You Can’t Take It With You
Study Guide

This Study Guide was written by Kate Jones-Waddell and edited by Kacey Roye. It contains selected excerpts from public domain.

Show Runs September 8th – October 1st, 2017
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MISSION: The Classic Theatre creates excellent theatre that is relevant, diverse, entertaining, and transformative.

VISION: We seek to create a vibrant city with a rich diversity of arts and culture which connects communities.

Classic Theatre Staff

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Roush</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diane Malone &amp; Allan Ross</td>
<td>Co-Artistic Directors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Kanayan</td>
<td>Development Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meredith Alvarez</td>
<td>Operations Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kacey Roye</td>
<td>Education Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Bunten</td>
<td>Box Office Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Olivia Tober</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
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Production Notes

Elizabeth C. Ramírez, Ph.D.

YOU CAN’T TAKE IT WITH YOU was first produced at the Booth Theatre in New York City, December 14, 1936. Near the end of the Great Depression, this Moss Hart and George S. Kaufman comedy in three acts was one of their many great successes. The original production played for 838 performances. The comedy won the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

The Frank Capra film version won the Academy Award for Best Picture in 1938 and Best Director. Lionel Barrymore’s “Grandpa” was greatly admired along with Jean Arthur’s “Alice Sycamore” and James Stewart’s honest young “Kirby,” all contributing to the year’s best, according to the September 2, 1938 review of the film in THE NEW YORK TIMES.

The play offers a varied production history, entertaining audiences for many generations. Perhaps one of the most notable revivals is the Broadway production of 2014, starring the Tony award-winning theatre veteran James Earl Jones and Elizabeth Ashley. According to press notes, “Family can do crazy things to people. And the Sycamore family is a little crazy to begin with.” In this production, Jones “heads the wackiest household to ever hit Broadway,” playing the “wily Grandpa Vanderhof, leader of a happily eccentric gang of snake collectors, cunning revolutionaries, ballet dancers and skyrocket makers. But when the youngest daughter brings her fiancé and his buttoned-up parents over for dinner, that’s when the real fireworks start to fly” (THE VERDICT: CRITICS REVIEW, PLAYBILL Staff, September 28, 2014).

While society has witnessed many changes since this play first appeared, unquestionably, many of the concerns of that time are still found today, namely, unemployment, economic and political worries, and threats to the homeland. Yet, above all, the work stands out for its universal themes and ideas about family, love, and living life fully.
## You Can’t Take It With You Cast & Production Crew

### Cast of Characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allan Ross</td>
<td>Grandpa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hunter Wulff</td>
<td>Tony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Tonra</td>
<td>Alice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Magda Porter</td>
<td>Grand Duchess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincent Hardy</td>
<td>Henderson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim Mammarella</td>
<td>Boris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy Thornton</td>
<td>Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catherine Babbitt</td>
<td>Penelope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randee Lutterloh</td>
<td>Essie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Starr</td>
<td>Ed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Van Dyke</td>
<td>Rheba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin Keown</td>
<td>Donald</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John O’Neill</td>
<td>De Pinna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Byrd Bonner</td>
<td>Mr. Kirby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christi Eanes</td>
<td>Mrs. Kirby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitney Marlett</td>
<td>Gay Wellington</td>
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### Production Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Stringham</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaitlin Muse</td>
<td>Stage Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane Malone</td>
<td>Set Designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jodi Karjala</td>
<td>Costume Designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pedro Ramirez</td>
<td>Lighting Designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alfy Valdez</td>
<td>Properties Master</td>
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<tr>
<td>J. Cameron Beesley</td>
<td>Technical Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rick Malone</td>
<td>Sound Designer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Estin Kandt</td>
<td>Directing Intern</td>
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Synopsis

Act I

The show is set in the Vanderhoff family home in New York City, mid-1930s. Owned by Martin (Grandpa) Vanderhoff, this is also the home of his daughter Penelope (Penny) Sycamore, Penny’s husband Paul Sycamore, Penny’s two daughters Essie and Alice, Essie’s husband Ed, and family friend Mr. De Pinna. The family’s maid Rheba, Rheba’s boyfriend Donald, and Essie’s ballet teacher Boris Kolenkhov are also fixtures of the household.

The cheerfully chaos of the Vanderhoff family’s lifestyle is immediately apparent. As the act opens, Penny writes a play involving a woman from the Kit Kat Club wandering into a monastery, Essie dances ballet while cooking candies, and Paul and Mr. De Pinna experiment with fireworks.

When Alice arrives home and announces that a young gentleman, Tony Kirby, will be calling for her, the family is delighted. Alice, though clearly nervous about introducing Tony to her eccentric family, heads upstairs to get ready for her date. When the doorbell rings, the family joyously anticipates Tony’s arrival, but the caller turns out to be one Willie C. Henderson of the Internal Revenue Department, attempting to collect back income taxes from Grandpa. Grandpa brushed Henderson off, and the next time the doorbell rings, it is indeed Tony Kirby, who spirits Alice off to see a ballet.

Later that same night, Alice and Tony return from their date, giddily delighted with the ballet they saw and with their evening together. Tony proposes marriage to Alice, but their romantic repartee is repeatedly interrupted by various other members of the household. Alice, though clearly deeply in love with Tony, hesitates to accept his proposal, fearful that her eccentric family would never be compatible with Tony’s highly conventional parents. Eventually, Tony is able to persuade Alice that their love can transcend any differences between their families, and the couple happily confirms their engagement.

Act II

A week later, the Vanderhoff family excitedly makes plans for the following evening, when Tony and his parents will be coming to dinner. Alice is terribly anxious that her family’s eccentricities be hidden from the conservative Kirbys.

As if to compensate for the restraint that they are planning to show the next night, the entire family seems even more magnificently erratic than usual. Just as the height of their family madness, Tony and his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Kirby enter, in full evening dress. Tony, evidently, has mistaken the day that they were to come to dinner! The Kirbys are shocked. The Vanderhoff family is at a loss. Alice is stunned.

Desperately, the Vanderhoff family tries to make the Kirbys comfortable, while the Kirbys struggle admirably to appear undisturbed by the chaos around them. Attempts at small talk are repeatedly derailed by the apparent ideological chasm separating the two families, as well as by the random ridiculous events that plague the Vanderhoff household.

Penny attempts to restore an amiable atmosphere by proposing a game called Forget-Me-Not, a word association game. Unfortunately, the game begins to reveal some
uncomfortable truths about Mr. and Mrs. Kirby’s marriage, and the couple, visibly shaken, decides to leave. Alice, taking the events of the evening as proof that her marriage to Tony would be doomed to failure, attempts to break off her engagement.

Just as the Kirbys depart, three officers from the Department of Justice storm the house and arrest all the occupants on suspicion of sedition, because of some texts that Ed had innocently printed and placed in boxes of Essie’s candy that he distributed. The act ends in smoke and explosions as Paul and Mr. De Pinna’s fireworks in the basement are inadvertently set off by Mr. De Pinna’s pipe.

**Act III**

The next day, Alice, humiliated and convinced of the futility of her relationship with Tony, makes plans to leave immediately, alone, for the Adirondacks. Penny and Paul, heartbroken about their daughter’s departure, begin to question their frivolous life choices. Meanwhile, Tony tries desperately to talk Alice into staying and marrying him, but Alice refuses to see him.

Of course, even in the wake of the previous night’s events, the Vanderhoff household’s usual mania continues. Kolenkhov arrives and invites the former Grand Duchess Olga Katrina from Russia – now a waitress at Childs’ Restaurant, Times Square – to dinner. Greeted with appropriate ceremony by the family, the Grand Duchess immediately pops into the kitchen to make her famous blintzes.

Mr. Kirby appears at the door, trying to get Tony to return home with him. Just as the situation seems most dire and Tony and Alice’s love an impossible dream, Grandpa rises to the occasion. Passionately presenting his philosophy of putting his own happiness above money and success, Grandpa convinces first Tony, then Mr. Kirby, and finally Alice not to give up on their dreams and not to give up on love. Mr. Kirby agrees to stay to blintzes for dinner. More importantly, Alice relents and agrees to marry Tony. For the final cherry on top of the group’s happiness, Grandpa reveals how he has been able to avoid paying his income tax, having fortuitously managed to convince the U.S. government that he is dead.
About the Playwrights

While serving as editor of the New York Times’ theatre pages, George S. Kaufman began to write plays and comedies. He also explored directing. He often directed plays he had written—as he did with You Can’t Take It With You—but he is also well known for his direction of other playwrights’ works. He is known as the great collaborator, and usually worked with a writing partner when writing plays. In his long career, he only wrote one play on his own. Kaufman wrote for the stage for thirty-seven years, creating forty-five productions on Broadway, twenty-seven of which were hits.

As a young man, Moss Hart worked with a play touring company as a play reader, where he submitted one of his own plays under a pen name. It was accepted and produced, but when the play failed miserably in a five-week run in Chicago, Hart was fired. He continued to write plays and submit them, and they continued to be rejected. Hart finally wrote a draft that raised the interest of one of a Broadway producers. He thought the play could use some rewriting, and introduced Hart to Kaufman. They worked through the summer on the play, and in September 1930, they play opened and was a smash success. Hart established his career by joining forces with Kaufman.

In their later collaboration on You Can’t Take It With You, as with all of Kaufman’s joint projects, Hart was primarily concerned with plot while Kaufman focused on the witty, sarcastic dialogue for which he was famous. Kaufman and Hart also wrote the hits Once in a Lifetime (1930) and The Man Who Came to Dinner (1939), along with many other plays in the ten years they worked together before amicably separating to pursue new partnerships and/or to work on individual work.
Did You Know?
Facts about *You Can’t Take It With You*

→ The original play opened in 1936 and ran on Broadway for two years for 837 performances, and was sold out months in advance.

→ The play won the 1937 Pulitzer Prize for Drama, and was adapted for the screen in 1938. The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture and Best Director.

→ The play was still running on Broadway when the film was released. It marked the first time in history that a Broadway play and a film based on the same play ran simultaneously.

→ Excerpt from an interview with Christopher Hart, Moss Hart’s son.

*How do contemporary audiences relate to your father’s play? What do you feel resonates for people when they see a modern production?*

**CH:** Even though the play was written a long time ago, the characters seem modern, and their struggles to make ends meet and to “have a little fun along the way” have a very contemporary feel. The similarity between the The Great Depression and The Great Recession—as well as the gulf between the super-rich and the ordinary Joe—still rings a bell. One of the things this production accentuates is how beautifully Grandpa and his family accept all kinds of people—rich or poor, black or white—and the best thing that can happen to you is to be part of a loving family.

*The original Broadway cast of YCTIWY*
Analysis of Major Themes

Wealth (You can’t take it with you…)

Accumulation of wealth is useless when it goes beyond immediate happiness. Whatever one accumulates cannot be taken beyond the grave. If gaining wealth (or achieving other success) is done for others, then it does not bring happiness. Rather, the good life consists in doing what one wants to do instead of what is considered normal or reasonable. After this premise is accepted, the actions become logical extensions of the characters. In other words, the story shows how wealth doesn’t matter and money won’t make you happy.

Do What You Love

Grandpa and his followers seek personal fulfillment, even when their desires lead to activity that most consider meaningless. Grandpa himself collects snakes and attends commencement exercises. Thirty-five years before the time of the play, he had decided to leave his job on the spur of the moment. He rejects the joyless pursuit of money and power. Penny writes plays and attempts to sculpt Mr. De Pinna as a Greek discus thrower. Essie dances and makes candy; at least the candy making shows some profit. Ed prints things that sound good and plays the xylophone. Paul Sycamore makes fireworks, etc. They live their lives in a way that fulfills their happiness, not worrying about what others think about them.

Family & Home

In You Can’t Take It With You, family is a matter of choice—and the more choices the better. Many of the people who live in Grandpa’s house are blood relations, like his daughter Mrs. Sycamore, and his granddaughters. But other folks just seem to have been passing through, like Kolenkhov, Essie’s dance instructor, who comes for dinner every night. Part of the reason the house is so sprawling and chaotic is because it’s home to whoever wants to be there. It’s about loving one another, no matter how off-beat their hobbies are, and welcoming everyone with open arms. This is how the Sycamores lead a happy, loving life.
Vocabulary

➢ **Monastery**: a house for persons, especially monks or nuns, living under religious vows
➢ **Brothel**: a place where men can visit prostitutes
➢ **Calling Card**: a card bearing a person’s name and address, sent or left in lieu of a formal social or business visit
➢ **Trotsky**: Leon Trotsky, a Russian revolutionary and writer
➢ **Russian Revolution**: the 1917 uprising and eventual overthrow of the government which put the Bolsheviks (or Communists) into power
➢ **Czar**: emperor or king; former leadership of Russia
➢ **Pesetos**: the former basic monetary unit of Spain (replaced by the euro)
➢ **Indicted**: formally accused or charged with a serious crime
➢ **Securities Commission**: government agency responsible for financial regulation of securities products like stocks, bonds and other notes representing financial value
➢ **Spiritualism**: a system of belief or religious practice based on supposed communication with the spirits of the dead, especially through mediums
➢ **Gaiety**: the state of being merry or cheerful
➢ **Dictate**: to say or read aloud for another person to type, write down or record on tape
➢ **Helen of Troy**: in Greek Mythology, the beautiful daughter of Zeus and Leda and wife of Menelaus; abducted by Paris, which caused the Trojan War
➢ **Mrs. Roosevelt**: (Anna) Eleanor Roosevelt; a US diplomat, author, lecturer and wife of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt
➢ **Stalin**: Joseph Stalin; the general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from 1922-53, perhaps best known for his ruthless leadership
➢ **Frankfurters**: seasoned smoked sausages typically made of beef and pork
➢ **Solace**: comfort or consolation in a time of distress or sadness
➢ **Burlesque**: a variety dancing show
➢ **Communism**: a political doctrine based on Marxian Socialism that was the official ideology of the USSR
➢ **Trapeze**: a short horizontal bar hung by ropes or metal straps from a support, commonly found in circus performances
Pre-Play Activities

HOW DO WE CREATE A TABLEAU TO DISPLAY FAMILY VALUES?

In *You Can’t Take It With You*, you will meet a family whose values are different from those of the society around them.

MATERIALS: Open space

➢ **ACTIVATE ONE**
  Ask students to stand on an “Agree” or “Disagree” side of the classroom, based on their response to each of these 3 prompts. Prompts should be given one at a time. 1. It is important to make money. 2. It is important to have fun in life. 3. It is important to work hard at something you love doing. After each prompt, ask a few students to articulate their position.

➢ **ACTIVATE TWO**
  Create tableaux, showing families in which everyone holds one of these statements as a core value. Assign students to small groups and ask each group to create a frozen stage picture showing a family in which everyone agrees with the statement. Allow students to present their tableaux without telling the audience their statement. Viewers guess what each family’s shared value is.

**REFLECT**
How did each character in the tableaux demonstrate her/his agreement with the statement? Why do families share values? What happens when people within a family don’t agree on values?

**WRITE (EXTENSION)**
Mix students from different family groups, so characters hold different values. Students can collaborate to write an exchange of dialogue in which their characters debate values and try to persuade each other why their way is the best.
HOW DOES AN ENSEMBLE COLLABORATE TO CREATE COMEDY ONSTAGE?

The sixteen cast members of *You Can’t Take It With You* work together to create moments of physical comedy throughout the show. Often, actors rely on one another to set up a joke or help the audience know where to look. What skills do actors need to do this?

MATERIALS: Open space

ACTIVATE

Gather students into a circle. Have one person, the “it,” begin in the center of the circle. The objective of the game is to stay out of, or get out of, of the center of the circle. There are several ways to do this, all of which rely on quick reaction time. “It” may use any of the options.

1. Bippity-Bop: The person who is “it” points to and looks at a target and says “Bippity-Bop.” If the target says “Bop” before “it” finishes saying “Bippity-Bop,” the target stays where they are. If “it” reaches the end of “Bippity-Bop” before the target says “Bop,” the target is now “it.”

2. Bop: The person who is “it” points to and looks at a target and says “Bop.” If the target speaks, they have lost and they are now “it.”

3. Essie Carmichael: The person who is “it” points to and looks at a target and says “Essie Carmichael” and begins to count to five. The target person, AND the people on either side of him/her must take on the posture of a trio of classical ballet dancers. The person in the middle should rise on their toes and lift their arms into fifth position, a circle over their head. Those on either side should pivot toward the target and hold their arms in third position, one arched overhead and one at chest level. (Perfection in dance poses is not important—students should go for a big, stereotypical ballet look.) If the trio makes it to the ballet position before “it” gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the ballet position, the target becomes “it.”

4. IRS Agents: The person who is “it” points to and looks at a target and says “IRS Agents” and begins counting to five. The target person AND the people on either side of him/her must take on the posture of a trio of IRS agents looking through binoculars at Grandpa Vanderhof, who has never paid income taxes. If the trio makes it to the “IRS Agents” position before “it” gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the position, the target becomes “it.”

5. Mr. De Pinna: The person who is “it” points to and looks at a target and says “Mr. De Pinna.” The target person must hold his/her hands on their head and wiggle their fingers (as if the fingers are fire) and say “AHHHH!” The people on either side of the target use their arms and hands to make a fireworks gesture and say “BOOM!” If the trio makes it to the “Mr. De Pinna” position before “it” gets to five, they win and remain where they are. If they do not make it into the position, the target becomes “it.”
Post-Play Activities

HOW DO INDIVIDUAL ELEMENTS OF A PRODUCTION COME TOGETHER TO CREATE A COHERENT WHOLE?

In a family, each member’s interests and personality contribute to the family’s identity as a whole. Similarly, each element of a production—set, lights, actors, stage management, costumes, music, etc—contributes to the overall show.

MATERIALS: Blank paper, tape or glue, scissors, magazines

➢ WRITE
Who is in your family? Students may focus on a close group of friends, rather than a traditional family, if desired. Create a list of family members, and brainstorm a short list of words connected to each family member. Words can be descriptors or notes about their interests.

➢ ACTIVATE
Create a collage that includes visual representations of each family member. Do not divide the paper into different sections—let the elements overlap and run into each other.

➢ REFLECT
Display completed collages around the room. What do you see in each collage? How would you describe this family as a whole? Why? How do the individual elements of the collage contribute to your sense of the family?
HOW DO WE EXPLORE COMEDY THROUGH IMPROVISED SCENES?

➢ REFLECT
You’ve seen the comic situation that occurs when the Kirbys unexpectedly show up for dinner on the wrong night. Take a few minutes to analyze the scene: Why is it funny? Why is it an important moment in the play? How did Kaufman and Hart create complications to make the scene more hilarious?

➢ ACTIVATE
Improvise variations on the unexpected guest scenario. To begin, the group can generate two lists of prompts. Keep the categories A and B in two separate piles. List A: Activities a person could be doing (e.g., feeding snakes, making fireworks) List B: Jobs/positions people have (e.g., a ballet instructor, a Wall Street businessman, a Russian Princess) Students work in pairs or trios. Student A draws an activity and plays a character doing the given activity. Student B draws a job/role and becomes the unexpected guest. Give a few minutes for the students to plan a scene, thinking about the potential for comedy in this situation. Students should decide an objective for each character. Then, allow a few minutes for each pair to improvise in front of the class. Note: Encourage a “Yes, and” approach to keep the scene moving and building.

➢ WRITE
The improvisations move into playwriting. Students work in pairs or individually to further explore these situations in written dialogue and stage directions. Consider how the situation could become more complicated and comedic.
Theatre Etiquette

Going to a play is a special experience, one that you will remember for a long time. Everyone in
the audience has been looking forward to seeing the performance. A production team puts in
many long hours and a lot of hard work to mount a performance for an audience. If you keep in
mind common courtesy for the performers as well as your fellow audience members,
everyone’s theatre experience will be optimized. What follows are a few reminders for
attending the theatre.

1. Plan to arrive at the theatre thirty minutes before the
performance begins.

2. Gum, food, drinks, or candy are never allowed in the theatre.
You may, however, bring a water bottle.

3. Please go to the bathroom before seating for the
performance or at intermission.

4. TURN OFF ALL CELL PHONES or anything else that can disturb
the production, actors, and audience members during the
performance. It is very impolite to have your phone go off
during the show.

5. Lights will dim just before a performance and then go dark. Acknowledge this by sitting
quietly and calmly.

6. Do not talk or whisper during the performance. The actors on stage can hear you, which is
why you can hear them so well. Laughter is of course permissible at appropriate times.

7. Keep body movements to a minimum. You can’t get up and move around during the
performance.

8. No taking of pictures or video recording is allowed.

9. Don't leave your seat until the cast has taken their curtain
call at the end.

10. Show your appreciation by clapping. The actors love to
hear applause. This shows how much you enjoyed the
performance!
Free Student Programs at The Classic Theatre

STUDENT PERFORMANCES

YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU
BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN & MOSS HART
DIRECTED BY MARK STRINGHAM
SEPTEMBER 14, 2017

A DOLL'S HOUSE
BY HENRIK IBSEN
DIRECTED BY KELLY ROUSH
NOVEMBER 9, 2017

BLESS ME, ULTIMA
BY RUDOLPHO ANAYA
DIRECTED BY JOSE RUBEN DE LEON
FEBRUARY 22, 2018

THE CHERRY ORCHARD
BY ANTON CHEKHOV
DIRECTED BY ANDREW THORNTON
MAY 10, 2018

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Free Student Outreach Programs at The Classic Theatre

Classics in the Classroom- Bringing classics to life in the modern classroom

With funds from the Texas Commission on the Arts, HEB, the Texas Cavaliers, and Rackspace, the Classic Theatre of San Antonio will contract artist educators to take classic plays and literature into San Antonio public, private and magnet high school and middle-school classrooms with our Classics in the Classroom educational outreach program.

We offer your class a 3-day workshop on the following:

Day 1- Exploring Setting: Discover the history behind great playwrights like Shakespeare, Euripides and Moliere, and learn about the political and cultural influences surrounding the play being studied.

Day 2- Understanding the Text: Focus on finding the deeper meaning and introduce the concepts of prose, verse, allusion, metaphor, imagery and other elements of literature. In developing a modern-day translation, students can use the "actor's toolbox" to unlock the meaning and the message of any classic work.

Day 3- Performing the Classics: Students will use small portions of text and/or poetry, monologues and verse to comprehend the classics as they were intended to be performed.

The workshop will culminate in an in-class performance by our contract artist(s) and reserved seating to one of our Student Performances in our 2017-2018 season.

Interested? Teachers, please send an email with your school, grade(s) you are teaching, text you are studying/which edition, and your class schedule to Director of Education, Kacey Roye, at kroye@classictheatre.org