Our Town: A First Experience As A Technical Advisor and Costume Designer

HONORS 499

by

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Our Town: A First Experience As A Technical Advisor and Costume Designer

Abstract:

The objective of this project was to broaden my knowledge and experience with costuming at different levels of theatre production by helping a high school theatre company put on a production of Our Town with appropriately accurate costumes. (By "appropriately accurate" I suggest that the materials, construction methods, and importance of historical accuracy vary with the experience level, budget, and target audience of the production.) I compare those costumes from the high school production with the more historically accurate designs of a professional production.

Acknowledgements:

My special thanks to...

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- Mrs. Valerie Birk for constantly supporting me throughout my college career and attending Our Town.

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The Honors College for a truly unique and rewarding experience.
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A Thesis is Born

The idea for this project came from speaking with my high school theatre director, Ms. Knopp, about how I might be able to help the theatre company with the skills I have learned in college and also give myself an opportunity to exercise those skills and gain some practical experience. As we were talking about the plays I might be able to help with, I was struck with the possibility of the experience counting towards my honors thesis. After deciding that I would need to do some extra work for the experience to truly be an honors thesis, I consulted with my former instructor, Ms. Susan Owens, who costumes for Butler University’s Ballet Company, and has had other costuming experience. We thought that I could look at the difference between different levels of theatre production in conjunction with costuming, so I asked her to be my advisor and she consented to meet with me on a weekly basis throughout the semester to discuss my progress and strategies. I, then, wrote my proposal, it was approved, and an honors thesis was born!

Our Town Comes to Life

The play Our Town, written in 1938 by Thornton Wilder, (Thornton, 2004) and contains scenes taking place in 1901, 1904, 1913, and then a flashback to 1899. I have taken a History of Costume class in my coursework, interned with a Victorian clothing reproduction seamstress, and assembled costumes for plays in high school, but this play challenged me to put the knowledge and experiences I gained in all of these settings into action.

To broaden my knowledge and experience in costuming I read books about costuming with comments from actual professionals and spoke with my thesis advisor
who has experience in the field. I also drew on my experiences in costuming in high school. In addition to what I gained from researching the costuming profession, I drew from my internship experience with Originals by Kay, a one-woman historical clothing reproduction company. This knowledge and experience combined made my job much easier in every way; from different organization skills, to better script analysis approaches, to ease of locating historical photographs and illustrations.

First Things First

The first task a costumer has to tackle in order to create costumes with synergy is to read the script. According to The Costume Designer’s Handbook, 2nd edition, by Ingham and Covey, (1992), “Good theatre designers must be good play readers.” They go on to advise costumers to read the script all the way through, and then again, making notes along the way. After a few more readings, I used their guidelines to come up with a detailed outline of the play that includes the answers to basic Who, What, When, Where, Why questions, but goes deeper and illustrates character relationships and points of view, and cultural notes about the play’s time period and the society within the play. (My outline for Our Town is included at the end of this document.)

Historical Research

The play takes place during the Edwardian period, otherwise known as the beginning of the 20th century, 1901-1914 (with one scene taking place in 1899, on the cusp of the Victorian and Edwardian periods) (Tortora, 1998). Both of these eras represented very different English monarchies, and very different clothing styles. The close of the 19th century saw women in sleeves with fullness at the shoulder falling to slender cuffs, full gored skirts, shirtwaists and tailor-mades. The S-shaped waist with
“pigeon bosom” was achieved with long, restricting corsets, and blouses and shirtwaists draped loosely over the rigid silhouette.

By the early 20th century, women’s sleeve fullness was fairly tamed and fitted, with some three-quarter-length styles becoming popular by 1910. The S-shaped silhouette followed women into the early first decade of the 20th century, as did trained skirts. Throughout the years the Our Town involves, large and outrageously adorned hats with feathers, flowers, and small faux birds remained a must have (Beeman, 2005), while well dressed ladies and gentlemen never left the indoors without gloves (Barton, 1961). It was also taboo for young ladies or married women to wear their hair down or to show their ankles, only young girls wore ankle-revealing frocks and their hair down (Barton, 1961). The mark of a young lady’s coming of age was a longer skirt and a “pompadour” hairstyle (Melville, 1961).

Women wore fabrics of cotton, linen, silk, and wool (Old Fashioned Girl, 2004). Young girls’ skirts exposed nearly the entire calf (Gourley, 1999), while young ladies’ skirts lowered to show the ankle (Barton, 1961), and women’s skirts complemented their S-shaped waists with an inverted bell shape (Bradley, 1986) reaching the floor. As far as coloring is concerned, pastels as well as bright florals and plaid were popular in women’s dresses, with pure white lawn dresses gaining in popularity (Tarrant, 1994). Men’s clothes were somewhat dark and drab consisting of wool tweeds and cotton homespuns. Men’s options were limited to dark greens, grays, Havana brown, dark blue, and black.

The men’s silhouette by the Edwardian era consisted of slim trousers, with the hems turned up at the bottom, and the legs were creased (Russell, 1985). Young boys, at
the time, wore knickers or short pants and wool stockings. Watch pockets were still in use as the wristwatch had not been invented, and hair was slick and parted down the center (Tortora, 1998). The men’s shirt was very starched with a high, stiff collar accompanied with either a four-in-hand or bow tie (Barton, 1961).

**Putting the Research to Work**

After compiling all of my research, sketches, photocopies, and ideas, I went to work applying my newfound knowledge to costuming *Our Town*. I used a lot of pictures and illustrations to make costuming decisions, and looked at actual garments from Ball State’s own Beeman Historic Costume Collection. I also looked to my textbooks, earlier projects, and internship experience.

In discovering that the men should have high, stiff collars, I was elated to find the huge assortment of sizes of identical tuxedo shirts in Central Noble’s costume collection. I set to work assigning all of the male characters a tuxedo shirt – that made my life so much easier and gave their costumes a pretty close rendition of a high, stiff collar. To vary their looks I used a variety of bow and half-windsor ties, with or without vests.

Since this was a high school production, I could not afford to find all of the men hats and gloves, nor could we track down a realistic looking doctor’s coat, but since the play is mostly pantomime, the audience would just have to imagine those things as well. (In a more accurate setting, I would have preferred all the men have hats and gloves). As far as trousers go, they simply wore their own black dress pants. Wally really should have worn knickers – he was even scripted in them – but for lack of time and resources this high school’s Wally Webb wore regular pants.
The female characters presented a much larger challenge. Again, historical accuracy had to suffer because, in a professional production, all of the adult female characters would have been in floor length skirts with trains (Amnéus. 2003), but I had to concede that point quickly due to the lack of skirts. Ms. Knowl and I found some fairly long ones, but some of the silhouettes were all wrong—those skirts went to the extras.

I also struggled with Emily Webb’s wedding attire. I had to allow her to wear a blouse and skirt, rather than a white lawn dress. Early on, considering her father was a doctor and that most girls at that time would have worn a white lawn dress for graduation (Tortora. 1998), it seemed fitting that Emily would wear such a dress again to her wedding that was soon after her graduation. It seems like a small thing to be picky about, so I tried to console myself. When I went to see the play performed, however, I noticed that the actress had the blouse untucked—which NEVER would have happened—and I almost flipped my lid. I guess it is a good thing that everyone in the audience does not do as much research as the costumer, because no one else seemed to care. At least she was wearing white shoes!

Speaking of shoes, thankfully, we did manage to find some high button shoes for the younger characters would be wearing shorter skirts, and therefore their shoes would be showing, but most of the ladies wore more modern heels that were not visible.

Accessories were not a huge concern, because during this time in history, earrings were out of style, so the ladies simply did not wear them, and lockets were acceptable, so most could keep their necklaces on for the show. I found several illustrations of aprons from that time period, so it was quite easy to ensure the accuracy of Mrs. Webb’s and Mrs. Gibb’s aprons. Unfortunately, I did not have time to construct accurate caplets or
outer garments for the women, so knitted shawls had to suffice. The greatest loss of historical accuracy for women in the high school production was somewhat hidden to the untrained eye – it was in the undergarments.

If this had been a more professional production, I am convinced that the women would have been in chemises, corsets, and petticoats. I observed enough fashion plates and illustrations from the era in books like Beukel’s *Fashion design 1850-1895* (1997), Grimble’s *The voice of fashion* (1998), and the Web site *Démodé 1900’s underpinnings* (2004, April 4) and drew from my own experience wearing a corset to see the difference in a woman’s posture, ability to perform household chores, or even sit down, wearing a modern bra compared to an S-bend corset – it is surprising. The torso is literally forced into an S-shape, the breasts are pushed forward, the waist is constricted, and the hips are pushed in the opposite direction of the bust. The trend in theatre and movies is definitely leaning towards more historical accuracy, so I believe the female characters would have worn corsets. (I used a corset to construct the white lawn dress that is discussed later).

One other note on accuracy that could be improved in a professional production (with an actual budget) concerns fabrication. First off, we had to resort to using some synthetic fabrics, which is not only inaccurate, but they do not look as good as natural fibers in stage lighting. As far as construction goes, if I had had a skilled staff, the insides of the garments made for the show that could not be purchased would have been much neater. (Although I could contend that a lot of theatrical costumes are done in a hurry and the construction is usually of lesser quality, for historical accuracy’s sake, seamstresses 100 years ago were very skilled and their work was tidy.)
On With the Show

I had been thinking all along that compiling my historical research would be the difficult part of this project, but I soon discovered how wrong that assumption was. My true difficulty came in taking more character cues from the script than are really there. I was tempted, at first, to simply follow the costume notes in the back of the script word for word. After reading books with comments from professional costumers that advised beginning costumers like me to ignore such notes and make the production one’s own, I soon saw a larger challenge in creativity.

Another huge reason costume selection became a greater creative challenge came when I met with Ms. Cathy Knopp, the play’s director. Ms. Knopp had decided early on that this production was going to be costumed in nothing but black and white...much to my horror. The challenge of a little to no budget production being cast in black and white overwhelmed me at first. Yes, they have some costumes in their collection already that are right for the Edwardian period, but most were not black and white. Thankfully, I finally convinced Ms. Knopp to allow me to incorporate one element of color for each character, but the next challenge for me would be – who wears what colors?

_Our Town_ is not what I would call lighthearted, however, it is normally a staple of any high school theatre company’s repertoire. Wilder’s plays, in fact, usually seek to convey the idea that “…true meaning and beauty are found in ordinary experience…” (Columbia, 2004). Although most high schoolers would be less than convincing in a role demanding they come to understand this precept, the cast I worked with and watched on stage surprised me with their portrayal of the characters that come to make that very realization.
The idea that actors understand their character's role and point of view is important to a costumer. Thankfully, most of the high schoolers in the play were very mature and had come to understand their roles, just as a more experienced dramatist would. The actor's personality combined with the personality they interpret for their character is paramount to a costumer's mere interpretation of the script.

When a costumer is first reading through the script and making notes, it can be difficult to put a visual representation together of the character's personality, even with artistic guidance from the director and historical research. All of that information combined aided in deciding what colors to use in this production (and since I was only allowed to integrate a small amount of color), the personality quirks I observed from meeting the actors gave me inspiration. I decided to use a floral mauve, brown, and yellow fabric for Mrs. Webb's apron, for example, because I knew Natalya (the senior girl playing that part) likes earth tones, and she also influenced the placement of the pockets on the apron.

The example of Natalya's/Mrs. Webb's apron brings up another good point. The silhouette of the apron I used was from an Edwardian illustration of an apron, but I had found several such illustrations, so I had to decide which silhouette suited her character the best. The same went for Mrs. Gibbs' apron, ranging up to the ensemble Emily wore to the wedding.

Queen Victoria, (for whom the Victorian era is named) is credited with starting the white wedding dress trend in full force. The Victoria era, of course, preceded the Edwardian, so by the time Our Town took place, women were wearing white wedding dresses much more frequently than not. This point becomes negotiable when social class
is involved, because poorer people would have simply worn their best dress, and so I had a decision to make when I got around to costuming Emily for the wedding. Is her family well enough off to afford a white wedding dress? I was also influenced by what the theatre company had in their shop already and by time constraints. Having found a white blouse that fit Elizabeth (our Emily) perfectly and was right for the time period, I decided to make a skirt to go with it for the wedding ensemble.

Had this been a more professional production more dedicated to historical accuracy, I think I would have made a white lawn dress, also known as a lingerie dress, instead of a blouse and skirt. These dresses were very popular in the early 1900’s and where made of white cotton lawn or similarly sheer white cotton fabric. They were covered in lace and had lace insertions, and were popular as graduation dresses, or other celebratory occasions.

If this had been a more professional production with a bigger budget, sewing staff, and longer lead-time, I would have simply designed the dress. I designed and constructed a white lawn dress for this thesis project to visually illustrate the difference in costuming selection for different levels of theatre. I chose a white lawn dress for Emily’s wedding because I believe her father, being the town doctor, could have afforded one for her graduation, and she and George married very soon after they graduated from high school.

Another major difference between a high school production and a professional production that would have play, that in a professional theatre group, I probably would not have done so much sewing, but more designing and delegating. I did have the opportunity to delegate some costuming decisions to Elizabeth, the high school
costuming assistant, which was enjoyable getting to know someone who was interested in my field of study and who was a hard worker.

**In Closing**

It was positive that I covered so many aspects of this production because I came to understand how much work and organization this job would demand. A costumer’s duties often include sourcing as well, which I have gained much more experience in as a result of completing this project, as well. I had to scour Good Will stores, comb JoAnn’s, hunt through existing costume collections, and even search through my own supplies to find the right fabrics, laces, and even thread for the production.

From this experience, I learned a great deal about what a professional costumer *truly* does, and I am so much more aware now of what it will take to be successful. I have learned that organization is key (to my sanity) and to keeping a production on schedule. I have learned that the costumer does not just dole out orders and watch the stitchers create fabulous works of art. A costumer is a researcher, a sketch artist, a lobbyist (at least with the director), a technical designer, an artistic designer, a bargain hunter, an accountant, and a people person.
References


Journal Entry 1

1/04/05

I am excited to get this project on the road. Over Christmas Break I met with Ms. Knopp (the director and my former 10th grade English teacher) and I showed her some Edwardian fashion magazines and discussed what I had in mind. She told me she wanted very much to stick with the black and white color scheme to keep the audience more focused on the actors than the costumes. I was very discouraged by that because it seemed so limiting for me...after all, early 20th century Americans didn’t walk around in black and white all the time, they wore pastels, plaids, and prints with flamboyant hats and outer garments. Despite my pleas, Ms. Knopp held her ground for the most part. I eventually convinced her to allow the characters who are alive (some characters die during the play, but are still on stage in Act III) to be allowed one element of color, and then when they die, they would only be in black and white. With some reluctance she agreed, much to my relief!
Journal Entry 2

2/26/05

Saturday going to the work session was really enjoyable and productive. My sister and I loaded up my sewing supplies and etc. and headed to the school. Once we were there, Ms. Knopp and I sat down and I showed her my script analysis and some photocopies of clothing I think we should use for the production. It was kinda funny to sit there in the auditorium and actually be a part of a play again. (And to disagree with Ms. Knopp over costumes again, like I used to do in high school!)

Ms. Knopp’s “black and white” vision doesn’t thrill me, but I’ve got to learn to acquiesce a little – because I’m sure I’ll work with much more difficult bosses....? Thankfully, she’s letting me make colorful hats, shawls, and aprons a part of the show. After our little mini conference, Elizabeth Cupp (the high schooler who’s going to be doing costumes) came in and I gave her a recap, then we went upstairs to the costume room to pull items that can be used from the existing collection.

Once we’d finished there we took measurements of the cast members who were at the work session, broke for lunch, then I gathered some [possibly] useful fabrics from the shop to take home.

I had Elizabeth try on a blouse that Ms. Knopp approved for the wedding scene, and later we had Heron (the hilarious Brazilian exchange student) try on a shirt and jacket that Ms. Knopp also approved.

Carol (my sister) and Jenifer went through the jewelry stash to find brooches.

Heron is so funny, he’ll try on anything and he wants his costumes to have suspenders (he called them suspensers – hee hee!)
Elizabeth got the hang of taking measurements—even inseams—really quickly. She’s going to set up appointments w/ kids this week to get more measurements of the cast.

I took her blouse home to bleach it because it was dingy... Joe Smith (a senior, playing the part of Simon Stimson, and is a friend of my sis) seems like he’ll be cooperative, he is a bright (and ornery!) guy.

We took measurements for one of the baseball players as well. After the work session, Carol and I went to Columbia City’s Goodwill (Ms. Knopp gave me $20 to spend on costuming) and I got some skirts and a hat (that is going to need some transforming). I must say, it’s going to be very hard to get all of the women in black skirts and white blouses and all of the men in black pants and vests or jackets. In the costume shop there are several pieces with color that would work wonderfully for the time period, but Ms. Knopp vetoed them because they’re colorful. This is definitely going to necessitate some more Good Will shopping—especially because we have two girls in the cast who are as tall as mountains! It’s so hard to find floor length skirts for them!
Journal Entry 3

3/11/05

Working with the high schoolers this week really helped me to realize how much I enjoy working with that age group. It doubled my fun to be in my old high school again, in the auditorium for which I helped raise money to build.

While some people don’t idealize a frigid Spring Break spent locked up in a windowless room with a portable CD player and a sewing machine for company, I had a pretty good time! I made aprons for the characters of Mrs. Gibbs (played by my sister) and Mrs. Webb. Since Ms. Knopp wanted everyone in black and white, I talked her into letting me add color with aprons, hats, shawls, and other accessories. (I made the aprons as loud and colorful as possible! Some of the hats are pretty crazy, too!)

I think the project I had the most fun working on was decorating the hats. We ordered buckram forms from a theatre supply company and spray painted them tan, black, and blue, respectively. I added feathers, ribbon, and beads to the hats - one even had a small bird perched on the back. The best part of the whole experience was Ms. Knopp’s approval. I also very much enjoyed making a skirt for the character Emily’s wedding ensemble. I used a white sheet and some polyester taffeta that the theatre company already had, adding some lace for embellishment (I found it at JoAnn’s Fabric store on clearance! It is actually a curtain valance that I cut up!) The taffeta gave the skirt more shape and a nice rustle...

I definitely wanted to design a few shirtwaists but time was prohibitive. We found as many blouses as possible that resembled shirtwaists, and then the women just wore jackets over black skirts. I didn’t really have time to make skirts for the women, so
we found the longest skirts possible (if they would have been totally accurate, you would have only seen the ankles of the young girls). Also, I really wanted to make a long, black velvet cape for Emily (the script calls for a black cape) but time and money put a stop to that.

Since there is an abundance of tuxedo shirts in the costume shop, we put all of the men and boys in those because they are the closest to a high collar we could get on a small budget. I still have a pair of pants that I need to make into knickers, actually.

My sister is attaching ribbon to a straw hat for me because I didn’t have time.

Where did the time go?!?!

I am learning (painfully) to set more realistic goals for myself. AND to be more organized. I kept losing things because I’d set them down and walk away and forget what I’d done with them. That’s what happens when I’m busy and get flustered. I lose things for years that way, but I digress...

I can’t wait to see the play. It was fun to watch the kids practice and to critique their performances with Ms. Knopp. It really made me miss acting and being in high school and not being a grown up!
Journal Entry 4

3/13/05

I just got back to school from Spring Break and helping the theatre company. I felt like I didn’t get half of the things done that I had wanted to, but I guess that leaves more for Elizabeth to do, and that way she’ll take more ownership in the costuming. I wrote her extensive notes on what everyone had been assigned and still needs to be assigned. I had to leave instructions with my mom on where to put the hook and eye on the wedding skirt because – surprise, surprise – I couldn’t find it before I left! Also, I didn’t have time to reattach a ribbon around the brim of a hat, so my sister Carol is going to do that for me. I brought back a pair of pants with me that I need to make into knickers for Wally. (Don’t ask me when I’m going to have time, but I’ll have to make time). I really hope that I can find my receipts for the fabric I bought, because Ms. Knopp said the theatre company would reimburse me for the materials I used for the play. (too bad I’m not getting paid for this! I worked hard all week!)
Journal Entry 5

3/28/05

This weekend was the play and it really was wonderful. I was a little concerned because after Spring Break I had to leave a lot for Elizabeth to do and I was unsure how it would all pan out. I got to visit the cast when they do their “Break a Leg” cheer before the show, and make a little speech. I let them know how much I missed theatre and that it was very important to me in high school and that they were carrying on a long tradition (and I’m sure I said something else, but I started crying when I looked at my sister, all grown up and about to graduate. I’m so proud of her). Unfortunately, she had to speak next and she started crying...we’re criers in my family, what can I say....in any case, the kids appreciated my sincerity.

I was not only impressed with Elizabeth’s costume selections, but with the kids’ performances. Our Town is not exactly a comedy, and serious is hard for high schoolers sometimes, but they made me cry both nights. They really did well. My instructor, Valerie Birk, and her family happened to be in the area that weekend so they came to see the play and she couldn’t stop complementing the kids (and the costumes 😉). Lots of people came up to me after the show and complemented the costumes...high schoolers just there in the audience, kids who were in the cast, their parents, etc.

The kids invited me to their cast party on Saturday after their last performance and strike (when you take down the set, return costumes, and clean back stage), and even though I was a senior in high school when the oldest of them were in 8th grade, I still had a good time. It turns out I wasn’t the only Central Noble Theatre Company veteran there, either, so it was nice to be with fellow “alums.”
Joe Smith, the senior who played Simon Stimson, was presented with his honors theatre key at the cast party (I remember when I got my key! Ahh, memories...) so it was neat to see traditions being continued. My little sister, Carol – being the theatre company president, got to present the key and give a little speech too.
Journal Entry 6

4/4/05

Now comes the hard part. Working with the high schoolers and even researching was fun, but I’m down to the nitty gritty of writing this paper and putting together a “more authentic” garment that would be used in a professional production. I’ve got my fabric and laces, I just need to get crackin’. I also need to crank out some more sketches. Thankfully, Ms. Owens has been so patient with me and constantly gives me pointers and encouragement to get things done. That’s why I picked her to be my advisor!
Our Town Script Analysis

I. Location - Grover's Corners, Sutton County, New Hampshire (pg 36 of script)
   a. Geography
      i. "The name of our town is Grover's Corners, N.H., just over the line from Massachusetts; latitude 42 degrees, 40 minutes, longitude 70 degrees, 37 minutes."
   b. Textural References and Descriptions
      i. Mountains in distance
      ii. The town
         1. RR
         2. Polish Town "foreign people come here to work in the mill"
         3. Churches
            a. Catholic, Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Unitarian, and Baptist
         4. Post Office
         5. Town Hall (jail in the basement)
         6. Row of stores along Main St.
         7. Grocery store & Drug store
            a. "Most everybody in town manages to look into these stores once a day"
         8. cemetery - earliest stone 1670
   iii. Gibbs
1. Mrs. Gibbs’ garden/yard
   
a. Corn, peas, beans, hollyhocks, heliotrope, a lot of burdock (def. = biennial w/pink or purplish flower heads surrounded by prickly bracts and forming a bur in fruit)

b. Woodpile

iv. Webbs

1. Mrs. Webb’s garden/yard
   
a. Corn, peas, beans, hollyhocks, sunflowers, big butternut tree

v. Misc.

1. Banker Cartwright lives “in the big white house up there on the hill”

II. When are they?

a. Act One
   
i. “The first act shows a day in our town”

ii. May 7, 1901

iii. Just before dawn, light increases to noon through action of the act

iv. 2 o’clock

v. Evening – “the day is running down like a tired clock”

b. Act Two

   i. The stage lights fade gradually into an early-morning blue

ii. July 7, 1904 - raining
iii. Flashback to June - clear

1. George & Emily, Junior/Senior yr of high school

c. Act Three

i. Summer 1913 – raining

ii. Flash back Tuesday, February 11, 1899

1. Emily’s 12th bday

iii. Back to Summer 1913

III. Who are they?

a. Relationships and Socioeconomics

i. For relationships see Table I

ii. Socioeconomics

1. lower-middle class, “sprinkling of professional men – 10% illiterate laborers” (pg 18)

2. Farmers

a. Uncle Luke (George takes over farm)

b. George Gibbs

c. Howie Newsome (milkman)

3. Civil Servants

a. Constable Bill Warren

b. Joe Stoddard (undertaker)

c. Simon Stimson (church organist, choir director)

4. Professional Men

a. Doctor Frank Gibbs
b. Editor Charles Webb

c. Joe, Si Crowell (newspaper boys)

iii. Government

1. National
   a. Presidents
      i. February 1899 – McKinley
      ii. May 1901- July 1904 – Theodore Roosevelt
      iii. Summer 1913 – Woodrow Wilson

2. Local
   a. “We’re run here by a Board of Selectmen.”
   b. “All males vote at the age of 21”
   c. “86% Republicans, 6% Democrats, 4% Socialists, - Rest, indifferent” (pg 18)

iv. Religious Environment

1. “85% Protestants; 12% Catholics; Rest, indifferent” (pg 18)

2. Gibbs, Webbs, Mrs. Soames, Simon Stimson, etc., go to Congregational church

v. Beliefs About…

1. Ethical Conduct – Keep out of other people’s business

2. Sex - something cruel…sending girls to marriage (Mrs. W)

3. Marriage – People designed to go 2 x2 (Mrs. G)

4. Family – Appreciate them, but not overly affectionate with

IV. What Happened Before the Play Begins?
a. The Gibbs
   i. Julia Gibbs was Julia Hersey
      1. “And how do you think I felt?”
   ii. Doc Gibbs
      1. “There I was in the Congregational Church marrying a total stranger!”

V. What do Main Characters thing about their world?

a. George
   i. Young, energetic, innocent (pg 57)
   ii. Doesn’t believe in “wedding superstition” (pg 46)
   iii. “…men aren’t naturally good, but girls are.” (pg 52)

b. Emily
   i. “I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.” (pg 52)
   ii. “Mama, am I pretty;” sensitive
   iii. “…all I want is someone to love me.: (pg 62) concerned/anxious
       about being accepted, loved

c. Doc
   i. “Well, I know all I had to do was call your attention to it…” – see rest of line, (pg 29)
   ii. Marriage – “I thought I’d made a mistake for sure…when I saw you coming down that aisle…” he changed his mind
iii. "The relationship of a father and son is the damndest, awkwardest..." (pg 43)

d. Mrs. G

i. "...I don’t know what’s going to become of you...I wish...a rest...would do you good: (pg 9)

ii. "Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces..." (pg 43)

iii. "[George] is no help to me at all..."

iv. "People are meant to live two by two in this world..." (pg 44)

v. "...it seems to me that once in your life before you die you ought to see a country where they don’t talk English and don’t even want to." (pg 15)

e. Ed. W

i. "I guess we’re all huntin’ like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome sink to the bottom."

ii. "We watch the change of the seasons: yes, everybody knows about them"

iii. "Hm - Yes. Haven’t any troubles on your mind, have you, Emily?" (pg 36)

f. Mrs. W

i. "As for me, I’d rather have my children healthy than bright." (pg 11)
ii. "You have a nice, young, pretty face. I never heard of such foolishness." (pg 24)

iii. "George... don't you be the first to fly in the face of custom." (pg 46)

iv. on the morning of the wedding her direction is: Mrs. Webb dries hands on towel, starts to weep

VI. What is the function of each character?

a. Which Characters Lead and Which Support?

   i. Leads

      1. George

         a. Has same struggles with not appreciating loved ones throughout life

            i. Mother Gibbs

            ii. Emily before the "realization moment" and before she dies

      2. Emily

         a. Has fear of unknown, of not being loved

         b. Comes to understanding of what was truly important in life, and how "the living" do not appreciate it

   ii. Supports

      1. Dr. Gibbs
a. Happy with the way life is, always a lighter note to his serious dealings

2. Mrs. Gibbs
   a. Sacrifices her happiness for everyone else’s

3. Mrs. Webb
   a. No nonsense housewife

4. Editor Webb
   a. “Andy Griffith as a New Englander” sensibility

5. Mrs. Soames

6. Simon Stimson
   a. Church organist
   b. He is often drunk
   c. Something underlying that troubles him
      i. He is unhappy with his life and even more-so, it seems, in death
      ii. Is he secretly gay and can’t come to terms?

b. Description of Stereotypical Characters
   i. Mrs. Soames
      1. town gossip
   ii. Howie Newsome
      1. milkman
      2. “Hello, Bill, you’re up early.” To Constable Warren
   iii. Constable Warren
1. never in too much of a hurry

2. says to Mrs. Webb "Good morning, you’re up early."

c. Description of Crowds

i. Wedding guests

1. Jeering Baseball players

2. Choir

3. Admiring Townspeople

ii. Funeral participants

1. Singing “Blessed Be The Tie That Binds”

iii. Cemetery dwellers

1. Dead man who knows Emily

2. Dead woman who was George & Emily’s neighbor

3. Dead people reminiscing about life

VII. What is the dialog mode?

a. Naturalistic dialogue

VIII. What is the play’s action?

a. Pantomime

IX. What is the play’s theme?

a. Appreciate Life in the “little things”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I - Character Relationships in <em>Our Town</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage Manager</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected to All Characters, Omniscient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is acquainted with the Stage Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gibbs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Doc (Frank, husband of Julia, father of George and Rebecca, neighbor to Webbs, inlaw to Emily, acquainted with Howie and Bill)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mrs. (Julia, maiden name Hersey, wife of Frank, mother of George and Rebecca, neighbor to Webbs, inlaw to Rebecca, sister of Carrie, aunt of Sam, in church choir, friend of Myrtle and Louella, acquainted with Simon, Howie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- George (son of Frank and Julia, brother of Rebecca, husband of Emily, brother-in-law to Wally, acquainted with baseball players, Miss Foster, Mr. Morgan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Rebecca (daughter of Frank and Julia, sister of George, acquainted with Miss Foster)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Webb</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Editor (Charles, husband of Myrtle, father of Emily and Wally, neighbor to Gibbs, inlaw to George, acquainted with Howie, Bill, Si, Joe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Mrs. (Myrtle, wife of Charles, mother of Emily and Wally, neighbor to Gibbs, inlaw to George, in church choir, friend of Julia and Louella, acquainted with Howie)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Emily (daughter of Charles and Myrtle, sister of Wally, wife of George, sister-in-law to Rebecca, acquainted with baseball players, Miss Foster, Mr. Morgan, 1st Dead Man, Simon Stimson)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Wally (son of Charles and Myrtle, brother of Rebecca, boy scout, acquainted with Miss Foster, Constable Warren)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Joe (older brother of Si, works for Editor Webb delivering papers, acquainted with Miss Foster, dies in WWI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Si (younger brother of Joe, works for Editor Webb delivering papers, plays baseball with George)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Howie (husband of Mrs. Newsome, milkman, friend of Bill, acquainted with Doc &amp; Mrs. Gibbs, Editor &amp; Mrs. Webb, Joe &amp; Si Crowell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Constable Bill (patrolman, friend of Howie, acquainted with Doc &amp; Mrs. Gibbs, Editor &amp; Mrs. Webb, Joe &amp; Si Crowell)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stimson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Simon (church organist and choir leader, acquainted with church ladies incl. Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Webb, Mrs. Soames)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Louella (wife of Mr. Soames, town gossip/busy body, in church choir, friends with Julia and Myrtle, acquainted with Simon)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Miss (school teacher, about to be married, acquainted with Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb and their children from having them in school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Sam (nephew of Julia, cousin of Emily and Wally, acquainted with Joe Stoddard)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoddard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Joe (undertaker/cemetery attendant, acquainted with everyone)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dead</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- 1st Woman (lived on same road as George and Emily)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 2nd Woman (likes hymn being sung at Emily’s funeral)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- 1st Man (father of Joel, knows George and Emily’s farm, acquainted with Emily)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As members of CNTC build sets, costume casts, plan makeup, design lighting and sound, act or stage manage a show, they earn points. Most assignments earn about eight points. When a company member achieves sixty points and has worked both as a performer and a technician or manager, he or she becomes a Honors' Theatre member and receives an honors' key.
Central Noble Theatre Company

proudly presents

Thornton Wilder's "Our Town"

CAST

Stage Manager
Stephanie Scheurich

Dr. Gibbs
Phillip Goodrich

Joe Crowell
Ryan Hayes

Howie Newsome
Cody Derrow

Mrs. Gibbs
Carol Steffey*

Mrs. Webb
Natalya Bender

George Gibbs
Caleb Frey

Rebecca Gibbs
Whitney Gray**

Wally Webb
Lukas Estep**

Emily Webb
Elizabeth Cupp*

Professor Willard
Josh Ihrie

Mr. Webb
Kyle Hayes*

Woman in the Balcony
Holly Simon

Man in the Auditorium
Heron Duarte

Lady in the Box
Brittany Hosford

Mrs. Soames
Melissa Cornish

Simon Stimson
Joe Smith*

Constable Warren
Jason Rouch

Si Crowell
Ryan Hayes

Baseball Players
Josh Ihrie

Samantha Craig
John Hague

Joe Stoddard
Mike Leatherman

Townspeople: Heron Duarte, John Hague, Brittany Hosford, Jennifer Iden, Josh Ihrie, Mike Leatherman, Hannah Richter**, Kate Reidenbach**, Holly Simon, Amanda Tener

The play takes place in Grovers Corners, New Hampshire.

Act I: 1901
Act II: 1904
Act III: 1913

There will be two five-minute intervals.

* Honors' Theatre
** Middle School Guest Artist

CNTC is producing "Our Town" by special arrangement with Samuel French, Inc.

The Play

When "Our Town was first staged in 1938, its playwright Thornton Wilder was breaking a lot of rules. For a long time, sets were as realistic as possible. At the beginning we are basically told to imagine Grovers Corners and Wilder throws in a couple of trellises for those of us who need scenery. Actors did not acknowledge the audience. Wilder's characters break the "fourth wall" and talk right to the audience. He makes the stage manager a character in the play. You will notice that in this stage manager is like a god. She knows about the characters' past, present and future. She invites people on stage to give the audience background information. The Stage Manager even manipulates time, moving us ahead or flashing back to pick up background stories.

Perhaps Wilder is asking us to hear the words as much as to watch the play. The first act is about daily life which we see mirrored back and forth between the Gibbs's and the Webbs' households. In Act II, we see a friendship evolve into that special relationship. The Stage Manager tells us "It's a good wedding." While the third act takes place in a cemetery, Wilder said he really wasn't trying to say what happens after death. He does use the opportunity to tell us what he thinks is important about life.
FAREWELL

A third of the class of 2005 tried theatre at least once between August 2001 and March 2005, some for a show or two and others for many shows. Several have earned honors' theatre keys. We wish them well as they graduate. We hope that the ones who have loved theatre will continue to participate and that all will be great audience members for the rest of their lives.

Raymond Angel started his CNTC career with the musical "Li'l Abner". He continued acting in "Robin and the Seven Hoods" and he played Juror Twelve in "Twelve Angry Men". Raymond also worked in the control booth for two plays. Some of us wish Jerry Barnhart would have had a little more time for CNTC. We haven’t seen him act but we appreciate his hard work on the sets of "You Can’t Take It With You" and "Murder at the Vicarage".

It’s about time Natalya Bender got on this stage. She played a nice, if slightly kooky, young wife in last fall’s "All Because of Agatha" and you will see more serious work tonight as she brings Mrs. Webb to life.

Dan Bennett appeared as a German soldier in "The Diary of Anne Frank". He played Theseus in "A Midsummer’s Night Dream" and he has also worked in the control booth.

Courtney Bonar worked on hair and make-up for "Robin and the Seven Hoods".

Andrew Brown appeared in "Li'l Abner".

Evan Collingsworth acted as a German soldier in "The Diary of Anne Frank".

We welcome Heron Duarte who traveled all the way from Brazil to make his stage debut in last fall’s "Break a Leg" and who, in true repertory theatre manner, is doubling roles in tonight’s play.

Trent Fogle was in "Annie Get Your Gun" his freshman year.

Jill Freeman was the lady stage manager for those "Twelve Angry Men".

Laura Freeman was student director Carol Steffey’s* stage manager for "All Because of Agatha".

Chris Goodrich sang in "Li'l Abner" his freshman year.

Playing Lysander in "Midsummer Night’s Dream" was Jeff Greeson’s first CNTC stage experience. He also acted in "All Because of Agatha".

Kyle Hayes* also debuted in "Dream" playing Robin Goodfellow a.k.a. Puck. He has also acted in "The Hobbit", "You Can’t Take It With You" (perhaps his best acting), "Break a Leg" and he plays Editor Webb in tonight’s production. Kyle has officially had stage management and lighting designer responsibilities, but he has also helped with a lot of set construction.

Christina Hippensteel is the make up artist for "Our Town".

We haven’t seen much of Nathan Holton this year, but he was a busy CNTC member his sophomore and junior years, acting as Juror 6 in "Twelve Angry Men" and as the bad guy in "Murder at the Vicarage". Nathan tried different technical assignments, but could not stay away from set construction.

Lee Hurst is the last of the German soldiers from "The Diary of Anne Frank". He also acted in "Robin and the Seven Hoods" and "A Midsummer Night’s Dream".

Laura Laymon was on the crew of "Robin and the Seven Hoods".

Dane Leitch acted and worked on set construction of "Break a Leg".

Craig Millhouse acted in "Li'l Abner", "The Hobbit", and "Murder at the Vicarage".

This is Mandy Miller’s* twelfth show! Of those twelve, she has gathered props for six and done more painting than she probably wants to remember. She has also acted in "Annie Get Your Gun", in "Twelve Angry Women" as Juror Six, and in "Murder at the Vicarage". Directors appreciate Mandy’s willingness to do crew and technical work whether she has a part or not.

It is too bad Fawn Mosley is such a busy young woman. She brought Angry Juror Four to life in "Twelve Angry Women" and went on to act in "The Hobbit" and "All Because of Agatha" as the feisty housekeeper.

Steve Neary acted in "The Hobbit" and played quite the gentleman "All Because of Agatha". He has also worked in the control booth.

David Ober appeared in "Annie Get Your Gun" his freshman year.

Andrea Perkins acted in "Break a Leg".

Sed Sagarsee acted in "The Hobbit" and some of his classmates wish he would have continued working on sets.

Krystal Schmitt appeared in "A Midsummer Night’s Dream". Jack Sleser* has appeared in nine plays, starting with "Annie Get Your Gun" through "Break a Leg". Jack played Juror Four in "Twelve Angry Men" and Bottom in "Dream". He also had stage manager responsibilities for student director Gavin Weeks’ play "You Can’t Get There From Here" and this fall’s "Break a Leg".

It took Joe Smith a while to give this theatre thing a try, but look out! Joe’s first role was Juror 5 in "Twelve Angry Men" at the end of his sophomore year. Since then he has acted in "The Hobbit", "You Can’t Get There From Here", "Murder at the Vicarage", "Break a Leg", and "All Because of Agatha". Joe is another one who has done a lot of stage construction and he is the actual stage manager of this play, quite suited to the task because he is combining the qualities of a cop, a big brother, and a director.

The first member of the class of 2005 to earn her Honors’ key, Carol Steffey* is also this year’s theatre company president. Carol has costumed or helped costume at least five shows and she is a fun actor to watch, bringing to life characters in "Little Women", "Robin and the Seven Hoods", "Dream", "The Hobbit", and "You Can’t Get There From Here". We hope you appreciate her more serious turn in this production. Perhaps the highlight of Carol’s CNTC career was directing "All Because of Agatha". A student director can only succeed if she has earned the respect of her fellow company members and her cast would say she succeeded.

"Li'l Abner" was Angie Thomas’s first theatre company work. We do not know if Angie would have joined had it not been for the musical, but we are glad she continued. She appeared in "Robin and the Seven Hoods", brought Juror 11 to life in "Twelve Angry Women" and played Anne Protheroe in "Murder at the Vicarage", even going on for another actress when Angie was to have the night off.

Jordan Woods was impressive as Juror 3 in "Twelve Angry Men" and he has also appeared in "Murder at the Vicarage" and "All Because of Agatha".

* Honors’ Theatre
with gratitude to...

Tim Hollis-electrical work
Tim Lock & Tom Trowbridge-this and that
Diane Perlich & Mandy Geiger-calendars
Jami Pyle-purchase orders
Jennifer Estep-proofreading
Jerry Polman & Chamber Choir-hymns
Geoff Brose-publicity
Nancy Egolf-coordination, Grade 8 matinee

Jerry Wellman & Brent Wilson-permission, Grade 8 matinee
Duber Merriman, Doc's-special orders
Lana Sheurich-hairstyling
Ann Winebrenner & Asbury United Methodist Church-chairs
Jane Bitting*—teaching light design
Beth Steffe*—costuming

END NOTE

This is where I usually try to say something profound about the meaning of the play, the importance of the arts in a sports-mad world, or tell you something about our actors, but maybe you already get the play and the importance of art to the human experience. Some of these young people get it too. So I decided to lighten up. This is for the kids to remind them of all our work sessions, cast parties, and Thurston awards, the times we just relaxed and shared a meal. Ms. Knopp

Theatre Company Hot Chicken Sandwiches

Ingredients
3 Rotisserie Chickens, meat picked from bones in 1 inch pieces
1 medium-to-large onion, diced
3-4 ribs celery, diced
2 cups chicken broth
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can cream of celery soup
1 sleeve Townhouse crackers, crushed
1 roasted red pepper, diced (optional)
salt to taste
pepper to taste

Directions: Saute the diced onion and celery in cooking oil or butter. Place first six ingredients in large slow-cooker, salt and pepper sparingly and set on low for three hours. An hour before serving, add crackers, red pepper, and adjust salt and pepper to taste. Serve on hamburger buns. Makes 20 to 24 sandwiches.
Our Grand
Olivia Webb

ACT I SCENE 1