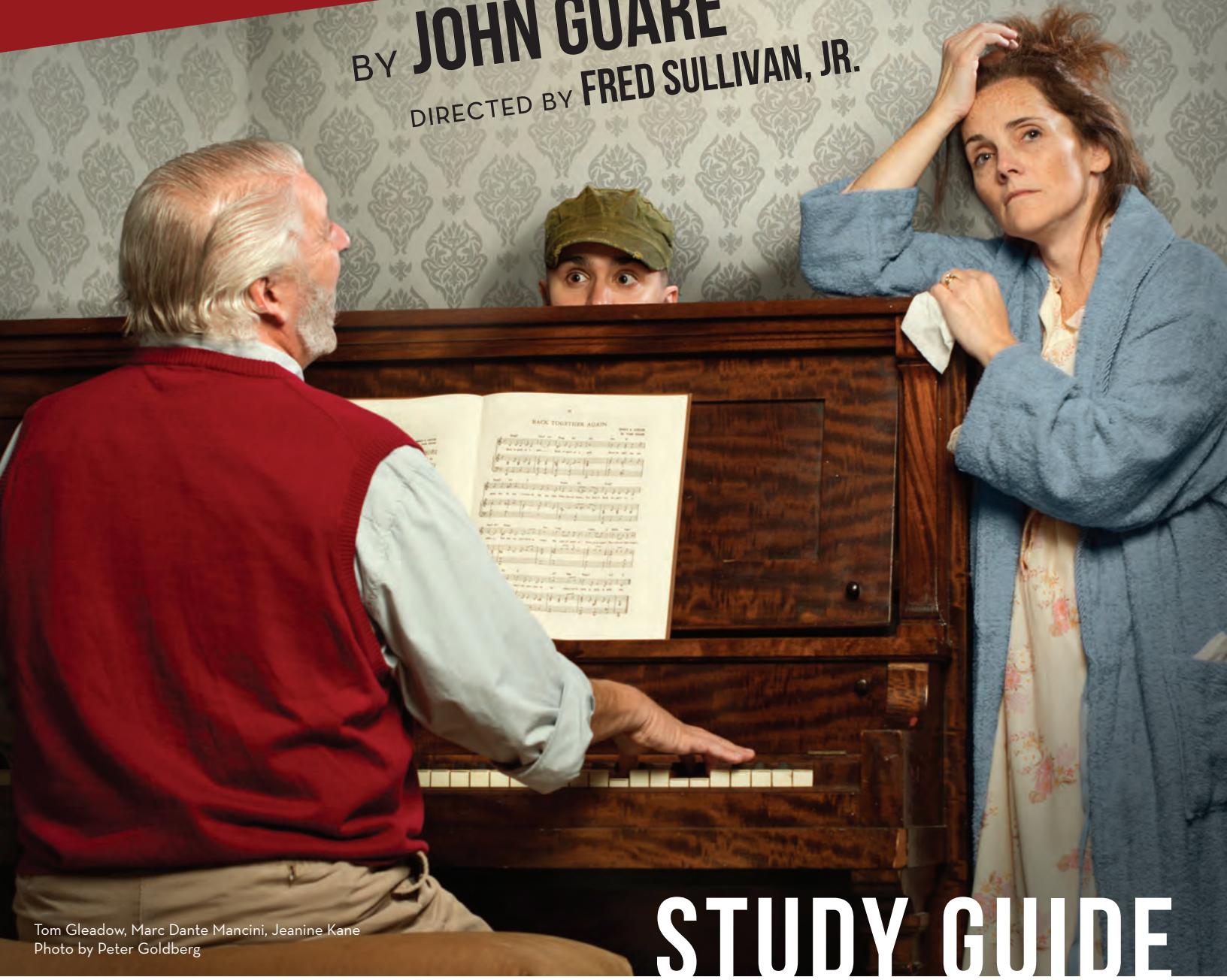




THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES

BY JOHN GUARE
DIRECTED BY FRED SULLIVAN, JR.



Tom Gleadow, Marc Dante Mancini, Jeanine Kane
Photo by Peter Goldberg

STUDY GUIDE

GAMM
EDUCATION

sandra feinstein-
GAM
theatre

30TH
2014
2015
SEASON

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 30th Season: The Rhode Island Foundation, the Otto H. York Foundation, The Rhode Island State Council on the Arts, a Community Development Block Grant from the City of Pawtucket, and Michael Achey and Susan Thomas.

This study guide was prepared by
Kate Hanson, Tracy Morreo, Susie Schutt, and Steve Kidd.

Design by Courtney A. Martin



Juliette Regnier as Bananas Shaughnessy and Robert Ellis as Artie Shaughnessy in Beck Center for the Arts' production of *The House of Blue Leaves*. Photo: Kathy Sandham/Beck Center

ACT I

WELCOME

.....

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 *The House of Blue Leaves* by John Guare. 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 workshop free of charge with your classroom/school before your visit to help prepare your students for the play. These workshops will get students out of their seats and up on their feet engaging in the themes, 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. We have included a list of standards that align with attending a performance and using our study guide (see page 3).

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!*

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

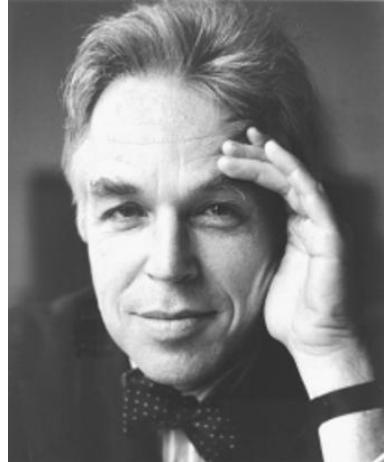
PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT

ABOUT JOHN GUARE

John Guare was born February 5, 1938 in New York City. He is an American playwright known for his innovative and often absurdist dramas. Guare, who was just 11 when he produced his first play for friends and family, was educated at Georgetown University (B.A., 1960) and at Yale University (M.F.A., 1963). After graduating, he began staging short plays, primarily in New York City, where he helped to found the Eugene O'Neill Memorial Theatre Playwrights' Conference. His first notable works satirize the American media, including *Muzeeka* (1968), about American soldiers of the Vietnam War who have television contracts, and *Cop-Out* (1968).

In 1971 Guare earned critical acclaim for *The House of Blue Leaves*, a farce about a family from Queens, NY that is so obsessed with fame and the American Dream that they cannot connect with one another. *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1972 with Mel Shapiro), a rock-musical modernization of William Shakespeare's comedy, won the Tony and New York Drama Critics Circle awards for best musical of 1971-72. In *Marco Polo Sings a Solo* (1977) and *Rich and Famous* (both 1977), Guare dealt with issues of success. In *Landscape of the Body* (1978) and *Bosoms and Neglect* (1980) he focused on parent-child relationships. The plays *Lydie Breeze* (1982), *Gardenia* (1982), and *Women and Water* (1990) make up a family saga set in Nantucket, Mass., in the second half of the 19th Century.

Other works include *Four Baboons Adoring the Sun*, *Other Plays* (1993) and *The War Against the Kitchen Sink* (1996). His one-act play *The General of Hot Desire*, first performed in 1998, is an unsympathetic adaptation of the Bible that takes as one of its starting points Shakespeare's sonnet number 154, from which the title of the play is taken. *Lake Hollywood* (2000) chronicles the lives of dissatisfied people and the futility of their idolization of celebrities, and *Chaucer in Rome* (2002), a sequel to *The House of Blue Leaves*, satirizes art, religion, and fame. *A Few Stout Individuals* (2003) is a colorful account of the memories and delusions of a dying Ulysses S. Grant. Guare also wrote several screenplays, including the 1993 adaptation of his 1990 multi-award-winning play *Six Degrees of Separation*. Guare made his Off-Broadway acting debut in June of 2013 in the world premiere of his play *3 Kinds of Exile* at Atlantic Theater Company.



John Guare

ABOUT THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES

John Guare's *The House of Blue Leaves* was first staged in 1966 by Eugene O'Neill Theatre Center in Waterford, CT. It then received critical acclaim when it opened Off-Broadway at the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, where it ran for 337 performances. It was brought to Broadway in 1986 and won multiple Tony Awards. Its revival on Broadway came in 2011, starring Ben Stiller as Artie Shaugnessy (who had played Ronnie Shaugnessy in the 1986 rendition).

The play focuses on Artie Shaugnessy, a zoo-keeper from Sunny Side, Queens who dreams of moving to Los Angeles with his mistress, Bunny, and becoming a big-time songwriter. Meanwhile his wife, Bananas, is having a mental breakdown. Artie's son, Ronnie, is AWOL from the Army, stowing a home-made bomb, and planning to blow up the Pope on his first visit to New York City. Also visiting is Artie's old school chum, Billy Einhorn, now a Hollywood producer with industry connections. But will Artie's dreams of fame be swallowed up in the chaos of his ordinary life?

ACT III

OUR PRODUCTION

.....

WHO MADE IT HAPPEN:

ON STAGE:

Artie Shaughnessy

Ronnie Shaughnessy

Bunny Flingus

Bananas Shaughnessy

Corrinna Stroller

Billy Einhorn

Lead Nun

Second Nun

Little Nun

Military Police

Man in White

Tom Gleadow

Marc Dante Mancini

Rachel Dulude

Jeanine Kane

Karen Carpenter

Steven Liebhauser

Joan Batting

Milly Massey

Julia Bartoletti

Jacob Larocque

JonPaul Rainville



Marianna Bassham
as Artie



Jeanine Kane
as Bananas



Marc Dante Mancini
as Ronnie



Rachel Dulude
as Bunny

BEHIND THE SCENES:

Director

Fred Sullivan, Jr.

Set Design

Patrick Lynch

Costume Design

Amanda Downing Carney

Lighting Design

David Roy

Production Technical Direction

Joe Short

Stage Management

Stef Work

Production Management

Jessica Hill



Carla Petroski, Juliette Regnier and Robert Ellis in Beck Center for the Arts' production. | Photo by Kathy Sandham

DIRECTORS' NOTES:

by Fred Sullivan, Jr., Director of *The House of Blue Leaves*

Half my lifetime ago, when I was 26, I played Ronnie Shaughnessy the AWOL son in *The House of Blue Leaves*. Ronnie was the role for which I became a member of Equity, the professional actors' union. It was at Trinity Rep and was directed by David Wheeler (who is often called the "father of Boston theater" and it starred Peter Gerety whom I so admire and adore). I looooooved the play for its funny bone, its dark heart and its absurd sensibility. Raised Irish Catholic on the East Coast, I felt I understood the Shaughnessys – their intense loves and joys, their Greatest Generation nostalgic longings and memories, their mystical devotions and superstitions, their interneccine resentments and their impatience with unhappiness, each other and especially mental illness.

A few years ago I had the privilege of playing Walter Burns in John Guare's adaptation of *His Girl Friday* also at Trinity. Mr Guare came to work with the company for the first week of rehearsal and I got to spend some time with him. I was thrilled that he knew quite a lot about both Trinity and The Gamm. He shared stories with me about the writing of *Blue Leaves* and how Ronnie's story at the beginning of act two is completely autobiographical. (His mother's brother was a casting director at MGM. His dad worked on Wall Street but referred to it as "the zoo." Hence, Artie is a zookeeper.)

Guare is notoriously allergic to kitchen sink naturalism and got very excited talking about actors directly addressing and viscerally connecting with the live audience nightly. He writes articulately about how when he was writing *Blue Leaves* he went to see Laurence Olivier playing in repertory *The Dance of Death* and the next night in *A Flea In Her Ear* (ironically the play I'm playing two great roles in right now at Trinity). He says he jumbled the Strindberg marriage-as-war play with the Feydeau farce in his brain and that's how act two of *The House of Blue Leaves* was born. Fascinating!

I've been lucky enough to direct 23 plays for The Gamm over the last 19 years and several of my favorites have been American family plays: *Awake and Sing* (2009), *The Glass Menagerie* (2010) and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (2002). *The House of Blue Leaves* seems to me not only one of the greatest stage plays of the 70s but a thrilling continuum to that great tradition of O'Neill and Williams and Odets....with a brilliant and brave absurdist contemporary vitality. During a time in which the current Pope is planning a visit to New York and 80% of our young people have set a goal "to be famous" through reality TV, Youtube or desperate acts for world-wide validation and attention (at least for a brief news cycle), this is the perfect time to revisit *The House of Blue Leaves*.

- Fred Sullivan, Jr.

DRAMATURGICAL NOTES: By Jennifer Madden, Gamm Theatre Resident Scholar

America in the Year of *The House of Blue Leaves*

- The population is 3.345 billion.
- On January 4th President Lyndon B. Johnson delivers his "Great Society" State of the Union Address.
- Malcolm X is assassinated by members of the Nation of Islam on Feb 21.
- Operation "Rolling Thunder" consisting of sustained air strikes deploys in North Vietnam and continues for the next three years.
- The first American combat troops arrive in Vietnam.
- On Sunday March 7 Rev. Martin Luther King attempts to lead 50-mile protest march from Selma to Montgomery demanding the right to vote for African-Americans. Alabama State Troopers attack the 600 nonviolent protesters. The day becomes known as "Bloody Sunday."
- Two days later white supremacists beat Unitarian Universalist minister James J. Reeb to death for participating in the Selma march.
- In March the University of Michigan holds the first "teach-in" protesting the war in Vietnam.
- On April 6th the United States launches "Early Bird," the first commercial communications satellite, into orbit.
- Cosmonaut Alexei Leonov makes history when he completes the first space walk, becoming the first human to take steps in outer space.
- President Johnson signs the Voting Rights Act on August 6th.
- Programma 101, the first desktop computer hits the commercial market for \$3,200.
- President Johnson signs the Medicare Bill into law.
- The Watts riots begin on August 11 and last for six days.
- Pope Paul VI becomes the first pope to visit the United States on October 4th.
- In *Griswold v. Connecticut*, the Supreme Court strikes down the law prohibiting contraceptive use by married couples.
- Willie Mays hits his 500th homerun.
- Mary Quant designs the mini-skirt.

WHAT WERE WE LISTENING TO?

- The Byrds "Mr. Tambourine Man"
- The Rolling Stones "(I Can't Get No) Satisfaction"
- The Righteous Brothers "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'"
- The Beatles "Yesterday."
- The Supremes "Stop in the Name of Love"
- Bob Dylan "Like a Rolling Stone"
- Sonny and Cher "I Got You Babe"
- Dylan outrages fans by going electric at the Newport Folk Festival.
- The Beatles play before 55,600 at Shea Stadium.

WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN 1965?



Jennifer Jason Leigh as Bunny Flings in
The House of Blue Leaves. Photo by Joan Marcus

WHAT WERE WE WATCHING?

- *The Sound of Music*
- *Help!*
- *Doctor Zhivago*
- *My Fair Lady* wins the Academy Award for Best Picture.
- *The Man of La Mancha* opens on Broadway.
- “I Dream of Jeannie”, “Lost in Space”, and “A Charlie Brown Christmas” premiere on television.
- The Pillsbury Doughboy makes his TV debut.
- Sony introduces a home video tape recorder for \$995.

WHAT WERE WE EATING?

- For better or worse Campbell Soup introduces Spaghetti Os.
- General Foods creates Cool Whip.
- A patent is issued for the disposable plastic grocery bag.



Carla Petroski, Juliette Regnier and Robert Ellis in Beck Center for the Arts' production. | Photo by Kathy Sandham

ACT IV

DISCUSSION & WRITING



1. How did the set design aid in the telling of the story? What would you change and why?
2. What sort of atmosphere was created with the lighting, and sound?
3. 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?

TOPIC: Historical Context

Set in 1965, *The House of Blue Leaves* takes place in New York on the day of Pope Paul VI's first visit to the United States. This was the first time a Pope had left Italy since 1809. During his short time in NYC the Pope made a visit to St. Patrick's Cathedral, met with President Lyndon B. Johnson, and led an outdoor mass at Yankee Stadium. In less than 14 hours, the Pope was seen in person by an estimated 1 million people and on television by 100 million.

1965 also marks the midway point of the Vietnam War, which spanned from 1955 to 1975. During the Vietnam War, about 2/3 of American soldiers joined voluntarily and the rest were drafted, meaning they were involuntarily forced to serve in the military. The draft was extremely controversial and created a feeling of unrest in this country. AWOL, or Absence Without Leave, refers to when a soldier is absent from their post without a valid pass or leave. Approximately 50,000 American soldiers went AWOL during the Vietnam War.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- The Pope is scheduled to visit Philadelphia in September 2015, what impact do you think this visit will have?
- If the draft was in effect today, how would it impact you and society?

THEME: American Dream

The “American Dream” is the guiding belief in the United States that there will always be an opportunity for growth, success and upward social mobility. This strong desire for success has been made increasingly relevant with the prevalence of media and celebrity worship in our lives. Artie’s thirst for fame and obsession with stardom clouds his outlook on his own life and diminishes the value of family.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- Why do you think there is such an obsession with celebrities in America today?
- What do you consider to be the “American Dream”?

TOPIC: Mental Health

The character of Bananas is never officially diagnosed in the course of the play (she is simply referred to as being “sick”), but we learn that she was suicidal. Artie wants to put her in a mental institution where she fears she will be given shock treatments. Shock treatments are electric currents that cause brief seizures in the brain. Artie also manages Bananas illness by giving her pills which seem to numb her. The steady growth of antidepressant use, along with negative depictions of shock treatments in the media, led to a decline of their use during the 1950s to the 1970s. Guare walks a fine line between showing the sadness and devastation mental illness can have on a family, while also using it as a source for dark humor. During the early 1960’s the

topic of mental health and illness were viewed as a “private matter” which were more or less off-limits to outsiders. This can account for Artie’s isolation in dealing with Bananas.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- How did the depiction of mental illness in *The House of Blue Leaves* compare to modern day depictions?
- What did you notice about Jeanine Kane’s performance of Bunny?

TOPIC: Dialects

The House of Blue Leaves takes place in New York City, which is divided into five boroughs: Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, The Bronx, and Staten Island, with characters from New Jersey as well. While these regions are very close to one another, they each carry a distinct accent or dialect. For our production, Wendy Overly, Gamm Resident Actor and Dialect Coach, worked with the actors on their voice and speech technique.

Questions for Free Write or Discussion:

- How did the different accents represented on stage help tell the story?
- What did you notice about the different dialects?

ACTIVITY FOR THE CLASSROOM

AMERICAN DREAM WORD WEB AND TABLEAUX

DESCRIPTION:

A word web is a way of silently reflecting on an experience or word by writing in a shared space. Begin by writing the main idea, American Dream (explained above), on the center of the board and place a circle around it. This activity is conducted in silence. Students step up, draw a line off the center word and then write a word or phrase that relates to the center word, and then return to their seats. They may add thoughts or questions about the word or phrase someone has written previously by drawing a line and adding their own comment. They may honor what someone else has written by putting a checkmark next to it. The rest of the class observes the silent conversation taking place on the board and contributes whenever a marker becomes available. (Make four or five writing instruments available). At the end of the activity, a concept map should fill the board. If a rich conversation emerges on the board, use written phrases or dialogue to spark a verbal exploration of the topic.

To create an even more dynamic exploration of themes surrounding the American Dream, have students create tableaux, or frozen images to represent the words or phrases from the Word Web to help them understand bigger concepts or situations. First break students into groups (5-6) and give each group a word or phrase from the Word Web. Ask the students to read the word or phrase and discuss what images jump out at them. Have them stand up and create a tableau or still image with their bodies to represent that word or scene. They should rehearse their piece a few times. When each group is done have the class reconvene and create an audience. They will share their frozen images with the class.

ACT V

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

ONLINE ARTICLES

POPE PAUL VI VISITS THE U.S., OCT. 4, 1965
<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1012/81968.html>

VIETNAM WAR IN 1965
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1965_in_the_Vietnam_War

ARE WE WORSHIPPING
CELEBRITIES OR HEROES?
<http://bit.ly/1D8Fk9z>

A NEW AGE OF CELEBRITY WORSHIP
<http://bit.ly/1Dm9ulU>

GAMM INSIDER MAGAZINE: SPOTLIGHT ON “THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES”

New this season! 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.

HOUSE HISTORY

1966

1971

■ Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best American Play
■ Obie Award for Best American Play



1986



2011

■ Nominated Tony Award Best Featured Actress in a Play, Edie Falco



First staged by Eugene O'Neill Theater Center in Waterford, CT.

OPENS OFF-BROADWAY

at the Truck and Warehouse Theatre, where it ran for 337 performances. The cast included Frank Converse, Harold Gould, Katherine Helmond, William Atherton, and Anne Meara.

REVIVAL ON BROADWAY

directed by Jerry Zaks
The opening night cast included Swoosie Kurtz, John Mahoney, Stockard Channing, Danny Aiello, Ben Stiller (in his stage debut), and Julie Hagerty. Christine Baranski and Patricia Clarkson joined the production later in the run, which totalled 398 performances.

■ Nominated Tony Award Best Play

■ Winner Tony Award Best Direction of a Play, Jerry Zaks
■ Winner Tony Award Best Featured Actress in a Play Swoosie Kurtz

■ Winner Tony Award Best Featured Actor in a Play John Mahoney

REVIVAL ON BROADWAY

Staged by David Cromer at the Walter Kerr Theatre. Starring Ben Stiller (Artie), Edie Falco (Bananas) and Jennifer Jason Leigh (Bunny), the production began previews on April 4, with an opening date on April 15 for a limited 16-week engagement.

Ben Stiller, Edie Falco & Jennifer Jason Leigh | Broadway.com

MORE
TO
COME

EPILOGUE

.....

THANK YOU for joining us for *The House of Blue Leaves* 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 *The House of Blue Leaves*.

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

UPCOMING STUDENT MATINEES:

THE HOUSE OF BLUE LEAVES

by John Guare

• Friday, March 6, 2015

MARIE ANTOINETTE

By David Adjmi

• Friday, May 1, 2015



TO BOOK A MATINEE

contact Tracy at tracy@gammtheatre.org or 401-723-4266
ext. 12.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT GAMM EDUCATION
find us on the web at www.gammtheatre.org or reach
Susie Schutt at 401 723 4266 ext. 17.

A LOOK AT THE GAMM'S 30TH SEASON

A combination of classic and contemporary works, set over hundreds of years of world history, the 2014-2015 Season is an entertaining and evocative line-up that speaks as a whole to American society today.

"We're excited to celebrate our 30th anniversary season by traveling in time from the mid-14th century to the early 21st. This includes a world premiere medieval murder mystery and a one-woman tour-de-force about drone warfare. Along the way, we peek into the palaces of revolutionary France, visit the home of a bored house wife in Victorian Norway, and witness the wild goings on in a Vietnam-era New York tenement."

—TONY ESTRELLA, Artistic Director of *The Gamm*



COMING NEXT:

The season closes with *Marie Antoinette*, David Adjmi's alternately hilarious and shocking take on the 1% vs. the 99%.

1776: Marie's subjects used to love her-extravagant haute couture, three-foot-tall wigs, and all! But times are changing. A government in fiscal crisis and a populace railing against the super-rich mean France's frivolous and fashionable teen queen may soon be going out of style. From idle court gossip to gruesome beheading, American playwright David Adjmi's satirical new comedy is a fantastical slice in the life of the infamous monarch-a woman both captive and casualty of her unchecked appetites. Laugh-out-loud funny and hauntingly timely, *Marie Antoinette* reflects America today through the lens of 18th-century France.

"Audacious and stunning."- Variety



► LEARN MORE AT GAMMTHEATRE.ORG