

THE SANDRA FEINSTEIN-GAMM THEATRE

AMERICAN BUFFALO

BY
DAVID MAMET

DIRECTED BY
TYLER DOBROWSKY



STUDY GUIDE

GAMM
EDUCATION

sandra feinstein-

GAM
theatre

SEASON
THIRTY-TWO
2016 - 2017

401.723.4266

GAMMTHEATRE.ORG

172 EXCHANGE STREET
PAWTUCKET, RI

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We thank the following individuals and organizations for their support of PLAY in our 32nd Season: Rhode Island Foundation, Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, a Community Development Block Grant from the City of Pawtucket, Norman and Rosalie Fain Foundation, Hassenfeld Family Charities Foundation, June Rockwell Levy Foundation, Collette/Alice I Sullivan Foundation, Taco/White Family Foundation.

This study guide was prepared by Kate Hanson, Susie Schutt, Tracy Morreo, Andrew Conley and Courtney Martin.



**ACT
I**

WELCOME

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Dear Educator,

The Sandra Feinstein-Gamm Theatre is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *American Buffalo* by David Mamet. In this guide you will find background information about the play and playwright, an inside look at 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 debrief with your students.

We would like to offer a pre-show visit with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. This will whet students' appetites for the performance and encourage them to question and explore the themes of the play. This visit will last about half an hour and is offered to your classroom free of charge. Most student matinees are followed by a talkback with the production team and offer students the opportunity to debrief the performance immediately and ask questions of the actors, director, designers or playwright. Talkbacks range in length but we encourage you to stay and participate in the dynamic discussion.

We also offer longer workshops that will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the motifs and the language of the play. Kinesthetic engagement with language and literature ensures students deep comprehension and text-to-self connection that encourages students to invest in reading and literacy-learning. Much of this work was discovered, developed and inspired by the ArtsLiteracy Project at Brown University. Their strategies and models for learning continue to serve as a foundational pedagogical tool for all Gamm Education programming, including our PLAY (Pawtucket Literacy and Arts for Youth) in-school residencies.

Attending a production addresses several Common Core Standards in Theatre Arts Standards in Aesthetic Judgment, Cultural Contexts, and Communication, as well as many of the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening. Below, we have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide.

We would love to hear from you about your experiences using this study guide. It is a great help to us as we build on our education program from year to year. We look forward to seeing you at The Gamm!

Susie Schutt

Education Director, susie@gammtheatre.org

Kate Hanson

Education and Outreach Coordinator, kate@gammtheatre.org

THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

What is so exciting about attending the theater - especially in a smaller space such as The Gamm - is that it is live! Live theater is different from other forms of entertainment; unlike film and television you are encouraged to pay close attention and actively engage your imagination.

You, the audience, are mere feet (and sometimes inches!) away from the actors; therefore, you play an active role in the experience. **The actors can see and hear any distracting behavior such as talking, text messaging, unwrapping candy, the ringing of cell phones, etc.** This can affect the actor's concentration, disrupt the performance, and ruin the experience for other audience members. So we ask that you refrain from talking or making any noise during a performance. *Thank you!*

TIP:

Discuss with your students the particular demands and benefits of attending a live performance. Perhaps have them brainstorm how theater is different from film, television and sporting events.

COMMON CORE 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 Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.3] *See Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- 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 Activity for the Classroom*
- 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 Resident Scholar's essay.*
- 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 our Activity for the Classroom*
- 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 Themes and Questions for Discussion*
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2] *See examples throughout our study guide.*

ACT II

PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT

.....

TIP: Discuss David Mamet's career with your students. How did he get where he is today?

ABOUT DAVID MAMET:

Source: biography.com

David Alan Mamet was born on November 30, 1947, in Chicago, Illinois. His parents were Jewish immigrants who had come to the city from Europe. They raised Mamet and his younger sister, Lynn, on the South Side of Chicago until their divorce. He eventually moved to a suburb outside of the city, living with his mother and stepfather. Lynn would later recall that their home life was generally harsh, fueling an anger to be seen in Mamet's future work.



He founded the St. Nicholas Theatre Co. and won wide notice with productions that included *Sexual Perversity* in Chicago and *American Buffalo*. Later, his 1984 work *Glengarry Glen Ross* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Mamet became known for rapid-fire dialogue studded with obscenities and explorations of power relationships and corporate corruption. His screenplays include *The Verdict* and *The Untouchables*, and he's both written and directed projects such as *The Spanish Prisoner*, *Redbelt* and *Phil Spector*.

ABOUT AMERICAN BUFFALO

During one long day in a Chicago junk shop, three small-time, tough-talking crooks plot to rob a man of his valuable coin collection, including the rare Buffalo nickel. But when their con goes awry, it's every man for himself in a testosterone-fueled game of dead-end pipe dreams. By turns horrifying and hilarious, cynical and moving, *American Buffalo* is a small-scale tragedy packed with enough power to explode the American Dream. Hailed as a new American classic in 1977, Mamet's award-winning play is an engrossing experience whether you're seeing it for the first time or rediscovering this defining work.

American Buffalo opened at the Goodman Theatre Stage II on November 23, 1975. The play then went to Off-Broadway at St. Clement's Church in 1976. It premiered on Broadway at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre in 1977 and closed after 122 performances. *American Buffalo* received a great response and was considered "one of the best American plays of the last decade" (*New York Times*). The play has some very prestigious awards under its belt such as, the Obie Award for Best New Play and Performance and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play. It was nominated for four Tony Awards.

OUR PRODUCTION

WHO MADE IT HAPPEN:

ON STAGE:

Donny Dobrow.....Fred Sullivan, Jr.
 Bobby.....Marc Dante Mancini
 Water "Teach" Cole.....Tony Estrella

BEHIND THE SCENES:

Director	Tyler Dobrowsky
Set Design	Patrick Lynch
Costume Design	Marilyn Salvatore
Lighting Design	David Roy
Stage Management	Kristen Gibbs
Sound Design	Alex Eizenberg
Technical Production	
Supervisor	DJ Potter
Assistant Stage Manager	Sara Sheets
Rehearsal Assistant Stage	
Managers	Annalee Cavallaro,
	Erika Rethorn
Production Assistant	Jessica Corsentino
Master Electrician	Justin Carroll
Construction Crew	Alex Eizenberg,
	Nicholas Holbrook,
	Max Ramirez



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

There's an old theater axiom that says an audience sees a play with their ears. That is to say that the text of the play (and how it's delivered) is the primary vehicle for the story. For example, an actor can say, "It was a dark and stormy night" and the audience doesn't necessarily need lighting or effects to understand what's going on. They will simply believe the actor and go along for the ride. If that saying holds true, then you're about to "see" the theatrical and aural equivalent of a Jackson Pollock painting: a seemingly chaotic work of art that reveals itself to be an indictment of corrupt American capitalism, a warning against macho fascism, and a heartfelt plea for human connection in an environment of social and economic Darwinism. These are the themes that make *American Buffalo* a masterpiece, as trenchant today as when it was first written.

American Buffalo is in some ways a descendant of Arthur Miller's mid-20th century classic *Death of a Salesman*. Miller's genius was to use the form and structure of Greek tragedy and put it to bear on a middle-class American "everyman" in the person of Willy Loman. Mamet doubles down, applying the rules of tragedy to "flunkies," deadbeats and, to borrow a label from our recent presidential election, deplorables.

As Mamet puts it: "I was interested in honor among thieves; of what is an unassailable moral position and what isn't. What would cause a man to abdicate a moral position he's espoused? That's what *American Buffalo* is about. Teach is the antagonist. The play is about Don Dubrow. His moral position is that one must conduct himself like a man, and there are no extenuating circumstances for supporting the betrayal of a friend. That's how the play starts. The rest of the play is about Donny's betrayal of the fellow, Bobby, he's teaching these things to."

You'll notice that when Don and Teach begin to discuss the plan to steal the Buffalo nickel, they often use the term "business." Mamet is drawing a clear line that runs from three small-time crooks in a Chicago pawn shop to the board rooms of industry. As the playwright explains in a 1984 interview, "...The national culture is founded very much on the idea of strive and succeed. Instead of rising with the masses, you should rise from the masses....One feels one can only succeed at the cost of another....And once someone has no vested interest in behaving in an ethical manner and the only bounds on his behavior are supposedly his innate sense of fair play, then fair play becomes an outdated concept: 'But wait a second! Why should I control my sense of fair play when the other person may not control his sense of fair play? So hurray for me and to hell with you.'"

And then, of course, there is the language. A symphony of blue collar vulgarity, hilarious and wry, with turns of phrase that somehow manage to sound both quotidian and poetic; the dialogue of everyday people sprinkled with Beckett and Pinter. Their dialogue is filled with testosterone-drenched calls and raises, with bluffs and feigns, with action. This "action" is what makes the play so much fun to perform. It's this same world of macho posturing and, as Teach puts it, "free-market enterprise" that seduces Donny at the expense of his moral character and belies his relationship with his surrogate son, Bobby. *American Buffalo* is concerned ultimately with these lower-class white men who believe the American Dream—symbolized by the Buffalo nickel—is owed to them and has been denied them; and they will do anything to capture it. It's a blues song played with the staccato rhythms of jazz and a scathing indictment of who we are as a culture.

Now, feast your ears on this American Classic.

- Tyler Dobrowsky

A DYING BREED

by Jennifer Madden, Gamm Resident Scholar

Look at the face of the coin... the buffalo looks stunned, baffled, dejected, ready for slaughter. The animal is antiquated, and the would-be-robbers are a mess. The combination is symbolic.
-director/theater critic Harold Clurman on *American Buffalo*

When David Mamet's now canonical *American Buffalo* premiered in 1975 it was both fervently embraced as a new American classic and dismissed as foul-mouthed drivel. Many admired Mamet's withering critique of the capitalist system and his profane poetry. Detractors called it "trashy," "odious," and "a very thin slice of low life." One critic opined: "If there is any message in the play, it is probably that life is rotten, even for rotten people." In other words, many saw it as a pointless play with nothing to say. Ugh Mamet. So much swearing, so much testosterone. Why should anyone care?

Now 40 years on, the play has cemented itself as a bona fide American theatrical classic in both form and content. Its language changed forever the lingua franca of the American stage and arguably has proved as influential on the next generation of playwrights as were Miller, O'Neill and Williams for Mamet. The story of the play and its themes continue to assert themselves powerfully over time, reflecting our current state of vitriolic national discourse quite presciently. The play's blustering antagonist Walter "Teach" Cole insists "someone is against me" as he impotently rages against a system in which enemies lurk and everything from the weather to overcooked bacon conspires against him. Teach presents a hardened shell of violent macho bravado but his cry from the heart, "This hurts me in a way I don't know what the fuck to do," reveals his vulnerable wounded core.

As I write this, the third and final presidential debate is about to begin. No one can predict what may transpire this evening or on Election Day. It is enough to observe that we are witnessing an unprecedented and raw outpouring of a "someone is against me" attitude pervasive in a certain class of men who are unprepared to have their right to power and assertions of superiority checked. Gender, for obvious reasons, has played a central role during this spectacularly ugly and profoundly disturbing election season.

Though Jared Yates Sexton dissects the "toxic masculinity" at the core of "Trumpism" in a New York Times opinion piece, he might as well be referencing the characters of *American Buffalo*: "Taking refuge in traditional masculinity is a coping mechanism that works only so much as it deadens a man and his emotions. In its most pure state, masculinity is a hardening shell meant to protect men from the disappointments and travails of life, a self-delusion that preserves them from feeling overwhelmed by the odds against them."

Perhaps this answers dismissive critiques of "so what"—ironically, the first line of the play itself. The play's title says it all. This is not simply a naturalistic character study of life in the gutter, but a profound interrogation of the American character and way of life.

The buffalo once reigned supreme, roaming across this vast continent for millions of years only to be hunted to the edge of extinction. Earlier this year, the buffalo (or American bison) became our official national mammal. Elif Batuman in *The New Yorker* observed: "By identifying America with the bison, in addition to the eagle, the legislation may be viewed as having expanded and complicated our national self-image, to encompass not just the perspective of the powerful makers of history but also those who are its hapless bystanders."

The hapless characters in *American Buffalo* futilely struggle for the entitlement and privilege they believe is their birthright. Like the buffalo, Sexton notes, this "system of privilege that has ailed this country since its beginnings...now seems to be, and sees itself, fading away."

TIP: *Assign these questions for homework or in-class writing and then discuss your students' answers before and after the show.*

THEMES AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR WRITING



BEFORE THE PLAY:

1. What does the Gamm poster (also the cover of this study guide) tell you about the play? What sort of poster would you design for this play and why?
2. Why do you think the playwright chose this title? How does the title relate to the story?

AFTER THE PLAY:

3. How did the set design aid help tell the story? What would you change and why?
4. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, sound, and music?

Buffalo Nickel

The events that unfold onstage in David Mamet's breakout play, *American Buffalo*, are set into motion by a single inanimate object smaller than the face of a watch.

The American Buffalo nickel, also known as the Indian Head nickel, came about as a result of American President Theodore Roosevelt's dissatisfaction with the appearances of the various coins in circulation. The process of finding a designer for the coin was very difficult and took many years.

Sculptor James Earle Fraser submitted multiple concepts to the U.S. Mint and was commissioned to design the coin in 1912. Of the three final designs he'd submitted, the most favored design featured the head of an American Indian on one side and a bison on the other.

As word spread of the new coin's imminent release into circulation, the manufacturers of various coin-operated machines began requesting information on the dimensions and attributes of the new coin, which they were assured would be unchanged from the Liberty Head nickel. However, The Hobbs Manufacturing Company was not satisfied with these assurances and a long-standing feud began. The Hobbs Company demanded several adjustments to the nickel's design in order to make it compatible with the company's chief product, a device that could supposedly detect counterfeit nickels inserted into vending machines.

Despite all of the controversy surrounding the design, the coin entered production and the first waves rolled off the mint in February of 1913. The new coin had a very mixed reception from the general population. The Buffalo nickel remained as the American five-cent coin until it was replaced by the Jefferson nickel, which remains in use to this day.

Today, the Buffalo Nickel is very rare and could be very valuable. Depending on the year it was made and the condition it is in, the nickel could be worth somewhere between \$5 and \$3,500.

(continued)

Questions:

- Why do you think Mamet chose to make this nickel so important to the story?
- What do you think is the significance of the title of the play?
- A lot of the play's dialogue revolves around the worth of the nickel. How would finding out the value of the nickel have changed if the play was set in 2016 rather than 1975?

Pawn Shop Culture

American Buffalo playwright, David Mamet, was born and raised in the same city that the play takes place. Chicago, Illinois is a city rich in culture and diversity and the play's three characters are Chicago natives, struggling to get by. Mamet gives his audience a peek into the lives of these men as well as a look at what it's like in the typical American Pawnshop.

The first American pawnshops were opened in the early 19th century. Their popularity grew with time due to manufacturers paying their workers low wages. The pawnshop loan provided people who were low on funds with cash for basic necessities like food and rent. The purpose of the pawn shop has not changed much since then. According to the National Pawnbrokers Association, there are now more than 30 million pawnshop customers per year. Though the main goal for pawnshop owners is to collect profit from the interest on their loans and to sell goods from their shop, it is important to remember that from their inception 200 years ago until now, pawnshops have been effective equal-opportunity lenders, providing small loans to people who would otherwise not have access to other forms of money lending which are typically available to the financial elite.

Questions:

- Why do you think Mamet chose to set the play in his hometown?
- If you were to write a play about people in your town, where would you set it?
- The pawnshop's popularity has been increasing in recent years due to many reality-TV shows such as "Pawn Stars" and "Hardcore Pawn". Why do you think these shows are so popular?
- What do you think the play's setting (Don's Resale Shop) says about the characters?



Loyalty is very important to the characters in this play.

After watching the play, have your students discuss how loyalty affected the decisions and discussions between Don, Teach, and Bob. How does loyalty affect the relationships in your students' lives?

Mamet and Masculinity

TIP:

Current Events: *Have your students compare the brute masculinity in this play to what is happening in today's political climate. What similarities can they come up with?*

Some consider David Mamet to be a misogynist [a person who dislikes, despises, or is strongly prejudiced against women]. Mamet firmly denies this categorization. Many of his plays, however, revolve around male characters and are full of masculine energy and sometimes rage against both sexes. Mamet's childhood was somewhat troubled and had many instances of domestic violence. In his book, "The Cabin", which is partially a compilation of autobiographical essays, Mamet describes some of these violent encounters with his family. Many say that his upbringing has greatly influenced his writing as an adult.

Questions:

- Do you think the play would change if the only three characters, Don, Teach, and Bob were played by females? If so, how would it be different?
- Grace and Ruthie are two female characters who are mentioned throughout the play, but never seen on stage, why do you think that is?
- Do you think Mamet's upbringing has influenced the story of *American Buffalo*? If so, how?

Mamet Speak

Source: Wikipedia.org

Mamet's style of writing dialogue, marked by a cynical, street-smart edge, precisely crafted for effect, is so distinctive that it has come to be called Mamet speak. Mamet has recognized an association of his edgy narrative style by noting his debt to [fellow playwright] Harold Pinter, to whom he dedicated [his play], *Glen-garry Glen Ross*. He often uses italics and quotation marks to highlight particular words and to draw attention to his characters' frequent manipulation and deceitful use of language. His characters frequently interrupt one another, their sentences trail off unfinished, and their dialogue overlaps. Moreover, certain expressions and figures of speech are deliberately misrepresented to show that the character is not paying close attention to every detail of his dialogue (e.g., or so forth instead of and so forth). Mamet himself has criticized his (and other writers') tendency to write "pretty" at the expense of sound, logical plots.

When asked how he developed his style for writing dialogue, Mamet said, "In my family, in the days prior to television, we liked to while away the evenings by making ourselves miserable, based solely on our ability to speak the language viciously. That's probably where my ability was honed."

TIP: *Don't forget to have your students try the activity for the classroom: How would Mamet say it? Saying Mamet's words out loud can make a huge difference!*

Questions:

- Can you think of any other plays, TV shows, movies, or books that have dialogue like this?
- Do you like realistic dialogue like this? Why or why not?

***Disclaimer:** This play contains strong and vulgar language. Please prepare your students for this in any way you see fit.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

***Did you know?** The movie adaptation of "American Buffalo", directed by Michael Corrente and starring Dustin Hoffman, was filmed right here in Pawtucket? You can see Dustin Hoffman's handprints in our hometown's Walk of Fame right outside a city diner in downtown Pawtucket. Take your students for a stroll and check it out!

ACTIVITY #1:

HOW WOULD MAMET SAY IT?

As was explained earlier, Mamet is known for his fast-paced, realistic dialogue. On the right is an excerpt from the play. Have your students get into groups or pairs and practice reading it out loud.

After reading the excerpt, discuss the following questions with your students: How was reading it aloud different from reading it in your head? Did you find that Mamet's words encouraged you to change the way you talked? Did reading the text out loud feel natural to you?

DON: So?

Pause

So what, bob?

Pause

BOB: I'm sorry, Donny.

Pause

DON: All right.

BOB: I'm sorry, Donny.

Pause

DON: Yeah.

BOB: Maybe he's still in there.

DON: If you think that, Bob, how come you're here?

BOB: I came in.

Pause

DON: You don't come in, bob. You don't come in until you do a thing.

BOB: He didn't come out.

DON: What do I care, Bob, if he came out or not? You're s'posed to watch the guy, you watch him. Am I wrong?

BOB: I just went to the back.

DON: Why?

Pause

Why did you do that?

BOB: 'Cause he wasn't coming out the front.

DON: Well, Bob, I'm sorry, but this isn't good enough. IF you want to do business...if we got a business deal, it isn't good enough. I want you to remember this.

BOB: I do.

ACTIVITY #2:

THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE JUNKSHOP

The entirety of *American Buffalo* takes place in Don's Resale Shop. Although, all of the play's dialogue happens within the store, most of the action occurs outside and is never seen by the audience.

After seeing the play, have your students talk about the key plot points that were never seen on stage. Ask them why they think Mamet chose not to show those moments to the audience.

After brainstorming and discussing those key plot points have your students get into groups and write a scene that occurs outside of the resale shop in which one of those moments takes place. Once everyone is done, share those scenes aloud (or act them out) in front of the class.



Damian Lewis, John Goodman, Tom Sturridge | Photos by Johan Persson



ONLINE ARTICLES

BACKSTAGE SECRETS OF AMERICAN BUFFALO

The Telegraph | April 11, 2015

www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/11522123/American-Buffero-interview.html

BISON BISON BISON

The New Yorker | May 13, 2016

<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/bison-bison-bison-americas-new-national-mammal>

GOT A BUFFALO NICKEL IN YOUR POCKET?

<http://cointrackers.com/buffalo-indian-nickel/>

GAMM INSIDER MAGAZINE: SPOTLIGHT ON “AMERICAN BUFFALO”

An email-based collection of reviews and articles gathered from across the web.

Email susie@gammtheatre.org to request it be sent to your email address.



J.J. Johnson, Mike Nussbaum and William H. Macy.
Photo courtesy of Goodman Theatre

**MORE
TO
COME**

EPILOGUE

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THANK YOU for joining us for *American Buffalo* and for working with this Study Guide to ensure the best, most comprehensive theatrical and educational experience. Please be in touch if you would like us to visit your classroom before or after you attend *American Buffalo*.

Our Education Department provides classes for students of various grade levels, as well as a month-long Gamm Summer Intensive for summer time theatre fun. We hope you will join us for more student matinees at The Gamm!

MATINEES STILL TO COME:

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

by Lillian Hellman

- Friday, Jan. 13, 2017 @10am
- Friday, Jan. 27, 2017 @10am

KING ELIZABETH

by Friedrich Schiller
freely adapted by Tony Estrella

- Friday, Apr. 28, 2017 @10am

TO BOOK A MATINEE

contact Tracy at tracy@gammtheatre.org
or 401-723-4266 ext. 111.

**GAMM
EDUCATION**

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GAMM EDUCATION
find us on the web at gammtheatre.org or reach Susie Schutt at 401 723 4266 ext. 121.

A LOOK AT THE GAMM'S 32ND SEASON

"We strive mightily to make sure every Gamm season is even more than the sum of its plays. Season 32 is no exception. The line-up is perhaps our most ambitious, provocative and stylistically diverse yet. It includes masterpieces by three of the greatest writers of the modern era, a classic work of 16th-century political intrigue reinvented for today, and a darkly compelling new play about life in a virtual world. Together they tell a thrilling story of living in the present with the lurking shadows of the past and the looming unknowns of the future."

-Tony Estrella, Artistic Director

sandra feinstein-

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◀ COMING NEXT

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SPOTLIGHT ON A GAMM EMPLOYEE:

While actors, directors, and playwrights are the most well-known, there are many jobs and careers that make theater successful. Each of our study guides focus on a different theater career by highlighting a Gamm employee.

TRACY MORREO, BOX OFFICE MANAGER

What does your job entail?

I am the person that sells you your theater tickets! I answer the phone and take ticket orders and I also sell tickets to people who walk up to the box office. I hand tickets out to patrons at the box office before shows. I work with high school and college teachers to book students to come and see shows. I answer any email that comes to info@gammtheatre.org. I add the next season's plays into our ticketing system in January. Then, with the Box Office Assistant's help, I generate, stuff and mail letters to our subscribers asking them to renew their season subscriptions. In August we print out all of the subscribers' tickets for the upcoming season and stuff them by hand into envelopes and mail them! Right now we have over 2,100 subscribers. That's a lot of tickets! I also supervise our House Managers and recruit and organize Ushers. I love new ushers! You can email me if you are interested in ushering. It's a fun way to help out and see the show for free. My email is tracy@gammtheatre.org.



Why is your job important to The Gamm's success?

The box office is most people's first interaction with The Gamm Theatre. It's important that patrons have a good experience right from the start so that they keep coming back.

What led you to your position at The Gamm?

I started working at The Gamm in the evenings selling subscriptions. I've always loved theater and being around creative people, so I thought it would be a great part-time job for me! After that job ended (it was a seasonal position), I applied to be the Box Office Assistant/Group Sales Manager. A few months ago our Box Office Manager got promoted to another position and I got promoted to Box Office Manager. As of this August, I have worked at The Gamm for 7 years. Or as we like to say here: In August I had my 7 year "Gammi-versary".

Why theater?

Theater is not only about imagination and creativity but it is also about life. Theater allows you to "see" the world through a different set of eyes. This is very exciting to me. The first play I was ever in was in 2nd grade. I performed in many more plays and in the chorus throughout my entire school career. I always loved performing as a kid and thought that I would grow up and be a famous actor! This didn't happen, but I still get to be connected to theater every day through my job here at The Gamm and I feel very lucky for that.

What, if any, other professions are you curious about?

I enjoy writing and would like to write a book one day!

What special skills does your position entail?

To be a Box Office Manager you have to be friendly and enjoy talking to people, especially about theater! You also need to have a lot of patience and good organizational skills. Sometimes you have to make decisions quickly and creatively so good problem solving skills are also important. Lastly, you need to be supportive of your co-workers and willing to pitch in whenever you are needed. Theater is always a team effort, whether you are on stage, backstage, in the box office, teaching students about theater, fundraising or creating a poster or brochure design. We all depend on each other to do our individual jobs in order to make the theater on our stage happen!

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

I would have to say Haagen Dazs Coffee ice cream is my very favorite!