


theatre:
CALGARY

Stafford Arima, Artistic Director

PLAY GUIDE

LAURENCE & NELL  HEATHER
O'KEEFE BENJAMIN HACH
BASED ON THE NOVEL BY AMANDA BROWN
AND THE METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER MOTION PICTURE

LEGALLY BLONDE



MAY 20 - JUNE 15, 2025

AL OSTEN & BUDDY VICTOR
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2024-2025 Play Guides are intended to support your students' experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We encourage you to use some or all of these materials to provide context for your students before, during, and after their visit to Theatre Calgary. While not mandatory for students to enjoy the production, opportunities to connect art to personal life can deepen understanding and appreciation.

With that in mind, each guide provides you and your students with a range of contextual material. You will find background information on the play and playwright; social, linguistic, and historical context; expectations for the theatre; activities for you to lead in the classroom; and reflection questions to guide discussions. You'll find activities that connect to current events, are interdisciplinary, can be tied into your curriculum, and can be facilitated for various lengths of time.

Pages marked with a ★ can be photocopied and distributed to students.

We hope that you and your students enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY.

It's spring semester at UCLA. The Delta Nu sorority sisters are certain that their sorority president, Elle Woods, will soon be engaged to her boyfriend, the eligible Warner Huntington the Third. The girls gather to sing Elle their traditional Engagement Chorale. When Elle dines with Warner, the moment is perfect, but instead of proposing, Warner breaks up with her. He tells her he's going to Harvard Law next fall, and he must marry someone "serious" in order to fulfill his life plan.

Heartbroken, Elle mopes in her room eating chocolate until she devises a strategy to show Warner that she's "serious:"

Step 1) Get into Harvard Law

Step 2) Impress him with her high IQ

Step 3) Marry him!

While her friends party their way through their final semester, Elle studies to get a 175 on her LSAT. But the Admissions Officers are unimpressed by her application until she shows up with the entire UCLA marching band and cheer team in lieu of a personal statement.

At Harvard, Elle is ridiculed by her over-achieving classmates. During her first class, the merciless Professor Callahan tells his students that "you're nothing until/the thrill of the kill/becomes your only law!" Callahan discovers that Elle hasn't done her reading and throws her out of class. To make matters worse, Elle learns that Warner has a new girlfriend, her two-faced classmate, Vivienne. Elle's only support through all of this is Callahan's teaching assistant, Emmett, and her Delta Nu sisters, who continue to appear as her own personal Greek Chorus.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I.

Overture

Omigod You Guys

Serious

What You Want

The Harvard Variations

Blood in the Water

Positive

Ireland

Ireland (reprise)

Serious (reprise)

Chip on my Shoulder

So Much Better

In her grief, Elle heads for the Hair Affair, where she asks the stylist, Paulette, to make her a brunette like Vivienne. Paulette talks her out of it, and they become friends. Paulette confides in Elle that her ex-boyfriend, Dewey, left her and took her home and her dog.

Vivienne invites Elle to a “costume party,” where only Elle was told to arrive in costume. She stands out (and not in a good way!) dressed as a Playboy bunny. As she leaves the party, she runs into Emmett, who finally learns why she came to Harvard Law. Emmett grew up poor and is working two jobs while attending law school. He convinces Elle that she, too, should “get a chip on her shoulder” and work hard to prove herself. Elle decides to stay at school over Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks, Emmett and Paulette help her study.

In class, Elle manages to impress Professor Callahan, who asks whether she’s applying for his very competitive internship. Emmett and Elle help Paulette reclaim her dog by visiting Dewey and advising him that his ten-year stint living with Paulette is considered a Common Law marriage and entitles Paulette to half their property. Paulette is overjoyed, and Elle realizes that *this* is what law is really about.

Back at school, the list of Callahan’s interns is posted. Seeing their names on the list together, Warner impulsively proposes to Vivienne in front of everyone. Elle is shocked but feels much better when she discovers that her name is on the list, too. Callahan assigns Emmett and the new interns to work on his latest case—defending Brooke Wyndham, a TV fitness guru accused of murdering her husband. Elle is the only member of the legal team who believes Brooke is innocent. In a moment alone with Brooke, they discover that both women were members of the Delta Nu sorority in college. Brooke confides that her alibi was that she was having liposuction the day her husband was killed, and Elle swears not to reveal her secret.

Callahan is furious that Elle will not reveal Brooke’s alibi. He tells “ratty corduroy” (Emmett) and “legally blonde” (Elle) to get lost for the day, so Elle takes Emmett shopping. She then has her nails done at the Hair Affair, where Kyle, the new UPS guy, appears and knocks Paulette’s socks off. Elle and her Delta Nu Chorus teach Paulette the “Bend and Snap,” which catches Kyle’s attention.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT II.

Entr’acte

Whipped into Shape

Delta Nu Nu Nu

Take it Like a Man

Kyle the Magnificent

Bend and Snap

Gay or European

Legally Blonde

Legally Blonde (reprise)

Scene of the Crime

Find my Way / Finale

Bows

STORY WHOOSH

is an interactive storytelling technique that enables any kind of plot to come alive, even without participants having prior knowledge.

- The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.
- As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.
- At any time the teacher can say “Whoosh!,” and students quickly return to their ‘places’ in a circle.
- Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

The next day in court, Callahan is impressed by Emmett’s new look and even more impressed when Elle saves the day. She notices that the D.A.’s witness, who claims to have been Brooke’s lover, is impervious to her Bend and Snap and determines he must be gay. Emmett tricks him into outing himself in court. Back at the office, the team celebrates the victory, and Callahan congratulates Elle. But when they are left alone, he makes a pass at her and fires her when she rebuffs him. Elle is crushed, and although Emmett tries to stop her, she is determined to quit school and return to L.A.

The next day, Paulette and Kyle’s romance is blooming when Elle arrives to say goodbye. But Vivienne is there and acknowledges that she was wrong about Elle, urging her to stay. Elle agrees but on her own terms. She returns to the trial in a pink suit with her dog Bruiser under her arm, accompanied by the Delta Nus, the Salon folks, Elle’s own parents, and her fellow students in a grand parade.

The procession arrives at court, where Brooke fires Callahan and hires Elle and Emmett as her counsel. Elle calls Brooke’s frizzy-haired stepdaughter, Chutney, to the stand. Chutney claims she had just had her hair permed and was in the shower when her father was killed. Elle requests that they reconvene the court at the scene of the shower, where she demonstrates the flaw in Chutney’s alibi: if she had showered right after her perm, the treatment would have been ruined and her hair would now be straight. Chutney breaks down and confesses that she shot her father in an attempt to shoot Brooke, and the judge immediately dismisses Brooke’s case. Seeing Elle’s success at trial, Warner realizes—too late—that Elle would have been perfect for him.

Elle’s graduation day arrives. She closes her valedictory speech with a proposal to Emmett, and the Delta Nus are finally able to reprise their acclamation of Elle’s impending marriage.

Adapted from Camp Broadway’s StageNOTES

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



PRE-LAW

ELLE WOODS

UCLA Homecoming Queen and
Delta Nu President

BRUISER

Elle's dog

WARNER HUNTINGTON III

Elle's college boyfriend who
plans to be a senator by the
time he is 30

DELTA NU SORORITY GIRLS

ELLE'S PARENTS

HARVARD

WINTHROP, LOWELL, & PFORZHEIMER

tweedy Harvard
Admissions Officers

VIVienne KENSINGTON

Warner's new girlfriend, a
stuffy Harvard Student

PROFESSOR CALLAHAN

Harvard Law's merciless
Criminal Law professor

EMMETT

Professor Callahan's
teaching assistant

EXTRA-CURRICULAR

PAULETTE BUONOFONTE

a hairdresser with a heart of gold

RUFUS

Paulette's dog

DEWEY

Paulette's ex-boyfriend

KYLE BRENDAN O'BOYLE

UPS Delivery Guy who's
perfect for Paulette

IN COURT

BROOKE WYNDHAM

television workout instructor
accused of murdering her husband

D.A. JOYCE RILEY

head of the prosecution in the case
against Brooke Wyndham

NIKOS ARGITAKOS

Brooke Wyndham's pool boy, who
claims to have been her lover

CARLOS

Niko's "friend"

CHUTNEY WYNDHAM

Brooke's frizzy-haired
stepdaughter

JUDGE & BAILIFFS

Adapted from Camp Broadway's StageNOTES

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



5 FUN FACTS ABOUT LEGALLY BLONDE

- 1** *Legally Blonde* began as a book pitch by Amanda Brown about her experience at Stanford Law.
- 2** The “bend and snap” was specifically created for Jennifer Coolidge as Paulette.
- 3** The original ending, a kiss between Elle and Emmett after the trial and a cut to the future, didn't please test audiences, so they rewrote the ending to take place at law school graduation instead.
- 4** Harvard Law School began showing Elle's video submission scene during orientation to illustrate that this was not how they made decisions.
- 5** Spin-offs of *Legally Blonde* include: *Legally Blonde 2: Red, White & Blonde* (2003), *Legally Blondes* (2009), *Legally Blonde the musical* (2007), an MTV reality show featuring a competition to find the next Elle Woods for the musical, and the upcoming *Elle*, a TV series prequel.

THE BECHDEL TEST

The **Bechdel Test** is a simple way to see if a movie treats its female characters fairly. It was created by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in 1985 in one of her comics. To pass, a movie or play must:

- Have at least two named women
- Who talk to each other about something other than a man (or even a romantic interest)

Many popular films/plays don't pass. The story doesn't have to be feminist, it's just about whether women have real roles. Think about the stories you're most familiar with.... Would they pass? Does *Legally Blonde* pass the Bechdel Test?

DON'T COUNT YOURSELF OUT

an interview with Alex McKay, 33,
Legal Associate at Code Hunter, LLP

How many women are in your practice?

Our firm is about 30% women. It really depends on what kind of law you go into. I'm a litigator, and women tend to be under-represented in litigation. The unpredictable working hours and competition can be a barrier to women who would like to start families compared to working in-house (at corporations).



What impact do you think “Legally Blonde” had on the profession?

One of the most influential things is seeing yourself represented in film. So to see a young woman who is the opposite of a traditional male lawyer had a huge impact on my generation going into law, saying “Oh! I could see myself doing that!”

What does it mean to you to be a “woman in law?”

There is still an element of “the old boys' club” and giving up your work-life balance. I just don't operate where you give up everything else to make law your whole life. I see myself being the one to decide what the people on my team look like, how lawyers are treated, and what is being demanded of them.

What would you want young women interested in law to know?

A lot of women may think they can't compete, but if you try the things you may not be perfect for, you're going to create a niche for yourself.

Don't count yourself out.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE



An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. And actors love student audiences! Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! The actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. (See the call out on Q + As to help you form great questions for the team behind the show.) Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

PREPARING Q'S FOR A Q + A

While you watch the show, consider how the creative team (see pg. 9) brings the story to life on stage for you.

Consider questions about the process:

- How did the lighting / set / costume / sound designer...
- What made the director choose to...
- How did the playwright decide to...

Ask questions about the story:

- Why did [character] make the decision to...
- Can you explain how...
- Why didn't _____ happen?

Learn more about each job:

- Why did you decide to become a...
- What do I need to do to become a...
- What has been your favorite...



THEATRE TEAM TALKBACK

Theatre is a 'team sport,' and it's not the actors alone who bring a production to life. After your show, you'll have a chance to ask questions of the creative team. Here are some of the folks you might expect to speak with:

The Playwright writes the script, sometimes from an original idea, and sometimes adapted from a book or story—decides what the characters say and, often, gives the designers guidelines on how the play should look.

The Director creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

The Actors use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.

The Designers imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They run the show during each performance by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and the lights and sound all run smoothly.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IF YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Vote with Your Feet

Ellé's journey as a lawyer required her to learn how to articulate her opinions and beliefs. This activity helps support the idea of participatory decision-making by prompting students to express their beliefs and offer justifications for them.

Focus Question. How does it feel to express our opinions and explain our thinking?

Objective. Students will be able to hear a statement, consider their opinion, talk through their rationale, and listen to others' thinking.

Procedure.

- 1 Clear a space that will accommodate a horizontal line for students to move across.
- 2 Hang signs on opposite ends of the space: "Strongly Agree" and "Strongly Disagree."
- 3 Explain to students the concept of a spectrum—that they don't need to go from one end to the other, but their opinions might exist in the middle.
- 4 Using the suggested prompts or your own, make the statement, and give students time to position themselves on the spectrum of Agree and Disagree.
 - Have them turn and talk to the people nearest them about their response to the prompt
 - Call on students from across the spectrum to share their thinking
- 5 Repeat as many rounds as you'd like.
- 6 Conclude with a reflection:
 - What did you learn about yourself in how you responded?
 - What surprised you about your responses to the prompts?
 - Did anyone share something that changed your mind on a topic?
 - How did it feel to articulate your reason for this opinion?

SUGGESTED PROMPTS

Apples are better than oranges.

The beach is a better vacation spot than the mountains.

Cake is tastier than pie.

Roller coasters are scary.

Playgrounds should have age limits.

I would recommend this school to other people.

Uniforms should be required in public schools.

School should be scheduled year-round.

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

Greek Chorus

The theatrical convention of a Greek Chorus is a repeated motif throughout Legally Blonde. Represented by Elle's sisters of Delta Nu, the chorus is intended to advise her as she makes decisions about her future. This activity will give students an opportunity to play with text from the show and various theatrical conventions to enhance storytelling.

Focus Question. How can the use of a Greek Chorus encourage collaboration and the use of multiple voices to tell a story?

Objective. Students will be able to apply theatrical conventions (i.e., unison, tempo, repetition, etc.) to a piece of text to tell the story.

Procedure.

- 1 Divide students into groups of 4-6, distributing the [attached handout](#) to each student.
- 2 Review the concept of a Greek Chorus and the terms for the theatrical conventions typically employed by choruses.
 - **Unison speech.** Speech where everyone says the same words at the same time
 - **Solo speech.** Speech delivered by a single person without accompaniment from others
 - **Pitch.** Perceived highness or lowness of a voice or sound
 - **Tempo.** Speed at which speech or music is delivered
 - **Canon.** Speech where one voice starts a phrase and others follow with the same phrase at staggered intervals
 - **Repetition.** Deliberate reuse of words, phrases, or sounds for emphasis or effect
- 3 Using the [text excerpt](#) provided on the handout from *Legally Blonde*, have students use 1 theatrical conventions defined above and on the handout, to craft a choral performance
- 4 Remind them that unison and repetition put emphasis on parts of the speech, so they should make intentional choices about who says what when and what, if anything, should be repeated.
- 5 If a group finishes with enough time, they can build gesture or unison movement into their piece, as well.
- 6 Have each group present to the room (or another group, depending on how many students you have), and reflect:
 - What are the different ways each group represented the same text?
 - How did different choices impact the story being told?
 - Were there places where the text got lost? How would you revise that?

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

Resume-Building

When Elle applied for law school, she had to transform a 4.0 in Fashion Merchandising and her leadership role in Delta Nu into the strengths of a lawyer. This is a necessary life skill—transforming disparate talents and experiences into the necessary qualifications for a job. This activity will guide students through the process of creating a resume that leverages their interests and skills for an imagined career path.

Focus Question. How do we identify the skills and hobbies in our lives that can prepare us for a career?

Objective. Students will be able to write a resume that uses their real-life experiences for an imagined career.

Procedure.

- 1 Ask students to brainstorm a list of hobbies, interests, skills, talents, volunteer work, and jobs (formal & informal) that they have. (Remind them they can be as small as completing daily chores or as big as organizing a river clean-up at a park.)
- 2 Review the [accompanying slides](#) to introduce the concept of a resume with your students.
- 3 Have students consider their dream job (i.e., NHL player, teacher, Hollywood actor, stay-at-home dad, astronaut, etc.).
- 4 Share the [resume template](#) with students to adapt for their own resume—using the attributes they brainstormed at the beginning of the session.
 - What is on their list that might be beneficial in their dream job?
 - How might you adapt skills one might get from babysitting, for example, to the responsibilities of a professional hockey player?
 - Think creatively about what skills are transferable—considering technical skills AND interpersonal or social emotional skills.
- 5 Give students plenty of time to think through the sections of their resume, asking questions while you circulate.
- 6 As students begin completing their resumes, have them trade with a partner to collect feedback. Some peer prompts might include:
 - What are the key attributes this career requires?
 - Where in this resume do you see these represented?
 - What other skills or talents might this person have that have been overlooked on their resume? In what areas do you know them to excel?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to pose to your students following their experience with *Legally Blonde* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 Would you consider *Legally Blonde* a feminist story? Why or why not?
- 2 How do you envision the great female legal minds (like Ruth Bader Ginsburg) of our time would feel about Elle Woods?
- 3 Discuss a time that you've been underestimated. What did it feel like? How did you prove people wrong?
- 4 What does it mean to "be true to yourself?" How does *Legally Blonde* send this message?
- 5 When were you surprised—positively or negatively—to discover that someone's physical appearance did not match what you expected their behaviour to be? How much responsibility does an individual have to control how others perceive their appearance?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

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