



# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### SUGGESTED TEACHING TOPICS

- 1.) Recipe for Murder
- 2.) Agatha Christie
- 3.) Nursery Rhymes and Mystery

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *The Mousetrap*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at <http://www.milwaukeekeerep.com/On-Stage/2015-16-Season/TheMousetrap-PlayGuide/>

### RECIPE FOR MURDER

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- *The Mousetrap* follows the conventions of the classical mystery genre, including a formula of plot points, characters, and settings that are familiar to audiences. Can you name other plays, novels, TV shows or movies that follow the conventions of the "Whodunit" mystery? How can following the rules of a genre strengthen a story? How does "breaking the rules" in a genre affect a story? Why might an author/playwright choose to break rules?
- Are there any other genres that follow specific rules and conventions? Discuss "The Hero's Journey" and "Dramatic Structure". What stories do you know that follow these conventions? Why do authors and playwrights follow these structures?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Agatha Christie intentionally created an atmosphere of suspicion throughout the play. Which character(s) did you think was the murderer? What actions or clues made you believe this? How did the suspicious environment affect the characters of the play?
- What conventions did *The Mousetrap* follow? What rules were broken? Why do you think Agatha Christie chose to break these rules? Think back to your pre-show discussion and compare.

#### GAME: Murder, Murder!

Begin by **SETTING THE SCENE** for the students: They are arriving at a party where they do not know the host or anyone else. One student is secretly and randomly selected as the "murderer." Students begin walking around the room shaking hands with one another. As the "murderer" walks around shaking hands, they should quietly select a "victim." When they shake hands, the "murderer" lightly tickles the "victim's" hand with his finger. The "victim" then waits seconds so the "murderer" can move away, and **ACTS** out a dramatic death. The class may then stand in a circle, discussing who they believe is the "murderer." The class can pick 3 suspects, and they must offer a reason for their accusation. The accused may **DEFEND** themselves. Once everyone has spoken, the class votes on who they believe is the "murderer." The one with the most votes is out. The game continues until either the murderer is discovered or is the only one left. . .

**Reminders:** Encourage students to **CREATE A CHARACTER** for themselves throughout the game. If you would like, you may give students names as a foundation for their character. If they are accused, they should develop a **BACK-STORY/ALIBI**. Those accusing should create a motive for their accusation.

**Debrief:** How did the environment change once they knew there was a "murderer" among them? What changed about how they treated their "friends?" How did it feel to continue shaking hands with people? How did developing a backstory help them provide an alibi?

Reference *The Mousetrap* Play Guide pg 8 for further information on Recipe for Murder.

### AGATHA CHRISTIE

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- *The Mousetrap* has been running continuously in London's West End since 1952. Have you heard of or seen the play before? Have you read or seen another work by Agatha Christie?
- Agatha Christie is the third best-selling author of all time, falling behind only Shakespeare and the Bible! What qualities do you think are necessary in a best-selling author and their work?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- After seeing the show, what do you think has kept this play popular for so long? What elements do you believe draw audiences continuously? Note that the actors change every few years. How would changing the actors affect the play? Would you be interested in seeing the play again with a different cast? Why or why not?

#### GAME: Defender

Students begin walking around the space without speaking or physical contact. After a few minutes, ask students to each silently pick an individual in the room whom they will consider their own personal defender. They continue to move around while doing so. Then, ask students to silently pick an enemy while they continue to walk around the room. Then you tell them that their goal is to keep their defender between themselves and their enemy at all times. First, they play this for a couple of minutes; then you ask them to put different levels of importance on the circumstance. Maybe their enemy annoys them, they owe their enemy money, their enemy is an ex-friend or an ex-romantic partner, their enemy is trying to kill them, and so on. Push them to get their whole body involved, and make it important to them. This is a silent game.

Game Description from Michael Rohd's *Hope is Vital Training Manual*

**Reminders:** Remind students to stay involved and to be careful as they move through the space. Tell them to notice the differences in the ways their body and energy responds to each new circumstance.

**Debrief:** Ask students how their "pretend muscle" (imagination/suspension of disbelief?) connects to their actions and feelings. How would this game change if you knew whose "personal defender" you were, or whose "enemy" you were? How can you relate this to the interactions between the characters in *The Mousetrap*? What did they know about each other, and what people thought about them?

Reference *The Mousetrap* Play Guide pg 6-7 for further information on Agatha Christie.



The Cast of *The Mousetrap*.  
Photo by Michael Brosilow.

# NURSERY RHYMES AND MYSTERY

Reference *The Mousetrap* Play Guide pg 10 for further information on *Three Blind Mice*.

## DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- The plot structure of *The Mousetrap*, as well as one of Agatha Christie's other works, *And Then There Were None*, is provided by the nursery rhymes *Three Blind Mice* and *Ten Little Indians*. Why do you think a nursery rhyme can provide an interesting plot structure for a mystery? Support your answer using specific examples and characteristics of nursery rhymes.

## DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Read *Three Blind Mice* with the class. How did the events of the rhyme provide plot and structure for the play? Why do you think this worked so well for the play?
- Can you think of any popular movies or TV dramas that use rhymes, folk tales or famous stories as the structure for their plot? Discuss why this provides a good plot structure for other types of literature.

## WRITE: An Original Mystery

Have students **BRAINSTORM** different nursery rhymes, folk tales or stories they already know. Students should choose one they are familiar with and **CONSTRUCT A MYSTERY** around it. Encourage students to use the events in the rhyme for the basic plot structure and theme of the mystery. If students prefer, they may work in groups to brainstorm ideas for characters, setting, etc.

**Remind** students to intentionally drop clues (foreshadowing) throughout the story to incite suspicion (without revealing WHODUNIT!).

**Debrief:** Ask the students to **READ** or **PERFORM** their stories for the class. Discuss the strengths of each story and how the structure of the nursery rhymes helped inspire their stories. What major challenges did they face in constructing a mystery? Did the audience guess whodunit? Why or why not



Brendan Meyer. Photo by Michael Brosilow.



Greg Vinkler, Kelley Faulkner and Matthew Mueller. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

## STANDARDS

### Common Core State Standards:

#### English Language Arts

RL.8-12.3 NARRATIVE DEVELOPMENT

RL.9-10.1 LITERACY COMPREHENSION

RL.8-12.7 INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE

W.8-12.7 RESEARCH

SL.8-12.1 COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS

WL.8-12.3 WRITING A NARRATIVE

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The Education Department offers backstage tours, pre- and post-show workshops and classroom residencies.

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