

STUDY GUIDE

— *Deceit & Murder* —

CALAMITY TOWN

*A Play by Joseph Goodrich based on the
novel Calamity Town by Ellery Queen*



DIRECTED BY CRAIG HALL & NATHAN PRONYSHYN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Pg. 3
Top 10 Things to know about going to the theatre	Pg. 4
About the play and the novel	Pg. 5
Cast and Crew Credits	Pg. 6
Synopsis and Characters	Pg. 7
Inside Vertigo Theatre — Joseph Goodrich	Pg. 8
Pre-Show Discussion Questions and Projects	Pg. 11
WHO? Eavesdropping	
WHAT? Adaptation	
WHEN? Radio Ads	
WHERE? The List Poem	
WHY? Burning Questions	
Pre-Show Activities To Get Students Up On Their Feet	Pg. 15
Painting the Picture	
Reconstructing the Crime!	
Post Show Discussion Questions	Pg. 19
The Art of the Theatre Review	Pg. 20
About Vertigo Theatre/Education and Outreach	Pg. 21
Workshops/AYA Program	Pg. 22

Vertigo Theatre is committed to creating a welcoming atmosphere for schools and to assist teachers and parent chaperones with that process. It is our wish to foster and develop our relationship with our student audience members. It is our intention to create positive theatre experiences for young people by providing study guides and post-show “talk backs” with our actors and theatre personnel, in order to enrich students’ appreciation of theatre as an art form and enhance their enjoyment of our plays.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Study Guide for Vertigo Theatre's world premiere production of CALAMITY TOWN by Joseph Goodrich (based on the novel *Calamity Town* by Ellery Queen).

In this guide you will find background information on the play, information about the creative team and performers, as well as a variety of activities to do with your class before and after the show. There are activities suitable for class discussion, individual projects, as well as games and exercises that get students moving around and learning on their feet.

For this production, we have chosen to highlight Story Creation. You'll find tools that playwrights use to generate and develop settings, characters, and plot. Some are writing assignments and others are activities to do on your feet, so you can choose the ones that work best for your class.

This guide can be used solely by you, the educator, but it is also full of pictures and hyperlinks, so it can be used interactively with a SMART Board. We have tried to keep the text and instructions simple and straightforward to keep you and your students doing fun things rather than wading through a bunch of text.

Sometimes your students might read an unusual word or term and feel some "vertigo", so we've got handy-dandy blood spatters that give definitions. Like this:



Vertigo is a medical condition one of the symptoms of which is the sensation of movement in a sufferer who is not moving. Often it feels like a spinning or swaying movement. Vertigo is the most common type of dizziness.

ENJOY!

TOP 10 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT GOING TO THE THEATRE

Because some of you may be first-time theatre attendees (and some of you more experienced theatregoers may need a little reminder), we've compiled a Top 10 list of some of [New York Show Tickets Do's and Don'ts of Broadway Theatre Etiquette](#) as well as a few of our own:

1. **Power Down**

Turn off your cell phone, people. Turn. It. Off. And, no, putting your cell phone on vibrate isn't good enough - the people next to you can hear that weird buzzing sound, too. Besides which, the use of cameras and recording devices in the theatre is strictly prohibited.

2. **Don't Send Text Messages During the Show**

You may think you're being all incognito, but in a darkened theatre, the light from your cell phone screen is incredibly distracting to those around you. And why do you still have your phone on anyway? We just told you to turn it off!

3. **Eat Your Lunch Before the Show, Not DURING It**

This isn't the movies. Eating, drinking or chewing gum is not permitted in the theatre. There is a water fountain out in the lobby for your use during the intermission.

4. **Unwrap Cough Drops and Candies in Advance**

If you anticipate any coughing fits during the show, be sure to unwrap your lozenges before the performance starts and have them at the ready. That crinkling sound is like nails on a chalkboard during a quiet play. And, no, unwrapping it S-L-O-W-L-Y does not help the situation ... it's much, much worse.

5. **PreShow=PreChatter**

When the houselights go down at the beginning of the play, this lets you know that we're starting. It is at this moment that the actors and technical staff do their final preparation for the opening moment, so please let them do their work by being quiet and respectful.

6. **Don't Be A Disruptive Miss Manners**

Sure, it's irritating when someone's cell phone goes off, but what's even worse is when it's followed by a series of annoyed "Tsks," "Hmphs," hisses, snarls, and shouts of "Turn it off!" can be just as distracting as the original disruption.

7. **Zip Those Lips**

A quick whisper to your neighbour, or an audible reaction to something interesting that happens on stage is fine (this is the live theatre, not the morgue), but keep conversations to the intermission and after the show.

8. **Stay put, watch and enjoy the play.**

If you absolutely must use the washroom during the performance, please exit the theatre quickly and quietly. You will be readmitted to the theatre at the discretion of the House Manager.

9. **You're not in your Living Room**

Please do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat or stage in front of you. Everyone around you, including the actors, will appreciate it.

10. **Enjoy Yourself!**

Come to the theatre to get swept away into another world. Be sure to thank all of the artists for their hard work by applauding during the curtain call.

ABOUT THE PLAY AND THE NOVEL

Calamity Town is an adaptation of the novel of the same name by Ellery Queen. Joseph Goodrich, who is an aficionado of the Ellery Queen stories adapted the novel in 2013, and Vertigo Theatre is excited to be giving the play its world premiere!

This isn't the first time that the novel has been adapted into a dramatic medium. In 1979, Yoshitaro Nomura, a Japanese filmmaker adapted for the screen as *Haitatsu Sarenai Santsu no Tegami* (The Three Undelivered Letters). It has also been translated into many different languages:

Danish: Ulykkesbyen
Dutch/Flemish: De Verliefde Detective
Finnish: Salaperäiset varoitukset
French: La Ville Maudite
German: Schatten über Wrightsville
Hebrew: לייטקוקה
Italian: Il Paese del Maleficio
Japanese: saiyakunomachi
Mexican: La Casa Maldita
Norwegian: Arsenikkmordet
Polish: Przekłete miasto
Portuguese: Vivenda calamidade
Russian: Несчастливый город
Spanish: La ciudad desgraciada
Swedish: Mr Queen har otur
Czech: Město malérů



Ellery Queen, the novelist, is an interesting “character” himself. Ellery Queen was the collaborative pen name of cousins Frederic Dannay (1905-1982) and Manfred Bennington Lee (1905-1971). Beginning in 1929, the pair wrote more than 30 novels and numerous short stories under the name Ellery Queen. Their novels were among the most popular crime fiction of the 1930s and 1940s. Critic Otto Penzler has said that, “Ellery Queen clearly is, after Poe, the most important American in mystery fiction.”

Ellery Queen was also the name of the detective character in their novels. This served to blur the line between fiction and reality, not unlike the way many people thought the Sherlock Holmes stories were true cases passed along to Arthur Conan Doyle.

He lives on today as the namesake of a popular monthly collection of new crime fiction called “Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine”.

A pen name is a pseudonym adopted by an author. A pen name may be used to make the author's name more distinctive, to disguise his or her gender, to distance an author from some or all of his or her other works, to protect the author from retribution for his or her writings, to combine more than one author into a single author, or for any of a number of reasons related to the marketing or aesthetic presentation of the work.

CAST AND CREW CREDITS

THE CAST

(In order of appearance)

TYRELL CREW	Ellery Queen
KEVIN ROTHERY	Pettigrew/Willoughby/Eli/Dakin
JULIE ORTON	Nora Wright
JAMIE KONCHAK	Lola Wright/Rosemary Haight/Roberta Roberts
LINDSEY ANGEL	Patty Wright
CHRIS HUNT	John F. Wright/Samson/Garback
KAREN JOHNSON DIAMOND	Hermione Wright/ Emmeline Dupre
KYLE JESPERSEN	Carter Bradford
CURT MCKINSTRY	Jim Haight

CREATIVE TEAM

CRAIG HALL	Co-Director
NATHAN PRONYSHYN	Co-Director
JOHN WEBBER	Set & Lighting Designer
DEITRA KALYN	Costume Designer
DEWI WOOD	Composition & Sound Design
JAMIE NESBITT	Projection Designer
PATTI NEICE	Stage Manager
JUSTIN BORN	Assistant Stage Manager
MEREDITH JOHNSON	Apprentice Stage Manager
TECHART CUSTOM CREATIONS	Set Construction
KEVIN COREY	Head of Props
CAROLYN DEVINS	Wardrobe
KIRA SAMS	Wardrobe Apprentice
DAWNA MARK	Head Scenic Painter

TIME & PLACE

Summer, 1940 through Spring, 1941; Wrightsville, a small town in New England

CALAMITY TOWN by Ellery Queen is used with the express permission of The Frederic Dannay Literary Property Trust, The Manfred B. Lee Family Literary Property Trust and their representatives, Jaberwocky Literary, Inc.

The video and/or audio recording of this performance by any means
whatsoever are strictly prohibited

SYNOPSIS & CHARACTERS

SYNOPSIS

It's 1940, and there is nowhere in the country seemingly more charming than Wrightsville. The Depression has abated, and the New England town is booming once again. There is hope in Wrightsville, but Ellery Queen has come looking for death. The mystery author is hoping for fodder for a novel, and he senses the corruption that lurks beneath the apple-pie façade. A jinxed house, poisonings and murder are all on the menu, as Queen sits back, waiting for crime to come to him...

CHARACTERS

ELLERY QUEEN - A mystery novelist who has come to Wrightsville under the assumed name of Ellery Smith.

JOHN F. WRIGHT - A banker. The town of Wrightsville is named after his family and they have lived there for generations.

HERMIONE WRIGHT - John's wife.

PATTY WRIGHT - The youngest daughter

NORA WRIGHT - The middle daughter. Engaged to and then later marries Jim.

LOLA WRIGHT - The eldest daughter. Divorced, lives in the bad part of town, has a penchant for drinking.

JIM HAIGHT - Former bank cashier. Engaged to Nora, jilted her, and then eventually returned to marry her.

ROSEMARY HAIGHT - Jim's sister. Recently arrived in town.

ROBERTA ROBERTS - A radio news reporter.

CARTER BRADFORD - The new County Prosecutor.

J. P. SAMPSON - Proprietor of Sampson's Pawn Shop

MYRON GARBACK - Proprietor of High Village Pharmacy

EMMELINE DUPRE - Teacher of Dance and Drama

J.C. PETTIGREW - A real estate agent.

DOCTOR WILLOUGHBY - The town physician

ELI MARTIN - A lawyer and an old friend of the Wright family

CHIEF DAKIN - The Wrightsville Chief of Police.

INSIDE VERTIGO THEATRE

Joseph Goodrich is no stranger to Vertigo audiences. His play *Panic*—which won the 2008 Mystery Writer of America Edgar Award for Best Play—delighted audiences in 2012-13 season. We had a few questions about *Calamity Town*, his inspirations, and his advice to young writers.



Out of the many Ellery Queen mystery novels and stories, what drew you to this one?

CALAMITY TOWN has long been a favourite of mine, but it wasn't the first Ellery Queen novel I considered adapting. I'd originally been drawn to the second of the first three books Queen set in the fictional New England town of Wrightsville: THE MURDERER IS A FOX. (CALAMITY TOWN is the first Wrightsville book; the third is, in my opinion, Queen's darkest and strongest novel: TEN DAYS' WONDER.) In FOX, Ellery reconstructs a murder that took place over a decade before; the book has a dual time frame that struck me as very theatrical—the past and the present existing at the same time. But I ultimately chose CALAMITY TOWN.

What were the challenges in adapting this novel? At the outset, did you have a sense of how you would tell the story for theatre or did you discover it along the way?

Shortly before I settled down to the task of adapting one of Queen's novels, I went to see THE 39 STEPS on Broadway. The show is a very amusing, lengthy in-joke about Hitchcock's film. I was taken with its theatricality, and I asked myself, what if that approach was used to tell a more serious story? CALAMITY TOWN is—among other things—the story of a town torn apart by a crime. Queen's book presents a panoramic portrait, and it made sense to me to use overtly theatrical devices to characterize the town and its inhabitants: narration, direct address, multiple casting, lighting shifts and a non-realistic setting. An easy and reasonably accurate way to describe my modus operandi might be: Our Town—with murder.

Were there any parts of the story that you really wanted to include but just couldn't make work?

I had to condense or remove a fair amount of material to fit the novel into two hours, more or less, but I can't say there's anything I regret cutting or couldn't find a way to fit in. Though the play differs from the novel—how could it not?—I hope it conveys the feel of the book. If you know the novel, I'd be delighted if you said, "That's it, that's CALAMITY TOWN." If you haven't read the novel, I'd be delighted if the play led you to it.

Who was your favourite character to write and why?

All of the characters are favourites, really; I have to sympathize with and inhabit each of them to be able to write them. That said, I admire Patty Wright's forthright, passionate nature. She goes to great lengths to see that justice is done—even when her choices aren't necessarily the best ones to make. But as I say, I like them all.

Other than Ellery Queen, which writers were inspirational to you?

There have been many. In the mystery world, I keep returning to Dashiell Hammett and Ross Macdonald, who were fascinating writers and fascinating people. Though he isn't a writer per se, Alfred Hitchcock's work is a long-term interest of mine (as those who saw my play PANIC at Vertigo will know). Lucille Fletcher, author of the SORRY, WRONG NUMBER and other radio plays and novels, is a neglected writer who deserves more attention. Outside of the mystery field, I've been reading and re-reading Marcel Proust for almost twenty years.

If you could give your younger self a piece of advice about being a writer, what would it be?

That's a tough one. I think we learn what we need to learn as we need it, and only through trial and error; in other words, I don't know if my younger self would listen me. But if I could pin that youngster down for a moment, I'd tell him that a writing career has two parts—the aesthetic and the practical—and that both must be tended to. I think I could have been a better advocate for my work earlier on; I could have worked harder to promote it, to get it out into the world. It's a particularly relevant point when talking about plays. A novel, published or unpublished, is still a novel—but a play doesn't exist until it's been produced. Young or old, a playwright lives for the moment the lights come up onstage.

BONUS! Here's an article written by playwright Joseph Goodrich on finding your voice as a writer and finding voices for your characters. It was originally published on the Trace Evidence Blog (trace-evidence.net).

HEARING VOICES: JOSEPH GOODRICH

As a playwright and a writer of fiction, I spend a lot of time alone in a room talking to myself. It's only natural that the question of voice fascinates me.

When I talk about voice, I'm talking about two things, really: the voice of an author, and the voices of an author's characters.

The first is a subtle combination of subject matter, language, experience, and perspective—the sum of all the choices a writer makes in the creation of a work. Those choices are as singular as fingerprints, and also serve as identification. It's why Hammett doesn't sound like Christie, and why Christie doesn't sound like Highsmith. Another word for this is style, which Raymond Chandler once defined as “the projection of personality.”

A character's voice is a lot like an author's: It reflects the age, background, likes and dislikes of that character, and serves to distinguish one character from another. For me—and this is a result of years of working in the theater—the key to a character's voice is sound. Marty Kaplan, the narrator of my short story “Red Alert” (AHMM, November 2014), is an East Coast wisecracker of a certain age who was once in show business. His sound is snappy, irreverent—and what he says is (I hope) entertaining.

When I'm moving words around at my desk, or contemplating notes scrawled in a Moleskine, or walking down the street with a head full of jangling story fragments, one of the things I'm doing is listening for the sound of the piece in question. Sound isn't separate from sense, of course. The two are related. But “Call me Ishmael” creates a different effect than “Hey, it's Ishmael. How are ya?”

Voice is what draws us to certain writers and characters. It's the single most important factor in appreciating (or not appreciating) an author's work.

An editor once cut some lines from one of Raymond Chandler's stories because they didn't advance the action. Chandler begged to differ. He believed that what readers really cared about was:

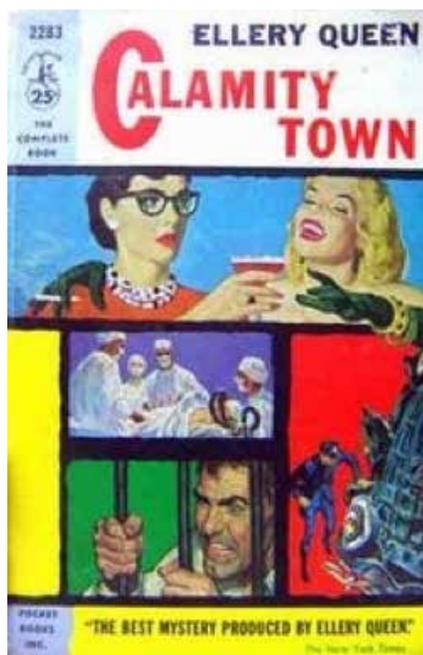
the creation of emotion through dialogue and description; the things they remembered, that haunted them, were not for example that a man got killed, but that in the moment of death he was trying to pick a paper clip up off the polished surface of a desk, and it kept slipping away from him, so that there was a look of strain of his face and his mouth was half opened in a kind of tormented grin, and the last thing in the world he thought about was death.

We're all aiming for that golden combination of language, psychological truth, and urgent circumstance that makes for great reading.

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said that character is fate. Our fictional creations reveal their fates through the language they use. Voice is fate.

I'd better get back to mine.

It's time again to start listening . . .



PRESHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND PROJECTS

WHO? Eavesdropping!

Characters are another important part of storytelling. We can tell so much about a character by how they speak, the rhythms of their speech, and what they choose to say.

Activity: Have the students go to a location and eavesdrop on two people they don't know having a conversation (in line at a grocery store or movie theatre, coffee shop, etc). Have them record it exactly as they heard it, including the hesitations, repetitions, interruptions, etc. One or two pages maximum. (DON'T GET CAUGHT!)

Part 1: Figure out how you capture the conversation and sound on paper so that someone else can read it the way you heard it.

Part 2: Have other students read out your scene. Get the class to try and pinpoint what the two people of that conversation are like – their age, gender, relationship, etc. If so, what were you successful at capturing in the writing, and if not, what might you do to be more specific?



WHAT? Adaptation

CALAMITY TOWN is an adaptation of the novel of the same name. Have you ever read a book and then seen the movie version of it? How is it different? What kinds of things have to change when you adapt a book to a film?

Think of your favourite book or graphic novel. If you had to adapt it to the stage how would you do it? What would you have to change to make it work?

Literary adaptation is the adapting of a literary source (e.g. a novel, short story, poem) to another genre or medium, such as a film, stage play, or video game. It can also involve adapting the same literary work in the same genre or medium, just for different purposes, e.g. to work with a smaller cast, in a smaller venue (or on the road), or for a different demographic group (such as adapting a story for children).

WHEN? Radio Ads

In the play we hear a radio reporter and some old-fashioned radio commercials:

Pepsodent - http://www.oldtimeradiofans.com/old_radio_commercials/Pepsodent.mp3

Aunt Jemima - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVVeO3u2RfQ>

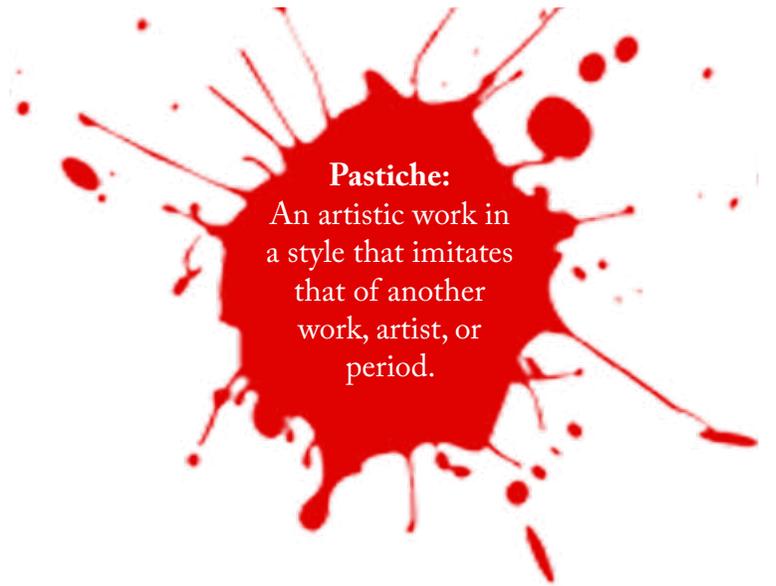
Household Finance Corp - http://www.oldtimeradiofans.com/old_radio_commercials/Household_Finance_Corp.mp3



What's the difference between the old style radio commercials and today's modern radio commercials?

Activity: Create a pastiche radio commercial of your own! Take a modern product and write an ad in the style of a 1940's radio commercial.

Read it out to the other students (or if you prefer, record and edit them in Garage Band to include music, as well.)

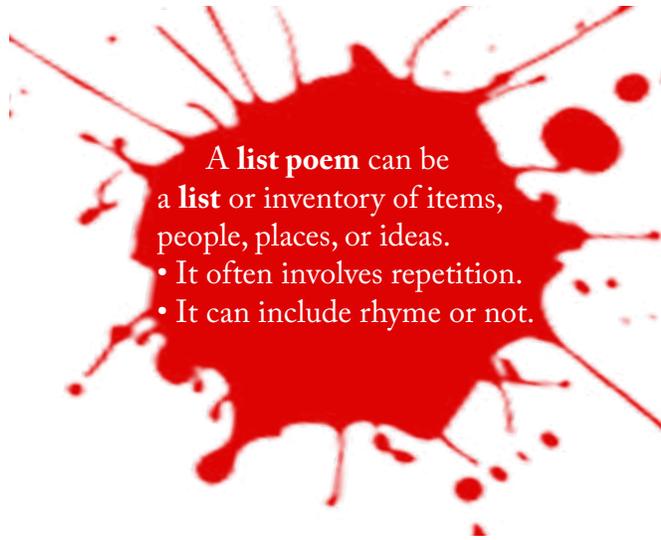


WHERE? The List Poem

Place is an important part of storytelling. Poet Marianne Moore expresses the importance of details in the setting by saying, “imaginary gardens with real toads in them”. By this she means that we can create whatever sort of place or world we like so long as it has real, life-like details. Calamity Town is set in a small town called Wrightsville, in the early 1940s, and giving the audience details of how the town looks helps us feel like we’re inside the story.

Keeping that in mind, have some fun with the following activity which draws upon your abilities to observe and describe:

Activity: pick a place of your choosing (neighbourhood, Grandmother’s house, playground, etc). Go to that place and make a list poem. For our purposes, we’ll keep it to a list of specific things that are in a particular area or place – no need to use rhyme (see the example below). Read your list poem out to the class and see if the class can figure out where the place is based on the items on your list.



Example of List Poem:

A modern grey couch with sharp lines and green accent pillows
A large black IKEA cabinet with shiny panels
A large Samsung flat-screen TV
Shiny hardwood floors
Family photos on the mantle

Notice how the images are specific. “A modern grey couch with sharp lines and green accent pillows” vs. “a couch”.

WHY? Your Burning Questions

There will be a question and answer session after the show. What questions do you have about putting on the play? What have you always wanted to know about theatre? What do you want to know about being an actor?



PRESHOW ACTIVITIES

TO GET YOU UP ON YOUR FEET

PAINT THE PICTURE!

When writing a play or a novel or any kind of story, having a strong and specific sense of place helps to bring your audience or readers into the world of the play. This activity will help students learn what kind of details make a setting come to life.

Instructions: Set the class up as an audience with a large open space in front of them. Ask for a suggestion of a place (something simple like an old house or a diner or an office works best). One by one students come onto the stage space and “paint the picture” of the scene.

For example, if the suggestion was a diner, a student would come up and say something like, “there’s a long counter top with perfectly arranged salt and pepper shakers and napkin holders” as they take a position on centre stage. Another student might come up to another spot on the stage and say, “there’s an old mop in a bucket leaning against the corner.” A third student would go up to a different part of the stage and say, “there’s a neon sign in the window flashing OPEN”. The student could even flash her hands like the sign. Students continue on for as long as it takes to get a good sense of the scene. Then you can start a new one or use one of the variations.



PAINT THE PICTURE!

Tips! Encourage students to use specific details. Ask them the difference between, for example, “a restaurant booth” and “a restaurant booth with red vinyl seating that has torn patches covered by duct tape”. The details tell us everything.

Avoid putting people in. Focus on the place itself.

Details don't have to be crazy. Simple things can tell us a lot.

Use a variety of senses. Details don't have to be just physical. “the smell of grease wafting out of the kitchen”, “the sticky lip of the syrup jar”, “the sound of distant traffic passing on the highway.” They can even make the sounds!

- Variations:**
1. Once you've created a setting, use it as a starter for a story (either written or improvised). For a written assignment, each student decides which characters would exist or enter into the specific place and they write the opening of a story. If you want to improvise it, ask one student to come in as a character, allow them to interact with the space in some way (eg. Start cleaning the counters or reading a newspaper). Then have a second character enter. Maybe even a third! The more characters, the more challenging it gets. If they're nervous about speaking, an alternative is to have them play the scene silently.
 2. Split the class up into groups of 5 students. Give each group a secret location. Ask them to have each group member select one detail of the setting. Present to the rest of the class and see if they can guess what the setting is. Discourage them from choosing obvious things like “a sign that says Diner”. And you can choose more challenging settings. Instead of “a house”, choose “a house owned by a former US President”.



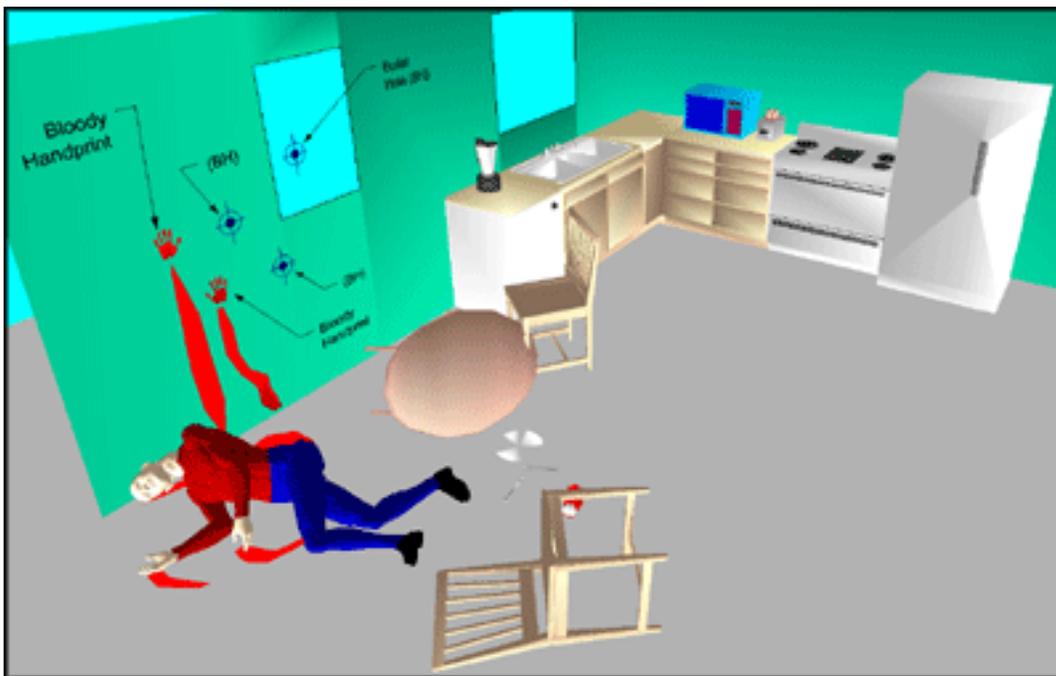
RECONSTRUCTING THE CRIME!

In CALAMITY TOWN, as in many plays from the mystery genre, “reconstructing the crime” is a climactic element of the story. The investigator will think back to the events just prior to the crime and put together what happened, trying to figure out what details they missed. Sometimes this is purely in their own headband sometimes it happens right in front of the audience. Reconstructing an event presents a number of challenges. Our memories, though powerful, aren’t perfect. Try your hand at it and see what happens . . .

Instructions: Ask everyone to leave the classroom and then re-enact *exactly* how they came into the room for the day’s class. Use the following to guide them:

- Who did you follow?
- What did you say?
- How did you walk?
- Where did you go?
- What did you do with your coat/bag, etc.

Tips: This will certainly take a number of attempts! Start with the things your students know for sure and then try to put together what they forgot. It will help if you pay particular attention to what happens on that day. Another option is to video their entrance into class, so everyone can go back after creating their “version” of it to see what they were able to capture accurately and what details they missed or altered.



Discussion: After you finish, you might discuss the following questions:

- What parts of our lives do we tend to forget?
- How mindful are we of what we are doing?
- What's the difference between "acting" the entrance and the real thing?
- When watching a play, how important are the small, seemingly inconsequential details of life to the telling of the story?
- How is reconstruction used in the real world — in a criminal context and elsewhere?



POST SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. As you saw in the play, the setting (place and time) is important to the story. Wrightsville is almost a character in itself. The playwright went through great effort to set up a shared imagination of time and place with the audience. Thinking back to the beginning of the play, how did the playwright set the scene for you?
2. Setting the story in a small town creates a specific set of realities for the characters where things like reputation (“keeping up with the Joneses”) and deep dark secrets all play a key role. What is the importance of reputation to the characters in the play (in particular Lola, Hermione and John F)? How might this story differ if it were set in a large city instead of a small town?
3. Would this plot line be possible if it took place in 2015? How might it change?
4. What’s is the purpose of the direct address to the audience in the play?
5. How did you feel about Ellery Queen’s character involving himself into the action of the story and the lives of the people who lived there? Was he being manipulative or did he genuinely care for them?
6. Ellery and Patty withhold the information about the letters from the police. Had they brought that forward sooner, would things have turned out differently?
7. Why does Roberta the reporter not come forward about being Jim’s sister?
8. How did you feel about Patty getting together with Carter at the end of the story after having been in a relationship with Ellery for the majority of the play?
9. Did your feelings about Jim change after you found out about what was really going on in his life? What about Nora? Did you sympathize with her?



THE ART OF THE THEATRE REVIEW

Now that you've seen the production, it's time to write a review. But how do you do it? Where do you start? The Guardian Theatre critic Lyn Gardner [suggests](#):

A traditional theatre review often begins by giving the reader some background about a production, a brief outline of plot and themes, a sense of what the staging looks (and sounds) like; it offers an evaluation of the writing, the production and the performances and concludes with a summing up.

But, most importantly, she says that:

The first rule is that there are no rules – you're writing a review to express your thoughts and feelings about a theatre show, not taking an exam. There are as many ways to write a review as there are personal responses to any production. There is no right or wrong. Allow yourself to develop your own distinctive voice, and be honest about what you really think about a production: convey your enthusiasm for it or explain why you disliked it. Don't worry about going out on a limb. A timid theatre review is often a dull read. The hardest reviews to write are not about the shows you passionately loved or hated, but about ones that were just so-so.

To begin, jot down what stuck with you in the production.

- What do you remember the most?
- Which performances did you love and why?
- What did you think of the costumes, the set, the lighting, the sound?
- Did you like the story?
- Did the production make you feel something?

This last question is perhaps the most important. Kenneth Tynan, one of the most celebrated critics of all time said the following about that very topic:

If a play does anything—either tragically or comically, satirically or farcically—to explain to me why I am alive, it is a good play. If it seems unaware that such questions exist, I tend to suspect that it's a bad one.

By “explain to me why I am alive”, Tynan is suggesting that a play should speak to you about some aspect of your life. Some other questions you could address are:

- If you lost interest, where did the production go wrong?
- Was there a part of the story that you had difficulty accepting? A performance you didn't believe? A twist in the story that didn't make sense?
- Would you recommend this play to others? Was it worth your time?

Bonus Activity!

Can you summarize your review in the length of a tweet? You get 140 characters. This includes spaces!

If you're on [Twitter](#), tag Vertigo with [@vertigotheatre](#), so we can know what you thought!

ABOUT VERTIGO THEATRE

We are a professional, not-for-profit charitable organization with a dual artistic mandate.

Our mission is to be a leader in developing, producing and presenting plays based in the mystery genre, and plays for young audiences, while providing a performance home for other organizations.

Our vision is to create exceptional entertainment experiences. Vertigo Theatre occupies a unique place in Calgary's cultural landscape as:

- The only professional theatre in Canada producing a series of professional plays based in the mystery genre
- The only theatre in Calgary presenting a full series of theatre for young audiences either produced by Vertigo Theatre or on tour across the country and beyond
- Providing a performance home for other arts and arts education organizations
- Committed to mentorship and training in all areas – artistic, production and administration

Vertigo Theatre is a member of the Professional Association of Canadian Theatres and engages under the terms of the Canadian Theatre Agreement professional Artists who are members of the Canadian Actors' Equity Association.

EDUCATION & OUTREACH PROGRAM STUDENT MATINEES

BD&P Mystery Theatre Series

Vertigo is the only professional theatre company in Canada that produces a full season of plays based in the mystery genre, encompassing classical and contemporary work that stimulates, entertains and engages the audience.

Y Stage Theatre Series

Features plays that have been created specifically for young people by Vertigo Theatre or other professional theatre companies on tour from across Canada and beyond. The Y Stage Theatre Series separates itself from other child-oriented arts programming with plays that are socially relevant and thought-provoking as well as entertaining, reflecting issues and concerns that children face every day such as bullying, self-acceptance, cultural diversity, tolerance and the value of friendship.

WORKSHOPS

Annual workshop programs are offered to support theatre arts and school curriculums by creating structured, interactive workshops that encourage dialogue and spark young people's imaginations. Pre/post show or stand-alone workshops with an artist-educator are available for all BD&P Mystery Theatre Series and Y Stage Theatre Series productions. Vertigo Theatre's workshop program assists teachers in expanding the theatre experience with hands-on activities specific to each production.

Proudly Sponsored By:



ACCESS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES (AYA) PROGRAM

Theatre for young audiences is an exceptional art form that, over and over again, has proven to be a significant contributing factor in the development of children. Studies have shown that sustained exposure to the performing arts at an early age develops an appreciation of music, dance and theatre that lasts a lifetime.

The Access for Young Audiences program offers a much-needed resource to schools and community groups that represent children and teens who are considered 'high needs' by providing low-cost or free tickets to productions in our BD&P Mystery Theatre Series and our Y Stage Theatre Series. The AYA program levels socio-economic backgrounds and allows kids to be kids, and teens to relate to each other on a deeper, more meaningful level. Children and teens are exposed to positively positioned real-life issues (bullying, drug-addiction or racism), and the concept and impact of empathy for others. Most importantly, the AYA program is a tool to incubate the next generation of artists and arts supporters.

Proudly sponsored by:



GIBSON ENERGY LTD.