

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Mr. Neden's Helpful Guide to:

*Lost in Yonkers* by: Neil Simon

Welcome to our next unit together. This brief unit will be focused on an in-class play, *Lost in Yonkers* by Neil Simon. Simon is America's best known playwright; his plays feature funny, original characters which force the reader, or audience member, to examine their own life while watching a character's story unfold on paper (or on the stage). Neil Simon has been re-produced several times at New Paltz High School. Most recently, *45 Seconds to Broadway* was produced in the fall, and *Lost in Yonkers* was brought to life four years ago as the fall drama production.

Please use this study guide as a resource for dramatic literary terms, questions for each act, and background on the playwright. Please do not lose this guide. You will only get one!

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Pre-Reading:

**Journal:** What would it be like to move in with your grandparents? Think about the article.

**Focus Question:**

What was happening in America in 1945? What would it be like to be a teenager at this time?

## Neil Simon: *Lost in Yonkers*



Neil Simon is the world's most successful playwright. He has had dozens of plays and nearly as many major motion pictures produced. He has been showered with more Academy and Tony nominations than any other writer, and is the only playwright to have four

Broadway productions running simultaneously. His plays have been produced in dozens of languages, and have been blockbuster hits from Beijing to Moscow. His true success, however, is in his unique way of exposing something real in the American spirit.

Born in the Bronx on July 4, 1927, Marvin Neil Simon grew up in Manhattan and for a short time attended NYU and the University of Denver.

By 1973, Simon was a major voice in contemporary comedy. But, that year he entered a low period in his life, when his wife of twenty years, died. Some time later, he met the actress Marsha Mason, and they were married. His 1977 play, *Chapter Two*, dramatizes the grief of a newly remarried man trying to start over after his wife has died. *Chapter Two* was considered one of his finest works and he followed it with a musical, *They're Playing Our Song*.

Throughout his four-decade career, Simon has drawn extensively on his own life and experience for materials in his plays. Many of his works take place in the working-class New York neighborhoods he knew so well as a child. One of Simon's great achievements has been the insightful representation of the social atmosphere of those times in New York. With his autobiographical trilogy, "Brighton Beach Memoirs" (1983), "Biloxi Blues" (1985), and "Broadway Bound" (1986), Simon created a touching portrait of an individual, his family, and the world around them. With these plays, Simon found his greatest critical acclaim, and for his 1991 follow-up, "Lost in Yonkers," Simon was awarded a Pulitzer Prize.

Neil Simon has for almost forty years invigorated the stage with touching stories and zany characters, but possibly his greatest contribution has been the ability to create humor from the lives and troubles of everyday people. Of Simon, actor Jack Lemon said, "Neil has the ability to write characters -- even the leading characters that we're supposed to root for -- that are absolutely flawed. They have foibles. They have faults. But, they are human beings. They are not all bad or all good; they are people we know."

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Based on what we just read, and what we learned about Neil Simon, make a prediction about what you think this play will be about. (Write your answer below)

<b>Asides</b>	Brief comments by an actor who addresses the audience but is assumed not to be heard by the other characters on the stage.
<b>Dialogue</b>	the lines spoken by the characters
<b>Drama</b>	literature written to be performed
<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	a situation that depends on the audience's knowing something that a character has not realized, or on one character's knowing something other characters do not know
<b>Monologue</b>	extended speech by one character
<b>Props</b>	short for "properties,"--the pictures, furnishings, historical nuances, and so on, that provide the stage's background
<b>Soliloquy</b>	a speech in which a character, alone on the stage, addresses himself or herself; it is a dramatic means of letting the audience know the character's thoughts and feelings.
<b>Stage Directions</b>	words in a dramatic script--generally <i>italicized</i> --that define an actor's (apart from his/her dialogue) actions, movements, attitudes and so forth throughout the play
<b>Tragedy</b>	a type of drama--as opposed to comedy--that depicts the causally related events that lead to the downfall of the protagonist (in classic tragedy this person should be of unusual moral, intellectual, or social stature)
<b>Unities</b>	<p>rules (originating from Aristotle) that require a dramatic work to be unified in terms of its time, place, and action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• one day (twenty-four hours)</li> <li>• one major action</li> <li>• one setting</li> </ul>

## Basic Literary Terms: Drama

We are going to have a quiz on these terms on \_\_\_\_\_. Know them, they will come in handy when we do *Romeo and Juliet* and on the mid-term.

Lost In Yonkers Character Analysis:  
Indirect and Direct Characterization

Please use the focus questions below to guide your answer in column II.

What is this character's relationship with others in the family? How do they get along?  
What is your impression of the character? Do you like them? Do they have any  
redeemable characteristics?

Character	Identification
Jay	
Arty	
Bella	
Grandma Kurnitz	
Gert	
Eddie	
Uncle Louie	

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## **Act I, scene i**

For each of the following questions, please work in pairs to discover the best answer. Some questions are comprehension questions, whereas others ask you to analyze the information and evaluate the characters.

### **Comprehension Questions:**

Why do the boys think that the grandmother is exceptionally cold?

What do you think that Jay means when he describes their Aunt Bella as “closed for repairs”?

What’s wrong with Aunt Gert?

What is it that Grandma never allowed her own children to do? What do you think of this?

Why is Aunt Bella a comical character? What does she say and do to deserve this description?

What tragedy has Grandma had in her lifetime?

What does Eddie think of America?

Why does Eddie have to leave the boys?

Why is Grandma bitter towards Eddie?

Why does Grandma think that Eddie isn't a man? Do you agree with her ideas about manhood?

What reason does Eddie give for not visiting Grandma?

How does Bella convince Grandma to let the boys stay?

**Significant Quote:** Eddie said, "Never take because you'll always be obligated." What does this mean? Do you agree? Explain in the context of the play.

## **Act I, sc.ii**

Where is Bella spending much of her time?

**Act I, sc. iii**

What does Bella know about her fiancé? Do you think she knows him well enough to marry him? Why or why not?

What hints does Bella give that shows that she doesn't know much about Johnny?

**Act I, sc. iv**

How is Louie different than Eddie?

List the lies that come from Louie.

How are Jay and Artie different?

What's ironic about what Eddie says at the end of the scene, "knowing you're with family..."?

**Act I Analysis**

Please choose 1 of the following questions and craft a two-paragraph analysis on your own piece of paper. It will be collected for a quiz grade.

1. What do you think about Uncle Louie? Is he a coward? Does he stand up for himself? What in his childhood do you think led him to become a gangster?
2. Candy is sweet. Grandma is not. Do you find it interesting that grandma owns a candy shop? Explain.
3. Why do you think Grandma forces Bella to rub her legs?

## **ACT II, sc. i**

Do you think Grandma doesn't like Arty and Jay? Why or why not?

What does Grandma say about being hated?

What happened when Louie ran away? What did he learn from the experience?

Why does Grandma accuse Jay of letting the pretzels be stolen if she knows it was Bella who ate them?

Why does Louie think that Jay has moxie?

## **Act II, sc. ii**

What story is it that Bella tells the entire family? How does Grandma react?

How does Bella show that she's smarter than she seems?

Why can't Bella stay a child?



What do you learn is the reason for Grandma’s cruelty all these years?  
**Act III, sc. iii**

Why does Grandma finally approve of Eddie?

**Act II Analysis**

Please choose 1 of the following questions and craft a two-paragraph analysis on your own piece of paper. It will be collected for a quiz grade.

- 1. After Bella gave her “speech” she said, “Hold me...Somebody please hold me.” What does this tell you about Bella?
- 2. Bella said, “I have no tears left in me. I feel sort of empty inside. Like you feel all the time.” Was Bella correct? Is grandma really empty inside? Do you blame her?
- 3. When Arty and Jay are leaving Grandma said, “Ve said good-bye dis morning. Two good-byes is too much.” Is this a symbolic statement?

**Theme Analysis:**  
Please use information from the play to support each theme.

Survival	
Acceptance	
The Importance of one’s family	

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