiquette" section below.

We would love to hear about your experiences with our programming. It is a great help to us as we build our education program from year to year, striving to understand and meet the needs of our school communities.

We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

**Sarah Matczak Ploskina**

Director of Education, [sarah@gammtheatre.org](mailto:sarah@gammtheatre.org)

# 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 a part of a living, collective, group experience. You are expected to pay close attention throughout the performance

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience of both actors and audience. The actors can see, hear, and sense all distracting behavior such as talking, texting, listening to headphones, unwrapping candy; and the ringing, buzzing, or illumination of phone screens. This can affect the actor's concentration, the audience's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members.

**Teachers, because we care deeply about both our audiences and actors, we insist that you and your students refrain from using phones, talking, texting, or making noise during a performance. We ask that you please address these behaviors swiftly, should they arise. Thank you in advance!**

## 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.*

## STANDARDS 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 examples throughout our study guide.**

Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] **See our Before and After the Show**

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 Before and After the Show**

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 Extension Resources**

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 Digging Deeper and Extension Resources**

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 After the Show Discussion Questions**

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] **See Extension Activities and Resources / Videos**

# ACT II

## PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT



### ABOUT LUCY KIRKWOOD

Lucy Kirkwood is an acclaimed British playwright and screenwriter. In 2009, her play *It Felt Empty When the Heart Went at First but Is Alright Now* was produced by Clean Break Theatre Co. at the Arcola Theatre. It was nominated for the Evening Standard Award for Best Newcomer and made Lucy joint winner of the John Whiting Award. *NSFW* premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in 2012. *Chimerica* premiered at the Almeida Theatre in 2013 and subsequently transferred to the West End, winning Best New Play at the 2014 Olivier and Evening Standard Awards, the Critics Circle Award and the Susan Smith Blackburn Award. In 2016 *The Children* premiered at the Royal Court, London.

The play opened on Broadway in December 2017 and was nominated for a Tony Award. *Mosquitoes*, presented by special arrangement with Manhattan Theatre Club, opened at the National Theatre in 2017. Lucy also writes for screen, including episodes of the British comedy-drama series *Skins*.

### ABOUT *THE CHILDREN*

Lucy Kirkwood's *The Children* is set in a small cabin near the sea, inhabited by two retired nuclear engineers, Hazel and Robin. The first lines of the play introduce a third character to the party: another retired scientist, Rose. Hazel, Robin, and Rose all worked together in the nuclear power plant near the cottage that Hazel and Robin now live in, but as we soon find out, a disaster has taken place at this plant.

A short time before the start of the play, there is an earthquake so large that roads and houses split. Following the earthquake, a tsunami hits, destroying the plant and the surrounding homes and buildings. As a result, radioactive materials are leaking into the area and into the people and animals living there. This radioactive material is known to cause severe cancer, and there is an 'exclusionary zone' that is contaminated and uninhabitable.

As we follow Hazel, Robin, and Rose throughout the play, we learn more and more about what this disaster has done to not only Hazel and Robin, but what it has done to their friends and family as well. However, it is unclear why Rose is really there. As past relationships resurface, and secrets unravel, we eventually get Rose's real reason for her visit in the last few pages."



# FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

---

## Where did the first seed for *The Children* come from?

Lucy Kirkwood: I had been trying to find a form for a long time to write about climate change in a way that was emotionally rather than intellectually driven. What is important and theatrical to me is not the facts of climate change – we all know the facts now, and most of the average theatre audience will believe in them too. What is interesting is this: if we know the facts, why are we failing so catastrophically to change our behaviours? I wanted to write something that didn't harangue or nag an audience, but was generous, honest and unsentimental about how difficult it will be to make the changes that we need to, about how overwhelming that might feel – an awakening perhaps, but a terrifying one. The idea you can do nothing because the disaster is already too large is an infantilising one (one of the many reasons for the title), and the play is about three people growing up into active agents. And of course the way in which they do that was very much inspired by what happened at Fukushima. When I heard about the heroism of the retired work-force returning to the plant to help with the clean up, lots of different and long gestating ideas started to finally come together for me.

## You've woven politics into many of your works, do you set out to create theatre that challenges its audience, or does this happen organically?

LK: To write a play takes a long time. This means that whatever I choose to write about has to sustain my interest for at least a couple of years, sometimes much longer. So, I find myself drawn to writing about things where the roots of the emotions and ideas go deep and the branches go high. This isn't consciously political, it's just about what holds me. Hopefully, if something can hold me for three years it will hold an audience for two hours. And I do believe that most theatre is an inherently political act because it demands we step outside of ourselves and imagine others. And it demands that we do that communally.

<https://stagebuddy.com/theater/theater-feature/interview-lucy-kirkwood-inspiration-riveting-play-children>



# ACT III

# OUR PRODUCTION

## THE CHILDREN

by **LUCY KIRKWOOD**

directed by **STEVE KIDD**

SET DESIGN/  
PRODUCTION MANAGEMENT  
**Jessica Hill Kidd**

COSTUME DESIGN  
**David T. Howard**

LIGHTING DESIGN  
**David Roy**

SOUND DESIGN  
**Peter Sasha Hurowitz**

DIALECT COACH  
**Donnla Hughes**

STAGE MANAGEMENT  
**Robin Grady\***

### SETTING

A small cottage on England's east coast. A summer's evening.

### THE COMPANY

Rose **Phyllis Kay\***  
Hazel **Candice Brown\***  
Robin **Richard Donnelly\***

### CREATIVE TEAM

Assistant to the Director **Omar Laguerre-Lewis**  
Assistant Stage Manager **Jessica Corsentino**  
Lighting Design Associate **James Horban**  
Yoga Consultant **Amy Smith**  
Dance Choreographer **Lea D'Arminio**  
Technical Director **Max Ramirez**  
Assistant Technical Director **Alex Eizenberg**  
Production Assistant **Eddy Tavares**  
Master Electrician **Alex Foley**  
Electricians **Audrey Visscher, Haley Ahlborg**  
Carpenters **Nola Fox, Eddy Tavares**

\*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.*





**What are the challenges of approaching a play about an important social issue?**

PK: Ultimately this is a play about people living in a time where they must confront both mundane and unimaginable complications. I approach this work like any other story. It's all human problems and I try to figure out how to solve them from my character's point of view.

**It's been three years since COVID-19 killed millions of people worldwide, and led to shutdowns and mask mandates. Might today's audiences experience this play differently than pre-pandemic audiences?**

SK: I think so. In reading the play for the first time with the cast, I was brought back to the summer of 2020 when we no longer had to "shelter in place." We were between surges and able to spend much of our lives outdoors. Inconvenient practices had become more or less routine, like standing 6 feet apart, masking up, incessant hand sanitizing, etcetera. There was almost a sense of normalcy. But there was also massive uncertainty. Would kids go back to school? Would businesses reopen? When could we fly again? Would there be a vaccine? To me, that period is similar to the sort of "familiar uncertainty" that Rose, Hazel and Robin are experiencing in *The Children*. But unlike most of us, those characters have an opportunity to respond in a way that could make a huge difference in the lives of others now and in the future.

**For such a serious and frankly terrifying subject, *The Children* is surprisingly funny! How does humor work in the world of this play?**

PK: What I like about Kirkwood's writing is that each of her characters has a distinctive voice. They all use humor to deflect and defend, but in very different ways. I'm not crazy about plays in which all the characters' words seem to have identical rhythms, tone and content. Same same same. I see it alot! *The Children* is the best kind of material to work on because Kirkwood seems to have avoided this trap.



# ACT IV

## BEFORE THE SHOW

### SO, WHAT HAPPENED IN FUKUSHIMA?

“It was a one in 10 million years fault sequence,” says Rose, a physicist who helped build the play’s fictional plant on the crumbling east coast of England. Playwright Lucy Kirkwood based the events in *The Children* on a real-life disaster that struck Fukushima, Japan. Here are the facts of that disaster:

- A magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck in the Pacific Ocean off the northeast coast of the Tōhoku region of Japan’s Honshu island on March 11, 2011:



Map of the 2011 Japan earthquake epicenter off the northeast coast of the Tōhoku region of Japan’s Honshu island.

- The Great East Japan Earthquake – the name given to the event by the Japanese government – triggered a massive tsunami that flooded more than 200 square miles of coastal land.
- Waves were estimated to be as high as 38 meters, the height of a 12-story building.
- A nuclear power plant meltdown triggered a nuclear emergency.
- Though Japan is a world leader in disaster preparedness, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake caused overwhelming damage and humanitarian needs that required an international response.
- High levels of radiation persist at the destroyed power plants. TEPCO, the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which manages the affected power plants, expects full decommissioning of the plants to take 30 to 40 more years.

#### Within a week of the tsunami:

- A nuclear emergency was declared.
- More than 1 million households had no water.
- The majority of the 270,000 persons within the nuclear evacuation zone were evacuated.
- Roads leading to coastal towns were cleared; all 14 ports were restored to receive relief goods.
- Electric service was restored to 90% of Japan’s residents.

**See more in this video:** <https://k1project.columbia.edu/news/fukushima-what-happened>

# AFTER THE SHOW: EXTENSION ACTIVITIES & RESOURCES

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

### Going to Extremes

The characters in *The Children* all have their own ways in which they deal with the situation they are stuck in. Think about the pandemic and the variety of ways people dealt with it. What similar coping strategies do you see in the play?

**Digging Deeper:** With a small group, improvise; or on your own, write; a scene that shows characters dealing with an extreme situation in contrasting ways. Try a dramatic version and a comedic version of the same extreme situation.

### Love Triangles

Robin, Hazel, and Rose are in a love triangle. We see and hear this dynamic in narratives throughout literature, pop culture, and music. How many versions of the “Love Triangle” can your class reference and list? Which ones are most like this one? Which ones are the most different?

**Digging Deeper:** Why do you think Love Triangles are such a commonly used narrative technique?

## RESOURCES

### “Bill aims to introduce climate change literacy to Rhode Island classrooms”

<https://www.browndailyherald.com/article/2022/03/bill-aims-to-introduce-climate-change-literacy-to-rhode-island-classrooms>

### Rhode Island’s Climate Change Dashboard

<https://climatechange.ri.gov/ri-climate-change-snapshot>

### Videos:

#### The Fukushima nuclear disaster

<https://k1project.columbia.edu/news/fukushima-what-happened>

#### Climate Change video resources for educators

<https://mass.pbslearningmedia.org/subjects/science/earth-and-space-science/global-and-regional-climate-change/>

# ACT VI

# EPILOGUE

## THANK YOU!

Thank you for joining us for *The Children* and for working with this Study Guide to expand your theatrical and educational experiences. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *The Children*.

Our Education Department provides classes and camps for students and adults. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

To book a matinee, contact Brittany at [brittany@gammtheatre.org](mailto:brittany@gammtheatre.org) 401-723-4266 ext. 112. To learn more about Gamm Education, find us on the web at [www.gammtheatre.org](http://www.gammtheatre.org) or reach Sarah Ploskina at 401-723-4266 ext. 111.



# SEASON 39

SEASON PACKAGES & FLEX PASSES ON SALE NOW!

2023|24

## TOPDOG|UNDERDOG

by Suzan-Lori Parks

## HANGMEN

by Martin McDonagh

## WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF?

by Edward Albee

## TWELFTH NIGHT

by William Shakespeare

## DOUBT: A PARABLE

by John Patrick Shanley

Brandon Whitehead / Faith Healer / Photo by Carl Laine