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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.

Pre-Show.

Before the show starts, the action story begins. The set is falling apart, the stage manager and the sound and lighting operator are fixing things. There is a missing dog and a CD. Things do not bode well for this production. The director of *The Murder at Haversham Manor* and head of the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society, Krista Bean, welcomes the audience. She shares Cornley Polytechnic's "illustrious" production history, and brags that this show, her directorial debut, will be their best show yet.

Act 1.

The play begins, and there are problems immediately. The actor playing the deceased Charles Haversham trips on his entrance and is not acting terribly dead. As other actors prepare to enter, the door is jammed, and they can't enter the scene. Thomas Colleymoore and Perkins finally find their way 'onstage' and attempt to get Charles's fiancée, Florence.

Meanwhile, actors are forgetting their lines, props are not where they're supposed to be, and parts of the set are missing and falling down. Thomas Colleymoore calls in Inspector Carter, despite a "snowstorm." Florence Colleymoore arrives but cannot get through the door, either, so—as "the show must go on"—she attempts to perform her scene through the window.

Charles's brother, Cecil, arrives and, finally, and with the help of the stage manager, Annie, gets the door open. We learn that Cecil and his brother had a strained relationship and that Charles was jealous and paranoid. Cecil believes his brother may have committed suicide. In Charles's final journal entry, we discover that he doubted whether Florence loved him at all.



Inspector Carter, played by Krista, finally arrives. He plans to do an inspection of the body and the cast begins the process of removing it from the room. As you'd expect, this comes with its own challenges as Perkins and Thomas attempt to lift Charles from the chaise but cannot, so they roll him over and drop him face-first onto a stretcher resting on the floor. When they lift him, the canvas rips, so the two exit as if they were carrying a dead body out of the room. Inspector Carter follows. Then, Jonathan, the actor playing Charles, stands up and exits the scene. Cecil and Florence are the only two left in the room, and it becomes very clear that they are having an affair.

More incorrect props, missed cues, and an *actual* fire ensue. At one point, Jonathan, now upstairs, falls from the upper level of the set to the lower in a coughing fit, yet the actors go on. Inspector Carter questions Perkins first, followed by Florence. Near the end of her interrogation, Robert (playing Thomas) bursts into the room hitting Sandra (playing Florence) who collapses unconscious to the floor. Robert, Krista, and Max (playing Cecil) are now expected to finish the scene with an unconscious castmate.

Inspector Carter questions Cecil as Robert and Jonathan try to remove the unconscious Sandra by dragging her through a window. After revealing to Cecil that he knows about the affair, the Inspector leaves.

Thomas Colley Moore receives a call that £9,000 has been stolen from his bank account. When he learns about the affair, he defends his sister's honour, and the men take their fight offstage. We hear the sound of multiple gunshots. Inspector Carter returns with Florence, except that now it's the stage manager, Annie, wearing Florence's dress and reading from a script. Cecil re-enters with three bullet wounds in his back and collapses, dead, on the chaise. The first act ends, like all good murder mysteries, with Perkins, Florence, and Inspector Carter realizing that Charles Haversham's murderer is still in the house with them.

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.

Act 2.

Krista, the director, appears again to address the audience, assuring them that this “hasn’t been the worst first act Cornley University has seen.” Act Two begins with Inspector Carter leaving the room to investigate the gunshots. Annie, filling in for Sandra, trips and scatters pages of script everywhere, losing her place, and causing all sorts of confusion. Max, who also plays Cecil, arrives as Arthur the Gardener. He was supposed to have left the grounds hours before, but the snowstorm forced him to stay.

During the scene, Max runs into the pillar supporting the upper level of the set and knocks it over, causing the entire second floor to tilt, nearly falling. Arthur the Gardener reveals a handkerchief he found on the grounds. It turns out to have traces of cyanide, the method used to kill Charles Haversham. Featuring the initials F.C., the handkerchief leads everyone to conclude that Florence must have killed Charles.

Annie (as Florence) is also knocked unconscious, and Sandra, who has come to, reappears in her underwear (since Annie is wearing her costume). She doesn’t remain conscious for long, however, as she’s knocked out by the door to the grandfather clock. Trevor, the sound and lighting technician we met before the show began, appears from inside the clock and is forced to read the role of Florence—that is, until Trevor falls under the tilted second story bringing the props and furniture crashing down on top of him. Sandra, who had been stuffed inside the clock after falling unconscious, is awake again but now stuck in the clock.

When the stage manager regains consciousness, she resumes her role as Florence. For the rest of the play, the two women fight over who gets to play Florence. Perkins, the butler, reveals that he knows who killed Charles Haversham: Inspector Carter. The inspector pulls a gun on Perkins, when Charles Haversham bursts through the door! He wasn’t dead at all! He never consumed the poisoned drink that the inspector had left him. Inspector Carter reveals that he had been working with Thomas Colley Moore all along and that he stole the £9,000 and was going to double-cross him. Thomas tries (and fails) to shoot Inspector Carter.

The play ends as the walls fall down, revealing the crew working backstage. In the final moments, Charles offers Thomas a glass of poisoned sherry, who drinks it and dies at length. We never do find out where this performance ranks in the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society’s list of worst productions ever.



Photos by Nanc Price for The Citadel Theatre's production of *The Play That Goes Wrong* (2024), in partnership with Theatre Calgary and Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



Meet the Cornley Drama Society



DENNIS

Actor, playing the role of Perkins in *Murder at Haversham Manor*



KRISTA

Director, playing the role of Inspector Carter in *Murder at Haversham Manor*



JONATHAN

Actor, playing the role of Charles Haversham in *Murder at Haversham Manor*



MAX

Actor, playing the roles of Cecil Haversham & Arthur the Gardener in *The Murder at Haversham Manor*



ROBERT

Actor, playing the role of Thomas Colley Moore in *The Murder at Haversham Manor*



SANDRA

Actor, playing the role of Florence Colley Moore in *The Murder at Haversham Manor*



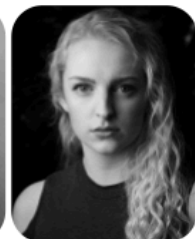
ANNIE

Stage Manager for *The Murder at Haversham Manor*



TREVOR

Lighting & Sound Technician for *The Murder at Haversham Manor*



STAGE CREW

for *The Murder at Haversham Manor*

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



5 THINGS YOU DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT STAGE MANAGERS

Stage managers provide practical & organizational support to the director, actors, designers, and stage technicians throughout the production process. They represent the director during performances, ensuring the production runs smoothly.

- 1 It's the stage manager who runs the rehearsal room (calling breaks, setting up and packing up props, etc.).
- 2 They are the go-between for the director and the design team, communicating the director's vision.
- 3 Stage managers record all of the blocking (actors' positions on stage), lighting and sound cues, and set transitions.
- 4 The stage manager runs the production beginning with technical rehearsals. They keep track of all of the light, sound, & set change cues in their *prompt book*.
- 5 They are responsible for communication between the director and the actors.

THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG AND THE JOY OF SCHADENFREUDE

The Japanese say, "The misfortune of others tastes like honey." The French use the phrase *joie maligne*, a diabolical delight in other people's suffering, and in German, the term *schadenfreude*—taking pleasure in others' troubles.

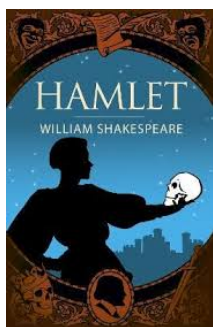
Have you ever laughed when someone face-plants on the sidewalk? Or watching those physical comedy routines where folks step on a rake and get smacked in the nose, slip on a banana peel, or get a pie in the face. These classic comic gags remain funny because of our human response: *schadenfreude*.

What makes *The Play That Goes Wrong* so funny? Watching the utter failure of characters set up to succeed. We laugh together in the audience. Laughing at others' misfortune becomes a community experience.

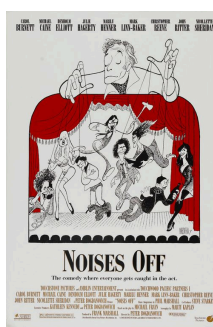
So the next time you feel guilty laughing at someone who slips on the ice, just remember, *schadenfreude* is a healthy, community-building experience!

THE PLAY'S THE THING: THE PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY CONVENTION

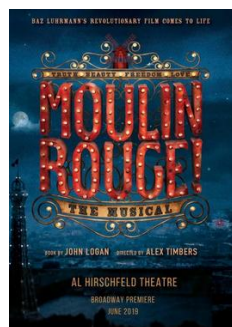
The Play That Goes Wrong isn't the only place you'll find actors playing actors playing characters.



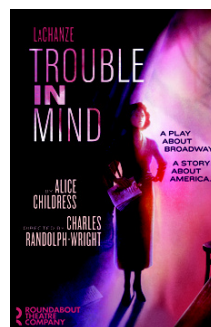
The Murder of Gonzago



Nothing's On



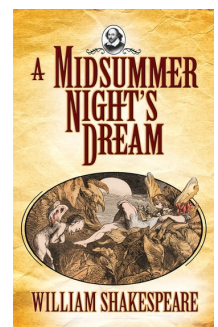
Spectacular, Spectacular



Chaos in Belleville



Omelette, the Musical



The Craftsmen's Play

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...

Sitting, Standing, Laying Down

The joy and hilarity of The Play That Goes Wrong is in its physical comedy. This quick acting activity challenges students to think on their feet, justify their choices, and keep the action moving while in tune with their scene partners.

Focus Question. How do actors juggle everything they need to think about while onstage?

Objective. Students will be able to perform a scene while connecting to their scene partners by improvising staging.

Procedure.

- 1 Choose three students to read aloud [this excerpt](#) from Act 1 of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, playing the parts of Robert, Max, and Dennis.
- 2 In groups of three, have students rehearse the scene with the instruction that at any moment, one actor must be sitting, one must be standing, and the third must be laying down. The more the actors change position, the more fun and challenging the scene becomes.
- 3 Remind students to keep the scene moving as best as possible. They should also be trying to justify their changes in position—lost glasses on the floor, standing to stretch, sitting down to tie a shoe, and so on.
- 4 Once groups have had a chance to practice, choose three volunteers to demonstrate for the class.

EXTENSION: Remove the script and have students improvise scenes using predetermined characters or settings.

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

Collaborative Playwriting

The script for *The Play That Goes Wrong* was written collaboratively by Mischief Theatre out of the U.K. This collaborative playwriting activity will use a pass-the-paper model of improvised writing, where students work together without planning their ideas in advance.

Focus Question. How is writing collaboratively different from writing independently?

Objective. Students will be able to work in a partnership to draft a scene of dialogue that establishes characters, relationship, setting, and conflict.

Procedure.

- 1 Start by pairing students together and providing them with either a [digital](#) or [analog](#) manuscript template to use. Have them decide who will be Writer A and who will be Writer B.
- 2 [Model](#) for students how this process works. →
- 3 Provide the starting prompt that the first line must include the phrase “the show must go on” (a key premise of *The Play That Goes Wrong*).
- 4 Once the first line has been written, Writer B takes over and silently adds Character B’s line.
- 5 Writer A takes the page back, reads the first two lines and continues with Character A’s response to what has been written. Writers continue this way for the remainder of the time, until they are able to end their scene.
- 6 Note that within the first 8 lines of the scene, we should know who the characters are, how they know each other, and where the scene is taking place.
- 7 Prompt students to reread what’s been written often, checking that they’ve established these elements, that their dialogue makes logical sense, and that the characters are listening to one another. When they’re ready to revise, they should talk through it together.
- 8 Leave time for them to read aloud what they’ve written and share examples with the class.

The image shows a sample collaborative play script with annotations. The script is written in a light blue font on a light gray background. The annotations are in orange boxes with lines pointing to specific parts of the script.

CHARACTER A
(SINGING) THE SHOW MUST GO ON AND ON AND ON AND—

CHARACTER B
Enough!

CHARACTER A
YOU TOLD ME TO PRACTICE THE CHORUS.

CHARACTER B
Well, I'm the leader of the band, and I say you've practiced enough.

CHARACTER A
YOU CAN'T BE THE LEADER OF THE BAND. THERE'S ONLY TWO OF US.

CHARACTER B
Well...it's my garage so...

CHARACTER A
SO... (BEAT.) THE SHOW MUST GO ON AND ON AND ON AND—

Annotations:

- Characters don't need names yet (points to CHARACTER A and CHARACTER B)
- Establish the characters' relationship right away (points to CHARACTER B's line: "Well, I'm the leader of the band, and I say you've practiced enough.")
- Be explicit about the setting (points to CHARACTER B's line: "Well...it's my garage so...")

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

If...Then: Designing a Rube Goldberg Machine

The Play That Goes Wrong *features a series of unfortunate events that kick off a chain reaction that leads to disaster. This makes for a great starting point for a conversation about Rube Goldberg machines and the cause and effect of simple machines.*

Focus Question. How can you think like an engineer and artist to create a machine that creates a simple task?

Objective. Students will be able to envision a multi-step process that combines simple machines to complete a single task.

Procedure.

- 1 Introduce the Rube Goldberg machine using [the slides provided](#), including the three video clips from PeeWee's Big Adventure, OK GO!, and America's Got Talent, and review simple machines.
- 2 Give students the opportunity to work alone, in pairs, or in small teams.
- 3 Students begin by choosing the task they want their machine to complete.
- 4 Follow the instructions to fold a page into 6 squares to sketch each step.
- 5 Next they will draw out their vision for their machine in 5 or fewer steps.
- 6 Once they have planned out their machine and drawn out the simple machines they will use, they should determine and, if available, collect the materials they would use to build it.
- 7 If time allows, students can start constructing their machine. Some groups will, of course, move more quickly, and wherever students get to in the process is a success.
- 8 Leave time for students to present their ideas to the group.

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 *The Play That Goes Wrong* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 If you were to be part of a theatre company, which role would you want to have? See pg. 9 for more details on the various jobs responsible for bringing a production to life.
- 2 Even a silly, hilarious story has a message that the author wants the audience to consider. What is that message for *The Play That Goes Wrong*?
- 3 When was the last time you faced failure and pushed through to the end anyway?
- 4 How do you think the members of the Cornley Drama Society could have worked more collaboratively on *The Murder at Haversham Manor* to avoid catastrophe?
- 5 Jealousy becomes a huge problem in *The Play that Goes Wrong*. Have you ever had feelings of jealousy? How do you deal with those feelings?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

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