

# IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

**Department of Music and Theatre**

Presents

## SENSE & SENSIBILITY

ADAPTED BY KERRY SKRAM

FROM THE NOVEL BY JANE AUSTEN



Study guide created by Cason Murphy

## **The Creative Team**

Director	<b>Cason Murphy</b>
Scenic Designer	<b>Rob Sunderman</b>
Costume Designer	<b>Sarah Henrich</b>
Lighting Designer	<b>Jared Rickard</b>
Makeup and Hair Designer	<b>Amelia Brown</b>
Choreographer	<b>Valerie Williams</b>
Technical Director	<b>Natalie Hining</b>
Stage Manager	<b>Sara Elkhatib</b>
Assistant Director	<b>Abbigail Markus</b>

## **The Cast**

Henry Dashwood	<b>Levi Miller</b>
John Dashwood	<b>Hayden Walker</b>
Fanny Dashwood	<b>Lauren Kawamura</b>
Mrs. Dashwood	<b>Alyson O'Hara</b>
Elinor Dashwood	<b>Olivia Griffith</b>
Marianne Dashwood	<b>Erica Walling</b>
Margaret Dashwood	<b>Isabella Witte</b>
Sir John Middleton	<b>Liam McDermott</b>
Mrs. Jennings	<b>Joi Wright</b>
Colonel Brandon	<b>Calvin Clark</b>
John Willoughby	<b>Jonah Miller</b>
Edward Ferrars	<b>Oliver Stratton</b>
Lucy Steele	<b>Erin Stein</b>
Servants	<b>Lillie Anderson, Hannah Brennan, Morgan Mulford, Trevor Rhedin, Cael Wyatt</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 *Sense and Sensibility* 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 discussion topics, as well as additional resource materials. These are just suggestions; please feel free to create your own activities and areas for discussion.

## The Play

In 18th-century England, the sudden death of Henry Dashwood leaves two of his daughters—sensible Elinor and hypersensitive Marianne—both financially destitute and socially vulnerable. The Dashwood sisters must learn how to weather the ridiculous societal pressures of the time in order to find love and their place in this new world. When reputation is everything, Elinor and Marianne must decide: is it better to use sense or sensibility to win the day? This charming, new adaptation—written by ISU alumnus Kerry Skram—imbues Jane Austen’s beloved classic with a fresh female voice, emotional depth, lots of humor, and bold theatricality.

## The Novel

*Sense and Sensibility* was the first of Austen’s novels to be published. It was originally titled *Elinor and Marianne*, but Austen changed its name before publication. The novel emphasizes the love shared by two sisters with differing personalities, and follows the disruption and repair of their relationship as they navigate their romantic entanglements in opposing manners. Austen published the novel in 1811, anonymously: “By a Lady.”



## Characters

HENRY DASHWOOD. A father.

JOHN DASHWOOD. His son from his first marriage.

FANNY DASHWOOD. John's wife.

MRS. DASHWOOD. Henry's second wife.

ELINOR DASHWOOD. Their eldest daughter.

MARIANNE DASHWOOD. Their middle daughter.

MARGARET DASHWOOD. Their youngest daughter.

SIR JOHN MIDDLETON. Mrs. Dashwood's cousin.

MRS. JENNINGS. Sir John's neighbor.

COLONEL BRANDON. Sir John's friend, a retired colonel.

JOHN WILLOUGHBY. A young man.

EDWARD FERRAS. Fanny Dashwood's older brother.

LUCY STEELE. A young woman.

## Questions to Ask and Answer—Before Seeing the Play

1. When was the play written?
2. Who wrote the play? Have they written other things?
3. This play is an adaptation; when was the original work written?
4. Who wrote the original novel?
5. Did the author of the original novel write anything else?
7. Is the play set in a time and place familiar to the authors (the original or those who adapted it)?
8. What are the important issues of this time and place and in what way do they differ from our own?
9. What can I do to be sure I can follow the action of the play?

### Answers to Questions

#### **When was the play written?**

This adaptation of *Sense and Sensibility* was created quite recently. The process began in 2010 when the piece was commissioned by the Repertory Theatre of Iowa. It had a public reading at the Iowa governor's mansion in 2011 and the World Premiere production appeared during RTI's 2012 season at Des Moines Social Club's Kirkwood Theatre.

#### **Who wrote the play? Have they written other things?**

The adaptation was written by Kerry Skram, who graduated from Iowa State University. Kerry is a playwright, actress, and company member of Iowa Stage Theatre Company in Des Moines. She is currently at work on an adaptation of one of Jane Austen's other novels, *Persuasion*.

#### **This play is an adaptation, when was the original work written?**

*Sense and Sensibility* was originally released in 1811.

### Who wrote the original novel?

Jane Austen. However, the novel was originally released anonymously and she received very little recognition despite the popularity of the books she had written. It wasn't until her nephew published, *A Memoir of Jane Austen* in 1869 that she was introduced to the public at large. By the mid-twentieth century, she was recognized in academia as a great English writer.

### Did that author write anything else?

Jane Austen wrote six novels in total, four that were published when she was alive: *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) *Mansfield Park* (1814) *Emma* (1815); and two published posthumously: *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and *Persuasion* (1818). Austen also had begun, but not finished, a final novel titled *Sanditon* before she died in 1817.

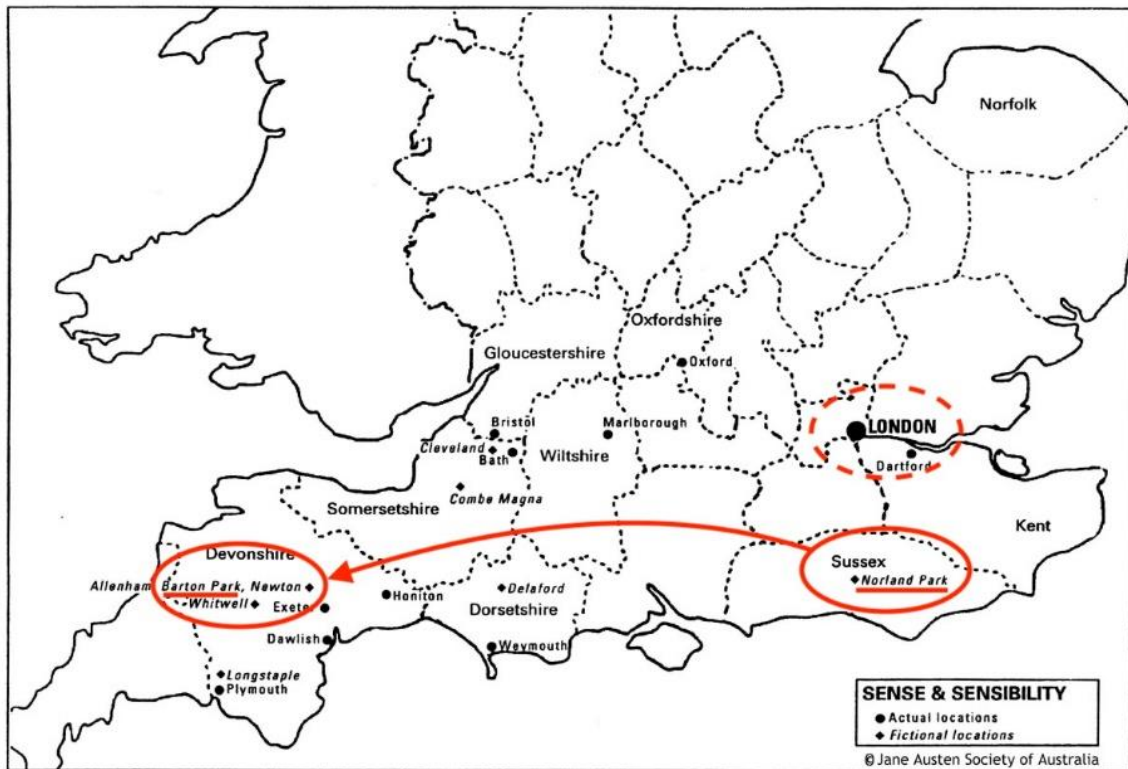


### Is the play set in a time and place familiar to the authors (the original or those who adapted it)?

*Sense and Sensibility* is set in the southern part of England's country side, specifically the villages of Sussex and Devonshire, during the Regency period—roughly two hundred and fifteen

years prior to the writing of the adaptation. The story takes place in homes, manor houses, and the meeting places of society very similar to the ones in which Austen herself grew up and lived.

This story moves between the town and the country, just as most people of a certain class did in Austen's time. Austen was very concerned with the social milieu of her characters, and her settings very clearly reflect this concern. We begin at Norland Park, a large fancy estate in the county of Sussex, but eventually move far away to a small cottage in the countryside. There, our main characters live in the shadow of their gentry cousin (Sir John Middleton of nearby Barton Park). Here is a map of the locations in which this adaptation takes place (London is mentioned often...but just never seen).



### **What are the important issues of this time and place and in what way do they differ from ours?**

The words of the title of Austen's novel are a really good place to start. These words represent the dichotomy of attitudes that are at the heart of political and philosophical struggles—to do the practical thing and act with good sense or to allow one's sensibilities to rule them, to do whatever emotions and passions lead one to do. This was enormously important to women of the period because family and a husband was the whole of opportunity in life. A wealthy husband meant they might have servants and nice clothing that society would treat them well and they might participate in such social activities as dinners and dances. A husband with status might give them power of influence over others, meaning those who want support or a good word from the husband will cater to and seek to win the favor of the wife as well. On the other hand, there is marrying for love, attraction, etc. Wonderful for a short time in youth, perhaps... but without hope for a nice home, clothing, or influence to ensure your children will find good placement.

## CLUES THAT YOU'RE READING A JANE AUSTEN NOVEL

### 1. Large sideburns



### 2. "poor" rich people

Elinor Dashwood



I CAN'T BELIEVE WE HAVE TO LIVE IN THIS 4 BEDROOM SHACK NOW.

### 3. Lack of children



H.C.

On a national scale, England had only just lost to the Americans (the American Revolution from 1776–1783). And in a few more years, it would find itself again at war with France (1803–1815). All of this happened at the center of the Industrial Revolution in England. During this time, a wildly spread out population living in the country began to converge on central industrial areas to form larger cities. The population grew rapidly and many were poor and with no means of providing for their families. This would lead to the world we see in Dicken's (who was born in 1812) novels, where even children work from dawn to dusk in factories for very little pay and the only hope is that one's children would marry well to keep the family alive when the adults grew too old and tired to continue to labor.

### **What can I do to follow the action of the play?**

Some people like to read a novel before seeing the adaptation of the story on stage or in film. Others choose to wait until after. There are merits to both perspectives. The important thing to do if making this choice (or if you are reading the book for a class and then coming to see the play) is to remember that they are going to be different. That's simply a matter of practicality. A theatre will attempt to recreate an environment and characters as closely to the script as possible but that doesn't mean it will match the script...let alone the novel. A play, on stage and live in front of you, is not a copy. It's an interpretation.

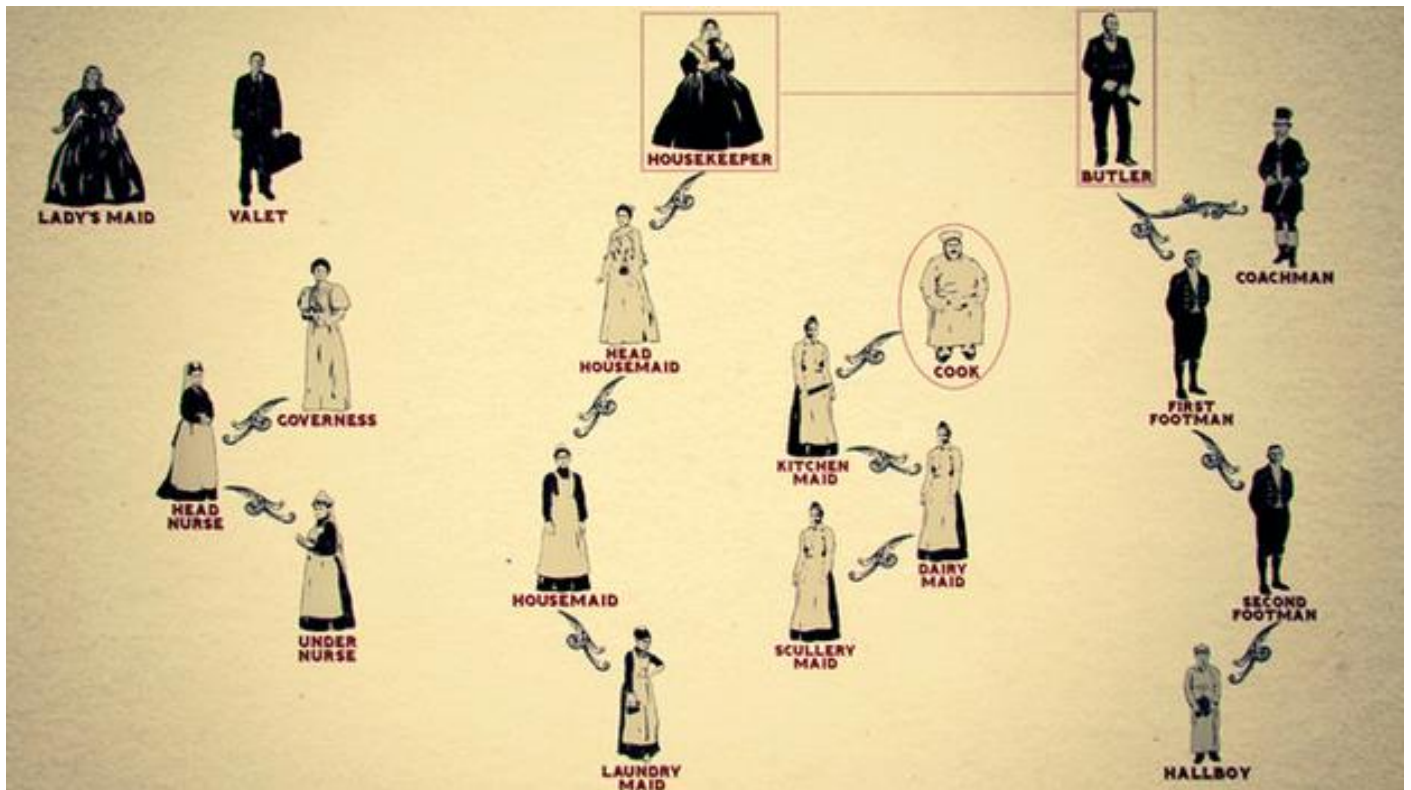
If done right, the play will give you insights into the characters, their interactions, and the time period in ways that one may not discover in reading the book. The production team of the play, led by the Director, studies the script and the book and the author. They notice and may highlight how people are the same or do the same things as those characters in the book...or how they're completely different. The creative team hopes the audience will bridge the gap between the contemporary world and the one told by Jane Austen over two hundred years ago resulting in an engaged audience in the storytelling of the theatrical piece.

### **Active Watching and Listening Tips**

Unlike a novel, where narration tends to show what critical elements the reader should notice, or a film, where camera angles, zoom lenses, and multiple transition and techniques are available to focus your attention; in a live performance, you have to be actively watching to see elements of characters not specifically in the dialogue. There are some things to be aware of that help you find these extra clues over the course of a play.

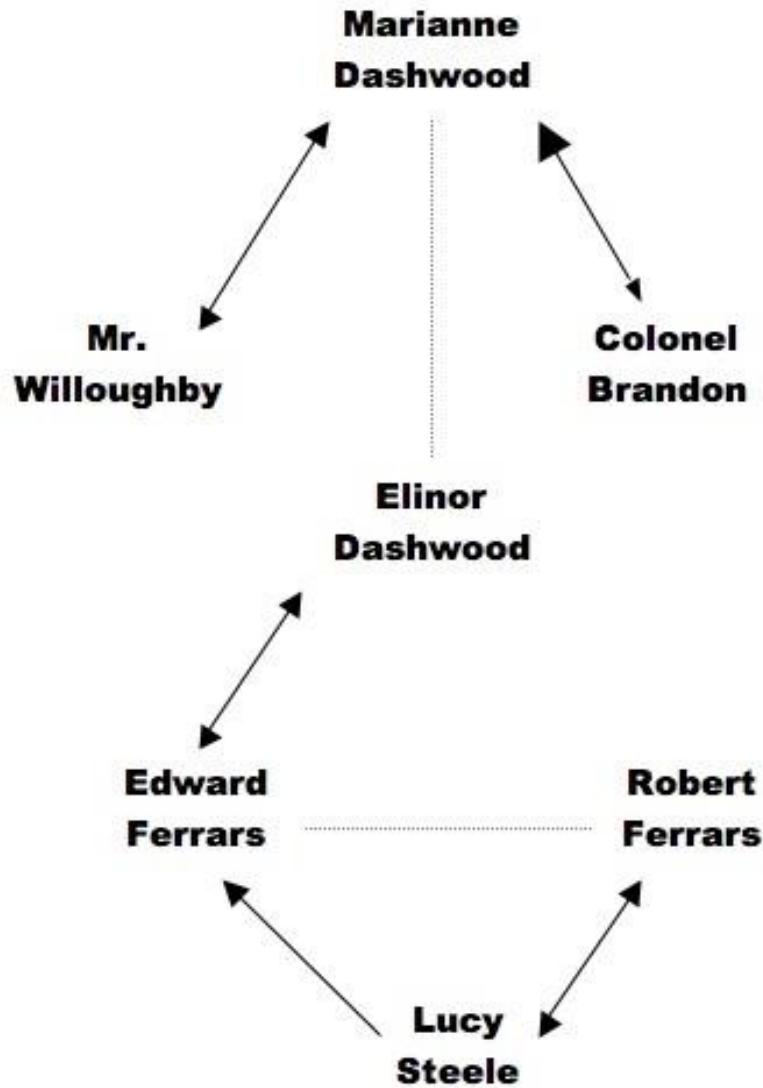
**Status:** A character sitting atop a throne high over their subjects is an obvious sign of someone in power. It's not only positioning on stage that can tell you who is in charge or in control of a given scene. Proximity (closeness) can be a sign that two people are intimate or are on the verge of exploding into violence. Keeping a third party between two characters is a protective action or an attempt at hiding. Entering from the side of the stage is weaker than entering from upstage. Moving in a diagonal is more actively engaging than sideways, direct lines more so than arcs. Even simply being aware of how characters listen to other characters speak can tell you a lot about what is happening on stage. Also, keep an eye out especially for the servants and the roles they play—an Austen-era estate couldn't have run without them!





**Fluidity of time and space:** While this sounds like something at the beginning of a lecture on Quantum Mechanics, it's much simpler in its relationship to a stage production. Simply be aware that theatres don't have the ability to describe every physical detail of a new location or to tell you the time. To keep events moving along on stage and the focus on the story, there is rarely a break from the action to change scenery. As a result, the scenery needs to become radically different several times within the duration of the play; smaller elements like a walnut tree, a streetlamp, or a different style chair may be the only physically visible difference on the stage. When this happens, understand that the change represents a difference in place or time from the previous scene. Sometimes this will happen with lights dimmed down and other times it will happen in full view as the dialogue and action continues.

**Love triangles:** The conflict in this play is fed by these love triangles—or when someone has romantic feelings for more than one person at a time. Can you spot all of these?



**Common elements:** Characters that move alike, who wear similarly styled or colored costumes, or enter the stage in specific ways don't do so by coincidence. A good artistic team (directors and designers working together to support the environment) build these clues in to help the audience make sense of the information overload that comes from being rapidly introduced to multiple people. Those patterns can also reveal other elements of character in addition to relationship with other characters on stage.

Not to mention, Jane Austen uses many tropes, or repeated elements, in her stories. Try using your active watching skills to spot any of these during the show—and see if you can get bingo!

# Jane Austen Bingo

Secret engagement	Army officer	Soulful letter	A child playing a game	Emotional outburst
A piano	Sisters	A picnic	A proposal	A clergyman
A false friend	A dance		Servant dressing a character	Silly neighbors
Die-hard gossip	Servants overhearing things	Married for money	Useless family members	Horses
More than one person named John	Longing glances	Tea-drinking	Someone reading a book	A serious illness

## Questions to Ask and Answer – After the Play

1. Were you able to follow the progression of events, especially through scene and act changes?
2. Did the environment serve the purpose of the play? Did the costumes suit the characters of the play?
3. Did the lighting and sound used in the production enhance the environment of the production?
4. Which characters did you identify with the most?
5. How would it feel to live in a society where you were expected to marry young with almost no knowledge about the person you would marry?
6. What would it be like knowing that unless you were the male heir, the only hope you had of wealth/land was to marry well?
7. What is the part about the play that you least understood? What things about it confused you?
8. How do you think this play gives you any better insight into the lives of the British two centuries ago?
9. How do you think this play gives you better insight into the lives of people today?
10. What would you consider to be the climactic moment of the play?
11. Could this play be placed in a contemporary setting and still work?

Now that you are familiar with the characters, the world, and roles that people play in the theatre, see if you can find them all in this word search!

## Sense and Sensibility

Z O F E E U H C D F N F E N L V O C H A  
 N S W S T H G I L U G R S E N S E X F D  
 E F E Y A S P Z D T E R C E S V M Y J D  
 T E S R D O T K R G T E R A G R A M O N  
 S G T E F A I K A O F K M Y S C K Y H A  
 U A A N M W N J W M T A D E K A W B N L  
 A T T E J U A C D Z R C N L S E F H Y R  
 P T E C B I T C E I O S E A J I V G G O  
 Z O Q S G P H S A H I B E R B K J U E N  
 V C X H R A Q N O B L T Q J I R B O S M  
 D Z J D I S N O I C H Q E U D D F L G Z  
 U Y A R J E W L G E I H A G O S A L N H  
 C L S X O N I O A Z V B W O O M N I I U  
 A U N O I T A T P A D A R V W U N W N Q  
 C C H R Y E R Z S B E V O L H S Y K N F  
 T Y V I L E T T E R L I D E S I G N E R  
 O J H I V Z C X Z Q U T Q J A C T L J R  
 R K N Q R E L T U B E D E G D A O Y F U  
 F O I H E P D I A M N O D N A R B B N J  
 R B G L F D Y L I M A F J V L R K T T D

ACTOR	LIGHTS
ADAPTATION	LOVE
AUSTEN	LUCY
BRANDON	MAID
BUTLER	MARIANNE
CHAIRS	MARGARET
COSTUME	MUSIC
COTTAGE	NORLAND
DANCE	SCENERY
DASHWOOD	SECRET
DESIGNER	SENSE
DIRECTOR	SENSIBILITY
EDWARD	TEA
ELINOR	THEATRE
ESTATE	WILLOUGHBY
FAMILY	
FANNY	
JOHN	
JENNINGS	
LETTER	

## Other Resources

### Jane Austen Society of North America

<http://www.jasna.org>

The society has over 5000 members in more than 70 regional groups in the US and Canada and is a fantastic source for information - both established and newly developed. They have everything from essay contests to scholarly publications, including being the source of the peer reviewed journal *Persuasions: The Jane Austen Journal* (and its online version).

### Wikipedia: Jane Austen

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane\\_Austen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Austen)

Wikipedia, as usual, has just enough general info to give you a rough idea that Austen is a popular novelist from two centuries ago ... without really giving you a solid understanding over why. Unless you already know all the differences and styles of writing that she was making fun of at the time.

### The World of Jane Austen

<http://www.janeausten.co.uk>

If you're looking for Regency period fashion, recipes, etc.

### Miss Austen Regrets

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece.austen>

Included there, even if you are unable to access the biopic itself, is a number of slideshows and a PDF guide for Teaching



# **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!

## **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 Mission of ISU Theatre and Performing Arts is to empower citizen artistry by engaging students and the community in transformative theatre and performing arts experiences which examine the human condition, encourage lifelong learning, teach artistic skills, prepare professionals, inspire empathy, explore creativity, build relationships, and embrace diversity.

We love to hear from our audience members!

Send letters, drawings or reviews to:

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