



Apr 10-19 | Thu-Sat at 8p, Sun at 3p

Please note there will be an additional 3p performance on Saturday, April 19 and no performance on Sunday, April 20

College Theater sincerely thanks the library for research support, for classes studying the script and production, as well as for the cast, director, and production team working on the project.

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Our Town Synopsis

“No curtain. No scenery.’ A minimalist theatrical style sets apart the 1938 recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Drama: Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*. Wilder’s greatest and best-known work as a playwright, *Our Town* opens with the Stage Manager’s introduction to Grover’s Corners, a fictional town based on Peterborough, New Hampshire where Wilder often spent his summers. The sparse and symbolic qualities of the set suggest Wilder’s intention to make Grover’s Corners represent all towns. The Stage Manager, played by Wilder himself for two weeks in the 1938 Broadway production, breaks the fourth wall by directly addressing the audience. The Stage Manager also assumes control over the onstage action through such unconventional, meta-theatrical devices as prompting actors and cueing scene changes. Once the actors have been set in motion by the Stage Manager in Act I, entitled, “Daily Life,” the allegorical world of Grover’s Corners unfolds. The audience is introduced to the Gibbs and Webb families who symbolize “ordinary people who make the human race seem worth preserving and represent the universality of human existence.” Wilder explores the families’ inter-relationships, specifically between George Gibbs and Emily Webb. The audience watches George and Emily talk through their second story bedroom windows, represented by ladders: their simple actions complemented by the simple set. Act II, “Love and Marriage,” takes place three years later on George and Emily’s wedding day. After listening to Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs talk about their own wedding day, the Stage Manager transports the audience back to the days of George and Emily’s high school courtship. In this scene, Emily expresses her disdain for George’s conceited behavior. To make amends, George buys Emily an ice cream soda presented in an imaginary glass by Mr. Morgan, played by the Stage Manager. As this glimpse into George and Emily’s past comes to an end, George decides not to go to agriculture school so he can remain in Grover’s Corners, close to Emily. Then, the audience again finds itself at George and Emily’s wedding. The Stage Manager, now playing a minister, focuses the audience’s attention on the tearful and anxious families before George and Emily blissfully run up the aisle, ending Act II. In Act III, Wilder focuses on the end of the life cycle. Nine more years have gone by and Emily has died in childbirth. As the funeral procession crosses the stage, Emily, dressed in white, emerges from behind the mourners’ umbrellas and sits next to the deceased Mrs. Gibbs in the graveyard. Emily begins to question what it means to live and die, and, although warned against it, chooses to relive her twelfth birthday. Deeply saddened by everything she failed to notice while alive, Emily asks the Stage Manager to take her back to her grave but hesitates a moment to say good-bye to the world. As Emily accepts her death, George falls at her feet in grief. While watching George, Emily asks Mrs. Gibbs, ‘They don’t understand, do they?’ to which Mrs. Gibbs responds, ‘No, dear. They don’t understand.’ As Emily settles in with the dead of Grover’s Corners, the Stage Manager bids the audience a good night.”¹

Setting

The entire play takes place in Grover's Corners, New Hampshire.

¹ Gallagher , Ashley. “Our Town.” *Our Town* | Thornton Wilder Society, The Thornton Wilder Society , www.twildersociety.org/works/our-town/.

Time

Act I: May 7, 1901

Act II: July 7, 1904

Act III: Summer, 1913

Characters

Stage Manager

Dr. Gibbs

Joe Crowell

Howie Newsome

Mrs. Gibbs

Mrs. Webb

George Gibbs

Rebecca Gibbs

Wally Webb

Emily Webb

Professor Willard

Mr. Webb

Woman In The Balcony

Man In The Auditorium

Lady In The Box

Simon Stimson

Mrs. Soames

Constable Warren

Si Crowell

Three Baseball Players

Sam Craig

Joe Stoddard

Farmer McCarty

Man Among The Dead

Woman Among The Dead

People Of Town

Director's Note

"This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying." ...and then the choir starts to sing,

~ Wilder, Thornton. *Our Town: A Play in Three Acts*.

Since its Broadway premiere in 1938, Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* has been a cornerstone of world drama. According to the official website of the Thornton Wilder Family, the play has been translated in over 30 languages, and it is performed at least once a day somewhere in the world.

Wilder wrote that *Our Town* was meant to set "the life of a village against the life of the stars." Therefore Grover's Corners becomes a microcosm of humanity — showing how, despite the vastness of the world and the universe, the small moments of life are where real meaning can be found. The idea that an entire world can be contained in a simple, small town resonates deeply as it elevates the "smallness" of each person's life to something profound and universal.

We hope that this production pulls you in for a few hours and then speaks to your life, as you live from here forward.

~AB

About the Author

“Thornton Wilder (1897-1975), born in Madison, Wisconsin, and educated at Yale and Princeton, was an accomplished novelist and playwright whose works explore the connection between the commonplace and the cosmic dimensions of human experience. *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, one of his seven novels, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1928, and his next-to-last novel, *The Eighth Day*, received the National Book Award (1968). Two of his four major plays garnered Pulitzer Prizes: *Our Town* (1938) and *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1943). His play *The Matchmaker* ran on Broadway for 486 performances (1955-1957), Mr. Wilder's Broadway record, and was later adapted into the record-breaking musical *Hello, Dolly!*

Mr. Wilder also enjoyed enormous success with many other forms of the written and spoken word, among them translation, acting, opera librettos, lecturing, teaching and film (his screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's 1943 psycho-thriller *Shadow of a Doubt* remains a classic to this day). Letter writing held a central place in Mr. Wilder's life, and since his death, three volumes of his letters have been published.

Mr. Wilder's many honors include the Gold Medal for Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the National Book Committee's Medal for Literature. On April 17, 1997, the centenary of his birth, the US Postal Service unveiled the Thornton Wilder 32-cent stamp in Hamden, Connecticut, his official address after 1930 and where he died on December 7, 1975.

Mr. Wilder continues to be read and performed around the world. *Our Town* is performed at least once each day somewhere in this country, with his other major dramas and shorter plays not far behind. In 2008, *Our Town* and *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* were selected as a joint choice for the NEA's "Big Read" Program. In recent years Wilder's works have also inspired a growing number of adaptations, among them an opera based on *Our Town* (music by Ned Rorem, libretto by J.D. McClatchy) and a dramatized version of his novel *Theophilus North* (Matt Burnett). Reflecting the renewed interest in Mr. Wilder, the Thornton Wilder Society sponsored the first international conference on his works in fall 2008." For more information, visit www.thorntonwilder.com.

Select Readings

Why 'Our Town' Springs Eternal, but Especially Now

Thornton Wilder's 80-year-old play offers something more than comforting nostalgia in a troubled American moment.

January 22, 2018

By Howard Sherman

"In the wake of a horrific act of violence at a pop concert in Manchester, England, the thoughts of Sarah Frankcom, artistic director of Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre, turned to Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, which she staged as a vehicle for gathering and healing her community. This slice of Americana, according to a *New York Times* article that marked the production's September opening, is not well known in the U.K.

When Scarlett Johansson sought to raise funds to support the reconstruction of Puerto Rico, in the wake of natural disaster, she conscripted her castmates from *The Avengers* films to perform in a one-night reading of *Our Town*. Given the international popularity of their films, Johansson, Robert Downey Jr., Chris Evans, and Mark Ruffalo appearing live would have sold copious tickets for a reading of pretty much anything they wanted. But Johansson gave them Grover's Corners.

Early in the 2017-18 theatrical season, the first that was capable of fully addressing the political divisiveness and roiling anger felt by many in the wake of the 2016 presidential election, professional theatres in Maryland, Florida, and California (surely just three among others) opted to retell the story of *Our Town* through the vehicles of,

respectively, puppetry; a multilingual mélange of English, Spanish and Creole; and American Sign Language.

At a time of stress, a time of fear, a time of sorrow, it seems that many theatremakers have independently and almost simultaneously turned to a play that turns 80 years old today (its premiere was at New Jersey's McCarter Theatre on this day in 1938), a Pulitzer Prize winner of seemingly bygone days, capturing the lives and deaths in a white New Hampshire village at the turn of the 20th century. What could be, at least on its surface, more anachronistic and less representative of the world today, more ill-suited to speak to modern concerns?

Of course, *Our Town* is hardly scarce on U.S. stages. But it is often denigrated as “a high school play” because of its frequent mountings in academic auditoriums. As of this writing, licensing house Samuel French lists 69 upcoming productions this year, and indeed high schools do dominate that accounting. But if we use the common journalistic metric of two is a coincidence and three is a trend, then five professional productions in a short span this past autumn might be viewed as a groundswell—an indication that there is something about *Our Town* that makes it a perennial apt for this particular moment. It's not just the freedom to stage it with a bare minimum of props and an easily expanded cast, which surely appeals to school and community groups. Oddly, for a play that we are told is so specifically set in a particular time and place, it may well be the work's adaptability that serves it so well. It broke creative ground for its lack of scenery back in 1938, and that certainly set a template. That may be why, unlike many classics, it has not been locked into a singular visual or verbal approach, trapped within the confines of the original production. It also doesn't hurt that Wilder's nephew Tappan, who administers his uncle's estate, has endeavored to keep the work a living text, rather than a museum piece, seemingly echoing his uncle's own preferences. While the Miami New Drama production last fall invited Nilo Cruz to provide Spanish translations and Jeff Augustin to provide the Creole, productions decades earlier had rendered the play in other languages for other countries; a Spanish production was seen in Puerto Rico at least as early as 1961, if not before. The Deaf West Theatre production at Pasadena Playhouse employed that company's signature style of blending performances in ASL and English (it is important to remember the ASL is a language of its own, not simply a physical and visual representation of English).



A SCENE FROM DEAF WEST THEATRE'S PRODUCTION OF "OUR TOWN" AT THE PASADENA PLAYHOUSE. (PHOTO BY JENNY GRAHAM)

David Cromer's celebrated production, which began with the Chicago troupe the Hypocrites, upended any assumptions of fidelity to the 1938 staging, with a scenic reveal that was heart stopping in its beauty, sadness, and sheer surprise. Cromer's interpretation, by virtue of a solid Off-Broadway run and restagings in other cities, also showed that productions need not be constrained by the original genders of the characters, with Helen Hunt taking on the iconic Stage Manager role at one point, prefiguring Jane Kaczmarek's performance this fall with Deaf West. But Hunt and Kaczmarek were hardly the first female Stage Managers: Geraldine Fitzgerald played the role in the 1970s at the Williamstown Theatre Festival, according to Rosey Strub at the Wilder Family LLC.

At the Olney Theatre Center in Maryland, Aaron Posner shaved the acting company, which numbered 50 in the original Broadway production, down to just seven—but they gave life to Grover's Corners through a complement of puppets. At Miami New Drama, Keith Randolph Smith, a veteran of plays by August Wilson, led a multicultural cast in the trilingual production; a 1968 production at the Inner City Cultural Center in Los Angeles had boasted a fully integrated cast of black, Asian, Latinx and white actors, garnering the cross-continental attention of *The New York Times*.

The play's persistence over eight decades, and its relative prominence this past fall, may ultimately have less to do with its versatility as a vehicle for cultural creativity than with Wilder's underlying impulses. Looking beyond the particulars of Grover's Corners, N.H., and even the United States, *Our Town* is a work of existentialism, constantly reminding us of the inevitability of lives passing away all too fleetingly, and that we must take our pleasures and joys in the everyday even as we come to understand how brief and indeed insignificant our existence is in the face of the vast universe and the infinity of time. As his major stage works predated those of Samuel Beckett, it is not entirely surprising to discover that Wilder once undertook to explain *Waiting for Godot* to the director Alan Schneider before the latter met Beckett.

The first two acts of *Our Town* may seem little more than a quaint vision of early 20th-century small-town life, domesticity, and romance, but it is hardly an unblemished, fully idealized portrait. Take note of characters mentioned who have died or will die, of the underprivileged elsewhere in the town (unseen), of the troubled alcoholic choir director Simon Stimson. Wilder may be primarily lulling us into comfort, but want and mortality are ever-present.

When Act 3 turns to give voice to the dead themselves, tut-tutting over how little they knew when alive and how much time they wasted with petty concerns, time that could have been better spent, *Our Town*—while still genteel in its telling, perhaps even a bit detached—becomes universal and transcendental. In the Manchester production, the actor playing the Stage Manager was Muslim, and the play's heart-wrenching flashback invokes a birthday breakfast treat of bacon, forbidden in both Islam and Judaism. But that detail is irrelevant in the greater construct—just one example for one character and one actor in one locale for a play that had already moved beyond the laws and limits of earthbound life.

In some ways, *Our Town* may seem a peculiar choice for high schools, since its greatest insights are about the brevity of our time on earth, our losses, and our mortality. No doubt George and Emily's romance is particular affecting in such productions, but unless the young actors have already lost loved ones, can they fully appreciate and enact the agonizing third act? Lives seem so endless in our youth. *Our Town* might be uniquely well suited to be played by a cast of seniors, who can look back on their own lives as they contemplate their not-so-distant, everlasting futures in the cemetery on the hill, even as they can recall their own youths in inevitably simpler times, and their own loves.

On the other hand, at a time when young people are filled with anxieties about the future—who they will be, who they might love, what does life hold in store—there is something to be said for having them enact a story in which they grapple not only with first love, but also with the possibility of death, tempered with a poignant depiction of

why every moment in life, even the simplest, is to be experienced with profound appreciation for every little detail.

For those of any age, now daily facing what so many view as assaults on the very principles of American life, perhaps there is comfort in *Our Town*. But there are also ever-present threats and inequities in the account willed to us by Thornton Wilder. Being reminded of those as well should spur us to make a difference while we can, while we still have time left—before, as the Stage Manager says of the lingering dead, “the earth part of [us] burns away.”²

Malcolm Goldstein

In the following excerpt, Goldstein discusses how the value in life and existence can be found in the ordinary and universal appeal of *Our Town*, particularly in terms of setting, plot, and character development.

“The plot is the story of two neighboring households, the Gibbs and Webb families. Their lives are in no way sensational or special; nothing has happened to them that might set them off either as heroes or as victims. True, the family heads are professional men—*Dr. Gibbs* an *Editor Webb*—but the distinction implied in the titles serves only to confer upon them a degree of familiarity with human problems, and this they are able to communicate to the audience. As one device out of many to link Grover's Corners to the great world beyond, Wilder also gives the two men distinctive hobbies: Dr. Gibbs devotes all his spare time to studies of the Civil War, and Editor Webb is equally fascinated by the life of Napoleon. The purpose of this quite ordinary information is not to particularize the town; rather, it serves to underline the fact that Grover's Corners, the home of the Gibbsses and the Webbs, is just another spot in the cosmos. But at the same time that it is a place of no importance, the town represents the universe, and whatever occurs to its inhabitants is an expression, in very general terms, of the chief events in the lives of all people.

The scenes devised by Wilder are moments of eternity singled out for our attention and played against the panorama of infinity. The first act is titled “The Daily Life,” and offers such details as the early-morning milk delivery, the family breakfast, and the children's departure for school. Proceeding from dawn till bedtime, at every turn the action distills poignance from the commonplace, including even so unremarkable an occurrence as the children's struggle with homework.

² Sherman, Howard. *Why ‘Our Town’ Springs Eternal, but Especially Now*. American Theatre. 22, January, 2018. <https://www.americantheatre.org/2018/01/22/why-our-town-springs-eternal-but-especially-now/>

Of the twenty-two characters who pass across the stage, most are present only to populate the arena whose principal actors are George Gibbs and Emily Webb, the older children of the two families. Through the conduct of their lives, which, as we see them on Wilder's bare stage, they lead in infinite space at a point in the endless continuum of time, emerges in little the general pattern of the human adventure. At the moments when they act out their personal joy and sadness, they present an abstract rendering of these emotions as they come to us all. They are allegorical figures, but, because what they represent is not a special quality or force but the complete sum of the human passions, and because also they speak in an ordinary manner without the aggrandizing self-consciousness of an Everyman, they are completely absorbing as characters in their own right. The two protagonists grow up in houses on adjacent properties, play together as children, fall in love with one another in adolescence, and marry as soon as they graduate from high school. Emily dies in childbirth after nine years of marriage, and as the play ends George grieves hopelessly beside her grave. That is all. But so basic to the life of every civilization are these experiences and the emotions they evoke that their theatrical impact is universally stunning.

To extend the dimensions of the plot, Wilder employs images of vast numbers which with a lightly comic tone the Stage Manager pulls out of his capacious mind. In three years the sun comes up a thousand times, in long marriages husbands and wives may eat as many as fifty thousand meals together, every bride and groom have millions of ancestors, all of whom may be spectral guests at the wedding. To take the audience out of the present moment and move the play forward in time, Wilder permits the Stage Manager to use his omniscience in still another way: he mentions not only the past and present of the characters' lives, but their future, including, for many, the dates and circumstances of their deaths. At the end of the first act, after we have listened at length to his observations, we come to understand through the words of another figure, George Gibbs's young sister Rebecca, that over all dates and places and activities such as we have been hearing of, God eternally watches.

In the preface to his *Three Plays*, the collected edition of his major dramatic works, he writes forthrightly of this theme: *Our Town* is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire Village; or as speculation about the conditions of life after death (that element I merely took from Dante's Purgatory). It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life ... Molière said that for the theatre all he needed was a platform and a passion or two. The climax of this play needs only five square feet of boarding and the passion to know what life means to us.

The people of Grover's Corners are the sort whose effect upon the world is slight, slighter even than the effect of such a man as George Brush, since they never move

away from their particular piece of the universe. For that reason they are the personages whose lives most clearly reflect the marvelousness of the unheroic.”³

Themes

The Theater

The theme of theater is central to the play as it actively breaks the fourth wall, using the Stage Manager as a narrator who directly addresses the audience, commenting on the action and reminding us that we are watching a play, not a realistic depiction of life, thereby emphasizing the artificiality of the stage and encouraging active audience participation in imagining the world of Grover's Corners.

- **The Stage Manager:**
This character acts as a play-within-a-play narrator, breaking the fourth wall by speaking directly to the audience, providing context, and sometimes even interacting with them.
- **Minimalist Staging:**
The play utilizes a bare stage with few props, forcing the audience to use our imagination to visualize the setting and actions, highlighting the theatrical nature of the performance.
- **Meta-theatrical Elements:**
The play sometimes acknowledges the act of performance itself, with the Stage Manager even commenting on the limitations of the stage and the audience's role in creating the world of the play.

Community

Blessed Be the Tie That Binds

"Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" is a Christian hymn written by John Fawcett, a dissenting Baptist clergyman in England. The hymn is considered one of the most beloved farewell hymns of all time. The "tie" in the song's lyrics refers to the

³ Malcolm Goldstein, "Three Plays of the Human-Adventure," in *The Art of Thornton Wilder*, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, pp. 95-129.

connection between humans and God, as well as the ties between humans themselves.

The hymn "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds," is sung throughout the play; it serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of human lives and the value of these relationships, even in the face of mortality.

1 Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.

2 Before our Father's throne
we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,
our comforts and our cares.

3 We share our mutual woes,
our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.

4 When we are called to part,

it gives us inward pain;
but we shall still be joined in heart,
and hope to meet again.

5 This glorious hope revives
our courage by the way;
while each in expectation lives
and waits to see the day.

6 From sorrow, toil, and pain,
and sin, we shall be free;
and perfect love and friendship reign
through all eternity.

Psalter Hymnal, 1987

The Everyday

By turning ordinary moments into something theatrical, the play highlights how even the simplest aspects of life can hold deeper meaning. This approach invites the audience to reflect on their own lives and see beauty in the small, often overlooked details. It can be a powerful reminder that the mundane isn't just filler—it's part of what makes life rich and meaningful.

Time

The way Wilder portrays time, especially through the Stage Manager's direct and almost casual commentary, serves as a reminder of how quickly life moves and how

much we miss when we're too caught up in the rush. The non-linear structure of the play makes the passage of time feel more fluid, almost as though we are moving in and out of different moments and perspectives, reflecting the way we often don't notice the small details until they're gone.

Emily's experience after her death is one of the most powerful moments of realization in the play. She is counseled to go back and relive a most ordinary day and in so doing realizes they held so much beauty that she failed to see at the time. That idea of hindsight, realizing the preciousness of time only when it's too late.

Wilder's use of time doesn't just make the audience think about life's impermanence—it also suggests a way to truly live. To savor the present and appreciate the beauty of everyday moments is a poignant takeaway. It's a call to be more mindful, to embrace life more fully before it slips through our fingers.

Stage Manager as Timekeeper

The Stage Manager frequently comments on the passage of time, often reminding the audience of how quickly years are passing and how people often fail to notice the details of their lives.

Jumping Between Time Periods

The play doesn't follow a strict chronological order; instead, it jumps between different points in the characters' lives, like their childhood, wedding, and death, allowing the audience to see the impact of time on their relationships and perspectives.

Emily's "Reliving a Day"

The most impactful scene regarding time is when Emily, after dying, is allowed to revisit a typical day from her past, which makes her acutely aware of the preciousness of seemingly mundane moments that she previously took for granted.

Focus on Ordinary Moments

The way *Our Town* focuses on the small, everyday activities of the townspeople makes the play a reflection on the richness of daily life that we often overlook. The routine actions may seem mundane, but in Wilder's hands, they become deeply meaningful. By emphasizing these moments, the play underscores how life is composed of a series of small, often overlooked events that, in their totality, make up a fulfilling existence.

It also connects to the broader human condition—how we tend to get caught up in the rush of life and forget to appreciate what we have in the present. The play ultimately encourages us to embrace the here and now, to be more mindful of the fleeting nature of life, and to find meaning in the simple moments we might otherwise take for granted.

Analysis Tools

Things to think about prior to performance

- Are you familiar with the play *Our Town*?
- Think about the very title: *Our* *Town*. What do these two words mean to you?
- What would you expect from a play called *Your* *Town*? Or *My* *Town*?
- In Act I, the Stage Manager says “This is the way we were.” She doesn’t say “This is the way we are.” Think about the difference between these two statements. Why does this play continue to be relevant to our lives?
- Do you agree or disagree that a play can provide a realistic understanding of life? How does a play help us understand the world we live in?
- The production begins with the Stage Manager entering the stage space. The Stage Manager unplugs “a ghost light.” The primary function of a ghost light is to ensure the safety of anyone who might accidentally enter a darkened theater, preventing them from tripping over obstacles or falling into the orchestra pit. Our production begins and ends with the ghost light.
- The name “ghost light” is rooted in theatrical superstition, with some believing it wards off mischievous spirits or provides light for the ghosts that are said to inhabit theaters.

Things to watch for in performance

- The First Act is called “Daily Life.” The Second Act is called “Love and Marriage.” And the Third Act is never named but implied as “Death” or “The After Life.” Watch for the occurrences that act as markers to each of these titles.
- Notice the few pieces of scenery and properties in the production. Do they aid your imagination or prevent it from fully engaging?
- What are the unique acting challenges inherent in pantomime versus using props onstage? Why might a playwright choose to include this kind of action into their play? What does it change about the world of the play?
- Notice how “exposed” the actors seem to be inside the space of the theater.
- Watch for when the actors use the space around the audience. What is the effect of placing the actors there?
- Notice how the Stage Manager is different from the other inhabitants of Grover’s Corners?
- Notice where the hymn “Blessed Be the Ties That Bind” is sung in all three acts. What is its significance in each Act?
- Notice the color of the costumes, particularly their contrast in Act III.

- Notice the lighting throughout the production. How does it affect you and your perception of the events.
- Notice the sound FX.

Things to think about after the performance

- Thornton Wilder uses the theme of time to challenge us to live more consciously, to slow down, and to savor the fleeting moments that make up our lives. What do you think makes Emily's realization so significant in the context of the play's overall message?
- What do you think the most significant relationship is in the play and why?
- Realizing we can't help but view the play through contemporary eyes, there is a time span of 87 years since the play was written and over 100 years since the events in the play were to take place. Does it seem dated to you?
- As specific as the play's inner action is to the experience of one town, the narrator's commentary insists that the action be seen in larger contexts from the past—geological and anthropological. The play's first audiences also brought the context of their current events to the play, for they lived in a world filled with conflict—the Great Depression, labor unrest in American cities, and the looming war in Europe. Do you think our world has similar events that influence our experiences?
- Why would Wilder choose to use a “Stage. Manager” to act as a bridge between audience and actor?
- Think about the function of the Stage Manager in this play. Do you think the play would be different without the Stage Manager character?
- Notice how Wilder begins the play with life and closes the play with death, both in childbirth. What is significant about this?
- This play is called “meta-theatrical” as it calls attention to itself as a play, as a construct. How does that affect your response to the story?

Other analysis tools

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is ‘about?’ In a nutshell, how does the playwright drive his point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

Additional Information

The running time for this production is approximately 2 hours, which includes one 15 minute intermission between Acts II and III.

Please join us for a pre-show discussion, Thursday, April 10 at 6:45pm in MAC 140 preceding the preview performance. Note the pre-show discussions will include the director and designers and will be a discussion on the approach to this production.

There will be a post-show discussion following the Friday, April 18 performance. The post-show will be with the director, cast, and crew, and we will; be fielding questions from the audience.

Please note: There will be two shows on Saturday, April 19: 3pm and 8pm, and no performance on Sunday, April 20.



Photo Credit: Press Photography
Pre-production photo of *Our Town*
Molly Heideman as Emily Gibbs and William Lech as George Webb