

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Music and Theatre

Presents



Study Guide created by Sarah Bennett, Eglal Hassan, and Lori Sulzberger

## The Creative Team

Directed by	<b>Egla Hassan</b>
Scenic Designer	<b>Jim Trenberth</b>
Costume Designer	<b>Kelly Marie Schaefer</b>
Lighting Designer	<b>Jim Trenberth</b>
Stage manager	<b>Rachel Shaw</b>
Assistant Director	<b>Sarah Bennett</b>
Hair and Makeup Designer	<b>Amelia Brown</b>
Technical Director	<b>Natalie Hining</b>
Costume Shop Supervisor	<b>Doris Nash</b>
Props Master	<b>Amy Taylor</b>

## The Cast

Many cast members play a character in the world of the 1946 radio station and also multiple roles within the radio play they are presenting.

Stage Manager	<b>Nathan Kruesemark</b>
Freddy Filmore (Announce and others)	<b>Maxfield Coenen</b>
Jake Laurentis (George Bailey)	<b>Levi Miller</b>
Harry jazzbo Heywood (Clarence and others)	<b>Ben Mayer</b>
Jackie Kelk (Mr. Potter and others)	<b>Jobe Fee</b>
Goodman Ace (Uncle Billy and others)	<b>Jacob Foster</b>
Sally Applewhite (Mary Hatch)	<b>Jensen Wilke</b>
Lana Sherwood (Violet and others)	<b>Rachel Ward</b>
Charita Bauer (Rose Bailey and others)	<b>Bethmari Marquez</b>
Singers	<b>Sydni Lapsley, Joi Wright, Margaret Smith</b>
Foley Artist	<b>Francesca Geis</b>
Pianist	<b>Kenneth Jolls</b>

## Preview Guide for Parents and Teachers

Dear Educator,

We have created the following study guide to help make your students theatre experience with the play *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* as meaningful as possible. For some younger students, it will be their first time viewing a theatrical production. We have learned that when teachers discuss the play with their students before and after the production, the experience is more significant and long lasting. Our study guide provides pre and post-production discussion topics, as well as additional resource materials. These are just suggestions; please feel free to create your own activities and areas for discussion

## Synopsis of the Play

As its name suggests, *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* is actually a “play within a play”. The overall frame story is that of a 1940's radio studio and its actors, who are presenting the play *It's a Wonderful Life* live for its radio audience. The radio broadcast includes all the elements of the time, including live music accompaniment, commercial jingles, and a foley artist who provides all the sound effects.

The story of *It's a Wonderful Life* takes place in Bedford Falls, a place loosely based on Seneca Falls, NY. This is a story about George Bailey, an ideal all-American dreamer, trapped into operating the town's Building and Loan Association. At numerous points in his life, he tried to escape the grasp of his puny, one horse town to see the world, and time and time again, his plans are postponed. We watch as the entirety of his life unfolds and is examined by two angels, Joseph and Clarence, to understand the reason George is placed in the situation we find him in at the start of the play- contemplating suicide on Christmas Eve. In an attempt to show George that life is the greatest gift, Clarence shows George what life would be like if he had never been born. George is taken through this alternate world by the interactions of those he loves, realizing just how many lives he had influenced, and how it really was “A Wonderful Life”.

## The Evolution of the Story Before You



The first iteration of this story arose in the form of a short story by Phillip Van Doren Stern: “The Greatest Gift: A Christmas Tale” that was written and sent out in a Christmas card to his loved ones in 1943. Famed film director Frank Capra found this story after it became popular and decided to adapt it into the beloved Christmas classic, *It's a Wonderful Life*, releasing the film in 1946. When creating the movie, Frank Capra was asked what the importance of this was and how his philosophy in filmmaking played a

role in the telling of this story. He said that the story must “1) Exalt the worth of the individual, 2) That the storytelling should champion mankind. Plead his causes, protest any degradation of his dignity, spirit or divinity, and 3) Dramatize the viability of the individual.” (Basinger, Goodrich, Malten).

In 1990, *It's a Wonderful Life* was deemed “culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant” by the United States Library of Congress and selected for preservation in their National Film Registry.

The film has been adapted several times. Soon after its release, *It's a Wonderful Life* was adapted for radio, and musical stage versions and plays followed. This radio adaptation of the play was first produced in 1996 by playwright Joe Landry, and since then, has been produced and performed almost 1500 times!

Basinger, Jeannine. Goodrich, Francis. Malten, Leonard. “Frank Capra archives”- 1986. New York.



## The World of the Play

Cost of Goods in 1947	
Average new house	\$6,600
Average annual wages	\$2,850
Gallon of gas	15 cents
New car	\$1300
U.S. postage stamp	3 cents
Loaf of bread	13 cents
Minimum wage	\$0.43 per hour

## The Year 1947

America is figuring out its place in a post-World War II era.

- President Harry Truman delivers his speech presenting the Truman Doctrine, officially marking the start of the Cold War.
- The Marshall Plan is also introduced this year, emphasizing the importance of aiding Europe in its recovery after the war.
- Creation of the Central Intelligence Agency
- Roswell UFO takes over headlines after it reportedly crashes in Roswell, New Mexico
- America experiences great post-war economic growth and expansion, which continues through the 1960's.

- Favorite pastimes included sports (baseball and football), going out to the movies or the theatre, and listening to radio dramas as a family in the evening. The radio was invented in 1895, was commercialized, and grew rapidly in popularity through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although television was invented in 1927, it wasn't widely available in American homes until the 1950's.

## Fashion

Fashion followed a specific trend from the previous war time era- utility fashion. Utility clothes typically featured squared shoulders, narrow hips, and skirts that ended just below the knee. Tailored suits were the dominant form of utility fashion. Colors were still “reserved”, compared to today’s standards, and the formal cut and line of these garments created elegant silhouettes.



## Theater Etiquette

We want your students to have the best experience when they see a performance live so below is a list of reminders of how to behave when they see the show.

- Stay seated during the performance.
- Keep in mind that the actors on stage can hear you if you talk, so always be courteous to the actors and other audience members around you by paying attention during the performance and not talking or texting
- Arrive early. Seeing a show is a special experience, and you don't want to miss any of it.
- No taking pictures or recording during the performance.
- Be sure to laugh and applaud when appropriate, and remember to have fun!

## Active Watching

Enhance your visit by encouraging your students to look at different aspects of the production. For this production, the time period is very specific, and that is reflected in the design of the set and costumes. This play also employs a Foley Artist, which is the person responsible for creating all the sound effects. For example, he might use shoes crunching cereal for someone walking in the snow, or a sheet of metal for thunder. All of these elements—lights, sound, costumes, and set—combine to create the world of the play. Before the show, identify tasks for your class. Have one group of students looking at the set, another listening for the music and sound effects, a third watching the lighting and a fourth, the costumes. Compare notes after the show about what they observed. Your students will be more informed, and they'll be surprised by how much they noticed.

## Post-Show Activities

### Write a Review

After seeing *It's a Wonderful Life*, generate a review of the show. These can be in written form to be put in a journal, they can be in podcast form, or they can be used as the basis for a roundtable discussion. If you were going to tell a friend about the performance, explore the main story using these suggested points:

1. Describe one of the actor's performances and discuss how that performance added to your enjoyment of the show.
2. Describe one of the costumes. How did it help to tell the story? What did the costume tell the audience about the character?
3. Describe the set. How did it create the world of the story?
4. What point did the director or playwright try to make? What main idea were they trying to convey to the audience? Were they successful? Why or why not?

### Create a Radio Play

Create your own radio play, or in today's terminology—a podcast. Here are a few tips. Also, see the list of resources for a lesson plan from Theatrefolk.

1. Remember that the audience can't see you, so everything must be conveyed through sound.
2. The dialogue is important, but so are music and sound effects to convey the story.
3. Many radio plays will use a narrator to help move the story along or assist with transitions.

## **Resources**

Short video about history of Foley and how sound is created for film:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N\\_PRIgX0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N_PRIgX0)

Lesson plan for creating a radio play: <https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/create-perform-radio-play/>

Frank Capra biography: <https://www.notablebiographies.com/Ca-Ch/Capra-Frank.html>.

More background on It's a Wonderful Life: <https://www.biography.com/news/its-a-wonderful-life-movie-facts>

## **About Iowa State University Department of Music and Theatre**

The Department of Music and Theatre offers a strong undergraduate music and theatre program, where students study with full-time faculty professionals in a supportive environment that encourages students to become their best.

### **Our faculty**

Faculty in the Department of Music and Theatre represent a distinguished combination of professional and academic excellence.

### **Mission and vision**

The Department of Music and Theatre is committed to a philosophy of education that draws its goals from the larger purposes of liberal arts education and from the guidelines of its accrediting agency, the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). The primary aims of the department are to prepare students for a variety of professions in music, theatre, and the performing arts, to provide all students with educational experiences that will enhance their understanding of and aesthetic sensitivity to music, theatre, and the performing arts, and to serve as a vital force in the cultural life of the university, the community, and throughout the state and nation. The activities of the department reflect the university's commitment to excellence in teaching, creativity, and service.

We love to hear from our audience members!

Send letters, drawing or reviews to:

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