

PROJECT DISCOVERY STUDY GUIDE



Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*

Music by **Richard Rodgers** • Book & Lyrics by **Oscar Hammerstein II**

Based on the book *Green Grow the Lilacs* by Lynn Riggs

Directed & Choreographed by **Richard & Sharon Jenkins**

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Prepared by Catherine Braxton and Trinity Rep's Education Department



trinity **re**peratory company

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-------|
| Theater Audience Etiquette | 3 |
| Using this Study Guide in Your Classroom | 4 |
| Unit One: Background Information | |
| The Directors: Richard & Sharon Jenkins | 5 |
| Richard Rodgers Biography | 6 |
| Oscar Hammerstein II Biography | 7 |
| Historical Information: The West | 8 |
| Terms of the Times | 9 |
| Farmer & Cowman | 10 |
| Dialect & Slang | 11 |
| Unit Two: The Play | |
| Synopsis | 12 |
| The Characters | 13 |
| The Play that Inspired <i>Oklahoma!</i> : <i>Green Grow the Lilacs</i> | 14 |
| Themes & Their Meanings | 15 |
| Choreography: The Art Behind the Movement | 15 |
| Set Design: An In-Depth Look | 16 |
| Unit Three: Entering the Text | |
| Exercise 1: Create Your Own Production | 17 |
| Exercise 2: To Design or Not to Design? | 18 |
| Exercise 3: Social Consciousness & Change | 19 |
| Exercise 4: Acting the Scene | 20 |
| Exercise 5: Song Lyric Exercise | 21 |
| Exercise 6: Write a Letter Home | 22 |
| Exercise 7: Speaking the Times | 22 |
| Glossary of Scenes/Songs | 23–26 |

THEATER AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE & DISCUSSION

PLEASE READ CAREFULLY AND GO OVER WITH YOUR CLASSES BEFORE THE SHOW

TEACHERS:

Speaking to your students about theater etiquette is **ESSENTIAL**. Students should be aware that this is a live performance and that they should not talk during the show. If you do nothing else to prepare your students to see the play, please take some time to talk to them about theater etiquette in an effort to help the students better appreciate their experience. It will enhance their enjoyment of the show and allow other audience members to enjoy the experience. The questions below can help guide the discussions. Thank you for your help and enjoy the show!

ETIQUETTE:

What is the role of the audience in a live performance? What is its role in a film? Why can't you chew gum or eat popcorn at a live theater performance? Why can't you talk? What can happen in live theater that cannot happen in cinema?

Reiterate that students may not chew gum, eat, or talk during the performance. If there is a disturbance, they will be asked to leave and the class will not be invited back to the theater. Students may not leave the building during intermission.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE SEEING THE SHOW AT TRINITY REP:

What are the differences between live theater and cinema? (Two dimensional vs. three dimensional; larger than life on the screen vs. life-size; recorded vs. live, etc.) Discuss the nature of film as mass-produced, versus the one-time only nature of live performances. Talk about original art works versus posters. Which do they feel is more valuable? Why?

Observation #1 — When you get into the theater, look around. What do you see? Observe the lighting instruments around the room and on the ceiling. Look at the set. Does it look realistic or abstract? Try to guess how the set will be used during the show.

Observation #2 — Discuss the elements that go into producing a live performance: the lights, set, props, costumes, and stage direction. All the people involved in the "behind the scenes" elements of the theater are working backstage as the play unfolds before the students' eyes. Tell them to be aware of this as they watch the show. Observe the lighting cues. How do special effects work? How do the actors change costumes so fast? Actors in a live performance are very attuned to the audience and are interested in the students' reactions to the play.

Ask the students to write letters to the actors about the characters they played and to ask questions of the actors. Send these letters to: Trinity Repertory Company, c/o Education, 201 Washington St., Providence, RI 02903 or email to: education@trinityrep.com.



USING THIS STUDY GUIDE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

A LETTER FROM SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS MANAGER, MATTTIBBS

Welcome to Trinity Rep and the 49th season of Project Discovery! The education staff at Trinity Rep had a lot of fun preparing this study guide, and hope that the activities included will help you incorporate the play into your academic study. It is also structured to help you to introduce performance into your classroom through the

- Community Building in Your Classroom
- Inspiration and Background on the Artist
- Entering and Comprehending Text
- Creating Text for Performance
- Performing in Your Class
- Reflecting on Your Performance



Resident acting company member, Angela Brazil, leading an in-school workshop

Further, the Rhode Island Department of Education has developed Grade Span Expectations for the fine arts in content, knowledge and skills that will be used to assess all students (available at <http://www.ride.ri.gov/instructionassessment/othersubjects.aspx>). Trinity Rep's Project Discovery student matinees help high school students in the following GSE and common core areas:

- Analyzing and evaluating a theatrical performance for its effective use of music, dance, or visual arts (T1-3b)
- Evaluating major and minor themes and characters and their symbolic representation (i.e., cultural references) (T3-2a)
- Evaluating techniques for their effectiveness and craft (e.g., critiquing actor's performance and the playwright's dialog) (T3-2b)
- Evaluating a play or performances based on analysis of what is seen, heard, and known to judge its value and contribution to humanity (T4-1a)
- Evaluating character's objectives and motivations based on what is seen, heard, and known to explain character's behavior (T4-1b)
- Evaluating technical elements of theatrical production (T4-1c)
- Evaluating dramatic elements of a plot for their effectiveness and cohesiveness (T4-1d)
- Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme (CCSS.RL.9-10.3)

UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE DIRECTORS: RICHARD & SHARON JENKINS

Richard and Sharon's shared history at Trinity Repertory Company goes back to the 1970s when they were brought into the company by founding artistic director Adrian Hall. After leaving the company to pursue a career as an actor in films, Richard returned to serve as artistic director from 1990–1994. As an actor at Trinity Rep, Richard appeared in many productions and directed such productions as *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Miser*, *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night*. With upwards of 100 film and television credits, Richard was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Actor for his performance in *The Visitor* (2008) and won an Emmy in 2015 for HBO's *Olive Kitteridge*. Sharon and Richard's work with the company includes *Camelot*, *Cabaret*, *West Side Story* and many productions of *A Christmas Carol* and most recently *Oliver*. A little while ago, Trinity's Marketing Director, Myah Shein sat down to interview them about life in the theater and their work at Trinity!

Myah: Do you have a particular style of working?

Richard: I like to let the work evolve. In movies you arrive on the set and everything has to be done. But in theater, if everyone is participating, it can evolve.

Sharon: It's about what the actors bring to the piece.

Richard: If you feel like we're interested in what you bring, you bring more. I want people to bring ideas; I want you to know more about your character than I do.

Myah: How do you approach the movement in a show like this?

Sharon: My feeling about musicals is that music and dance come because within the context of the scene, you get to a point where words can no longer suffice, and you go to the next level. So I hope the dance is connected to the scene, enhances the scene and makes the audience understand it, pulling them into the moment. I would rather find a very human movement come out of a character and let that evolve rather than just, BAM... we're in a number. It should be organic.

Myah: How do you approach working together on a project like this?

Richard: We always collaborate, whether we're working together or not. There's a shorthand, rules for what we

like and what we don't. I think it has to do with being together for 44 years, and being artists for 44 years. We started together, incredibly green.

Myah: What was it like working with Adrian Hall?

Richard: He nabbed Sharon very young, and I was right out of school. He loved the way she saw dance in the theater. I always loved him talking about theater and what it could do.

Sharon: He had the amazing ability to make you feel what you were doing could be the most important theatrical event of the year — that you were really breaking ground.

Richard: He made you feel this could be extraordinary. It was his passion.

Sharon: To be part of this in the early '70s, watching Adrian and [set designer] Eugene Lee create a theater that we never knew existed, was mind blowing.

Richard: And then many years later, to get the chance to direct with Eugene as the designer was truly amazing.

Sharon: After all the shows we've done with Eugene, we still learn from him.

Myah: What does it mean for you to return to Trinity Rep?

Richard: We're excited that the community is so excited. I was terrified of it, I haven't directed in a long time. But I'll tell you, just to be here, back in the building... Yeah, we're ready. It's our home.

Sharon: It's our artistic home.



Richard & Sharon Jenkins

UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RICHARD RODGERS BIOGRAPHY (1902 – 1979)



Composer Richard Rodgers composed over 50 American musicals during his lifetime and helped to establish musical theater as the respected art form that we know and love today. Richard Charles Rodgers was born in Queens, New York on June 28, 1902 to a physician, Dr. William Rogers, and his wife Mamie. Rodgers grew up in Manhattan, New York. His parents and grandparents shared a love of both Broadway shows and operas of the era and he learned to play the piano at an early age. Rodgers began to compose soon after and created one of his very first compositions during summer camp as a teen. At 15 years of age, he decided that music was his chosen profession.

In 1918 Rodgers entered Columbia University, following suit of his older brother Mortimer Rodgers. While at Columbia, Mortimer introduced Richard to both Oscar Hammerstein II and Lorenz Hart. Rodgers and Hart became immediate friends and soon partners in

music creation. When the partnership began, Rodgers was only 16 years old, while Hart was 23 and much more experienced in the music world. Their partnership proved fruitful with Hart as lyricist and Rodgers as composer. The two created many well known musical hits, "Manhattan" (1925), "Blue Moon" (1934), "My Funny Valentine" (1937), "Isn't It Romantic?" (1932), and "Bewitched, Bothered & Bewildered" (1940)

Together, they wrote music and lyrics for roughly 26 Broadway shows. Their partnership ended with Hart's death in 1943. Following Hart's passing, Rodgers paired with Hammerstein and the two became the dynamic duo that changed musical theater forever. The two started with a success in their first work, *Oklahoma!* In 1943. The pairing led to hit after hit and they were able to use their success to produce plays, concerts, tours and musicals.

From the 1940's to the 1950's, Rodgers & Hammerstein wrote some of the most beloved of musicals: *Oklahoma!* (1943), *Carousel* (1945), *The King & I* (1951), *The Sound of Music* (1951) and *South Pacific* (1949).

Starting in the 1950s, those same musicals were transferred from stage to film, changing the way that musicals were perceived and spread throughout the country. Now, everyone could enjoy the beauty of Rodgers and Hammerstein's works.

After Hammerstein's death in 1960, Rodgers continued to collaborate with young artists, such as Stephen Sondheim. He was awarded an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar and Tony Award in his lifetime, making him the first person to attain all major awards in the entertainment industry. He passed away December 30, 1979, leaving behind an astounding legacy.

UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN II BIOGRAPHY (1895 – 1960)



Oscar Hammerstein II was born in New York City, July 12, 1895 to a family who not only valued theater, but made a living in working in the theater. His father, William Hammerstein managed a vaudeville theater, while his grandfather, Oscar Hammerstein I, was a famed opera impresario. Oscar's uncle, Arthur Hammerstein, was a very successful producer of Broadway musicals. Oscar decided at first to stay away from musicals, having very little involvement and attending Columbia University for pre-law, until he began acting in the varsity show revues. He fell in love with the theater and soon asked for his uncle Arthur's help in finding a job while attending school. He was given the job of production stage manager. In 1919, he was promoted to production stage manager alongside his uncle and wrote his first play, *The Light*. It was produced at Arthur's theater and was a failure. However, this did not

deter Oscar from writing. In 1920, while still attending Columbia, he collaborated with fellow Columbia students, Richard Rodgers and Lorenze Hart for the varsity show *Fly With Me*.

Soon after, Hammerstein dropped out of Columbia to pursue a full time career in the theater. In 1923, he collaborated with Otto Harbach on the work *Wildflower* as the librettist. The collaboration continued into 1924 with *Rose Marie* and added Herbert Stothart and Rudolf Friml as artists as well. As a freelance librettist, Hammerstein was in search of a partnership in composing and he soon found it with Jerome Kern. Hammerstein and Kern met in 1925 and became partners, producing eight musicals and a host of songs together. Their best known show was produced in 1925, a musical by the name of *Show Boat*, featured on both stage and screen in multiple versions. Their other musicals included *Sweet Adeline*, *Very Warm for May*, *Centennial Summer* and *High, Wide, and Handsome*

Some of Kern & Hammerstein's most famous songs include "I Won't Dance," "Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man," "All The Things You Are," and "The Last Time I Saw Paris."

In 1943, Hammerstein left his partnership with Jerome Kern to create a partnership with Richard Rodgers, creating the dynamic duo of Rodgers and Hammerstein. The partnership was long lasting and incredibly fruitful in forming the musical theater world that we know today. The partnership lasted until Hammersteins' death in August of 1960. In Hammerstein's memory, the lights of Broadway were turned off as a moment of solitude that September. Oscar Hammerstein is known to this day as the "man who owned Broadway". His life and legacy live on today.

UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

HISTORICAL INFORMATION: THE WEST (1800 – 1900)

Although Rodgers and Hammerstein were writing in the 1940s, there was a specific time period that they were attempting to re-create. The time between territory and statehood status for Oklahoma was the time of westward expansion for the United States. Moving west and colonizing new lands was a main theme of the 1800s leading into the early 1900s.

Oklahoma! Fun Facts:

Statehood — November 16, 1907

Size — 69,899 square miles

Capital — Oklahoma City

Nickname — “Sooner State”

Tree — Redbud

Flower — Mistletoe

Oklahoma!: Territory & Statehood

1803: Oklahoma was added to the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase, given to the US from France.

1830s – 1840s: Congress passes the Indian Removal Act. Under this act, Native Americans were forcefully driven off their homelands and moved to Oklahoma territory.

1870s: Another 25 Native American tribes were forcefully moved to Oklahoma Territory, thus beginning the “Reservation System”.

1872: Railroads began to cross into Oklahoma establishing routes of commerce.

1889: The US government opened the territory to settlers. Colonizers from Texas were allowed to cross the borders at certain specific times and claim land. If they crossed early they were called “Sooners,” leading to the state nickname as the “Sooner” state.

1890: Oklahoma Territory officially created by the US government.

1907: Oklahoma becomes a state, the 47th in the United States.

The Trail of Tears & Indian Territory

For thousands of years, Native American peoples resided all throughout the country we know today as the United States. That life began to change when colonists and, later, pioneers took more and more land that had always been belonged to Native peoples. Wars broke out as Native Americans attempted to maintain their way of life. In 1830, life for those peoples would change forever in the form of forced displacement and genocide.

The “Five Civilized Tribes,” as they were known by colonists because of their embrace of white culture of the time, consisted of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole tribes. These tribes survived on land cultivated by their ancestors for thousands of years in present-day Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina and Florida. Many white plantation and land-owning officials throughout the US felt that these Native Americans were taking up land that they deserved and that there was an “Indian Problem” that needed to be solved by “civilizing” them. This took form in 1830 with the passage of the Indian Removal Act in Congress as well as the civilization campaign. The main goal of the civilization campaign was to encourage assimilation into white culture. This included conversion to Christianity, learning to speak and read English, and adopting European-style economic practices of the time. President Andrew Jackson was the president at the time in which the Native American removal policy was enacted, giving the federal government the authority to exchange the land Native Americans occupied for the land in the Oklahoma Territory.

The Cherokee and Choctaw Nations, the first tribes to be forcefully moved en masse, called this involuntary movement The Trail of Tears. On the arduous journey west, Native Americans faced many challenges, including hunger, exhaustion, Whooping cough, typhus, dysentery, cholera and starvation on the forced expedition; more than 4,000–5,000 out of 15,000 natives died (3,500 out of 15,000 Creeks died).

UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

TERMS OF THE TIMES

There are many terms in *Oklahoma!* That would have been heard in daily life in the west in the 1900s that are not commonly used today.

What is a Box-Social?

A box-social was defined as a social event, usually meant for fundraising. At this event, boxes of individually prepared lunches and dinners would be auctioned off and the highest bidder would often have the privilege of sharing said meal with the person who made the box. Although *Oklahoma!* takes place in the early 1900s, box socials didn't become popular as an event until the 1920s and 1930s.

What is Steer-roping?

Steer-roping is a rodeo event involving a cowboy and a steer, which is a full-grown form of cattle. The cowboy pursues the steer, lassos it with his rope and throws it to the ground. This would have been a common form of entertainment during the early 1900s in Oklahoma.

What is a Hired-hand?

A hired-hand is a hired laborer, mostly used to describe someone working on a farm or ranch. They are sometimes called farm-hand or ranch-hand.

What is Camphor?

Camphor is a waxy, flammable, solid that has a strong odor. It can be white or transparent and was usually used as a salve or ointment.



UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

THE FARMER & THE COWMAN

In *Oklahoma!*, there is an entire song devoted to relations between farmers and cowmen. What is the difference between the two?

Farmer: A person who owns and manages a farm.

Cowman: A person who owns or is in charge of a cattle ranch. Also known as a "cowboy".

Farming vs. Ranching

Farming: Plants, stationary farm, many different crops, Animals include: pigs, chicken, etc

Ranching: Cattle, traveling, uses land, one type of cattle

In the early 1900s, it was easier to see the distinct differences in farming and ranching. While they require different land, there was still tension around choosing which land to settle on. In present day it is difficult to tell the difference between a farmer and a rancher. A farmer who grows crops may also have a herd of cattle. A rancher who raises cattle may also grow alfalfa or some other crop to feed his animals. In Oklahoma some parts of the state are better for growing crops and some are better for grazing cattle. The flatlands of central Oklahoma and southwestern Oklahoma are good for growing crops. Southeastern Oklahoma is more rugged. It is difficult to grow crops there because the land is rocky and mostly covered with timberlands. But there is plenty of grass for cattle and sheep to eat, so there are more ranches there.



UNIT ONE: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

DIALECT & SLANG

In Oklahoma in the 1900s, people spoke in a certain dialect that may be different from what we see today. Just as in the world of 2016, we have our own way of speaking, people then had theirs. Let's take a look at some of the words that may be different but have similar meaning to what we use today.

| | |
|----------|-----------|
| Ner | Nor |
| Yer | Your |
| Kinfolks | Relatives |
| He'p | Help |
| C'n | Can |
| Whut | What |
| Fer | For |
| Git | Get |
| Purty | Pretty |
| Shore | Sure |
| Ast | Ask |
| 'fore | Before |

There are a few examples of words in which the ends are cut off. For instance: talking, becomes talkin'.

| | |
|------------|-----------|
| Talkin' | Talking |
| Sump'n | Something |
| A-thinkin' | Thinking |
| A-singin' | Singing |



Hugh Jackman as Curly McLain in the London production of Oklahoma! (1999)

UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

SYNOPSIS

The play begins in the Indian territory now known as the state of Oklahoma in the early 1900s. Aunt Eller is churning butter outside her farmhouse as Curly enters singing ("Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'). Curly, who has a crush on Aunt Eller's niece, Laurey has come to invite her to a box-social that evening. When Laurey enters, she pretends to be rude to Curly and he responds by describing the way in which he'll take her to the box-social in style ("Surrey with the Fringe on Top"). After the song, he admits that the surrey is something he made up. This makes Laurey furious and she refuses to go with him to the social. Meanwhile, Will Parker, a young cowhand comes on the scene with a description of his experience at a fair in Kansas City ("Kansas City"), where he won \$50 in a steer-roping contest. Those \$50 are important to him because he wants to marry Ado Annie. Her father, Judge Andrew Carnes, will not allow this to happen until Will can manage to come up with at least \$50.

In order to make Curly jealous, Laurey decides to go to the box-social with the hired hand, Jud Fry. When Laurey discovers that Curly invited another girl to go, she acts indifferent and sings ("Many a New Day"). Meanwhile, Ado Annie has been spending a lot of time with the "Persian" peddler, Ali Hakim. Having forgotten that Will is back from the farm, she and Laurey talk about what she should do. During the conversation she reveals that she is the kind of a girl who cannot refuse a man anything and sings ("I Cain't Say No"). The closeness between Ali Hakim and Ado Annie makes her father insist that the peddler marry her. Will is out of the running as he has spent his \$50 on presents for Ado Annie and no longer has it to show to her father.

When Curly and Laurey meet again, they decide to go to the social together. For appearances however, they will act as though they don't care for each other, and they sing ("People Will Say We're in Love"). To tell Jud that Laurey isn't going with him, Curly visits Jud at his room in the smokehouse, and gets Jud into a good mood and sings ("Pore Jud is Daid") and then leaves. While Jud wallows in self-pity, he sings ("Lonely

Room"). In a dream which becomes the dream ballet, Laurey imagines how it would be to marry Curly. She is awakened from this dream by Jud who has come to insist that she go with him to the party. When, a moment later, Curly appears, Laurey suddenly decides to go with Jud instead of Curly, closing act one.

The second act opens with the box-social. Farmers and cowmen start an argument, broken up by Aunt Eller firing her gun and turning the fight into a party leading to the song and dance of ("The Farmer and the Cowman"). After the dance, the auction of food boxes takes place, with the men bidding for the boxes of the girls of their choice. A spirited contest ensues for Laurey's box between Jud and Curly. Determined to be the winner, Curly sells everything he owns and gets the box for \$42.31. Meanwhile, Ali Hakim pays Will \$50 for all his presents. Having no intention of marrying Ado Annie, Hakim would very much like to see Will get the girl. Now that Will has enough money to convince Annie's father, they talk about their future as man and wife ("All Er Nuthin").

Laurey has fired Jud because of his strange behavior toward her and she literally runs into Curly, scared and crying. Curly kisses her and asks her to marry him as he loves her and will keep her safe. All seems to be happy three weeks later. The marriage of Curly and Laurey takes place and Curly says goodbye to being a cowman in favor of being a farmer. Jud, drunk, breaks into the festivities and threatens Curly with a knife. In the ensuing brawl, Jud falls on the blade and dies. A makeshift trial is hurriedly improvised by Judge Carnes so as not to delay the young couple. Curly is acquitted of murder, and is free to go off with his bride on their honeymoon while Oklahoma is welcomed into statehood (*Oklahoma!*).

UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

THE CHARACTERS



Gertie Cummings
(Royer Bockus)



Will Parker
(Jude Sandy)



Ali Hakim
(Stephen Thorne)



Jud Fry
(Joe Wilson, Jr.)



Laurey Williams
(Rachael Warren)



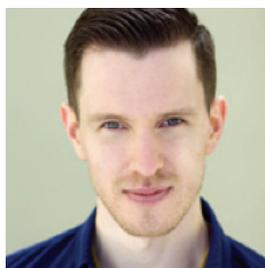
Ado Annie
(Rebecca Gibel)



Aunt Eller
(Janice Duclose)



Andrew Carnes
(Tom Gleadow)



Ike Skidmore
(Kevin Patrick Martin)



Curly McLain
(Charlie Thurston)

UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

THE PLAY THAT INSPIRED OKLAHOMA!: GREEN GROW THE LILACS

Green Grow the Lilacs by Lynn Riggs was written in 1931. The story is a retelling of a native folktale about young love in the Indian Territory that would become Oklahoma in 1900. The play breaks through the traditional setting of "Acts" and is constructed with six related scenes with old songs and cowboy melodies. Many of the songs that wound up in Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, are due to *Green Grow the Lilacs*. Unlike *Oklahoma!*, *Green Grow the Lilacs* is a play with music and not necessarily a musical. This means that there are more moments of dialogue than there are moments of full musical moments. The play filters a dark tone throughout the whole, that is not present in *Oklahoma!*, which has dark moments but is mostly a light musical. *Green Grow the Lilacs* deals more directly with westward expansion, Cherokee displacement, etc. The basic story of *Green Grow the Lilacs* is the same as Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!*, with even characters' names being the same. This technique of re-creation is called adaptation.

About the Playwright

Lynn Riggs was a Native American poet and playwright, born on a farm in Oklahoma in the Cherokee Nation in August of 1899. His other works include a dozen plays and ten Hollywood screenplays as well as two books of poetry, *The Iron Dish* (1930) and *This Book, These Hills, These People* (1982). Most if not all of his works reflect the tensions of living in a predominantly white culture without losing or dishonoring an Indian heritage.



UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

THEMES & THEIR MEANINGS

Displacement. One of the play's main themes is displacement. Displacement is the movement of one thing from its place or position. The early settlers of Oklahoma as well as the black communities that settled there with the Native Americans are all dealing with being in a foreign place and attempting to make that place home. The groups that the play is separated into in the "farmer" and the "cowman" having very distinct differences is a way to cope with the displacement. Everyone has their group and they survive in working together toward a common goal.

Independence. Another main theme in the play is independence. Laurey and Aunt Eller are women that are mostly self-sufficient on their farm at a time when women were expected to marry and produce children and leave the work to the men. Although Jud is their hired hand that helps on the farm, they too get to work in surviving in the West. It seems that in the American West, there's a dichotomy. Women are expected to marry and produce children but also contribute to farm work. However, as Laurey is working there is still a strong expectation to get married and settle down and with every year that passes, she's left as an old maid. The play deals a lot with Laurey's struggle of wanting to be married and really caring for Curly as a potential mate versus staying an old maid.

UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

CHOREOGRAPHY: THE ART BEHIND THE MOVEMENT

Oklahoma! was the first musical to incorporate the changing language of dance into a performance piece. Before that moment, full dance pieces were performed next to plays with music. The combination of dance, musicality, and a play's script is what made Oscar and Hammerstein such a hot commodity. *Oklahoma!* is the first musical that contains an elaborate ballet that actually propels the telling of the story. Usually, ballets were "fillers" in musicals, leaving time for costume or set changes. This time, the ballet was essential in telling the story.

The first production of *Oklahoma!* was choreographed by Agnes de Mille. Agnes de Mille was a dancer and choreographer born in New York City in 1905. She had a late start in dance, not starting lessons until the age of fourteen. After being told that her body type was not suited for dance, she stopped and attended UCLA for a degree in English. After graduating, she moved back to New York City and journeyed into choreography. In New York, she met modern dance pioneer Martha Graham and they became friends and colleagues. Agnes continued to learn and choreograph,

spending time in London learning with dancers Marie Rambert and Antony Tudor. In 1940, she was offered a choreographing job with what is now known as American Ballet Theater (ABT) working on a show by the name of *Rodeo*, which would change her career. From working with ABT, Agnes was asked to choreograph *Oklahoma!* with new duo Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The Dream Ballet

The Dream Ballet sequence in *Oklahoma!* is also known as "Laurey Makes Up Her Mind". The ballet explores Laurey's feelings towards Jud and Curly and how she can and/or will choose between the two. The ballet begins with a joyous feeling in an impending wedding between Curly and Laurey. However, the joyous occasion quickly sours when Jud shows up as the groom instead of Curly. The ballet is a combination of all that influenced Agnes de Mille in dance at the time. Elements of modern dance, ballet and Antony Tudor's "Psychological Dance Drama" made their way into the piece, making it captivating and a brand new look at dance as an art form used in musicals.

UNIT TWO: THE PLAY

SET DESIGN: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK

The design of a set is integral to the story-telling of a play. It sets the scene, tells the audience where they are, what to expect, etc. Trinity Rep's set designer for *Oklahoma!* is Eugene Lee. Eugene Lee is a renowned set designer that has been in the business for many years. *Saturday Night Live* and *Wicked* are just two of his major works. The set designer works very closely with the director to bring about the vision that will best tell the story.

In Trinity Rep's production of *Oklahoma!*, the set is relatively simple and spare. The most noticeable part of the set is a big wall in the back of the stage in which the characters set the scene. On the wall, is written "Oklahoma Territory" in big block letters, to show that Oklahoma has not yet acquired statehood. On the wall, is drawn various parts of the story. The stove that Curly sits on, Ali Hakim's name, hearts between Curly and Laurey, the knot hole that Curly shoots through, etc.

There are also platforms in the audience area that are used throughout the play to make the play feel as though it is happening all around the audience. The audience is very much a part of the action of the show.



Rachael Warren as Laurey Williams and Charlie Thurston as Curly McLain

UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 1: CREATING YOUR OWN PRODUCTION

Oklahoma! has been produced countless times since its premiere in 1943. Many of these productions have had different directors, actors, and designers working to make the play different from any other production audiences had seen before. Split the class into two sections.

Section 1: Take the part of a director and think about the following questions:

What actors would you cast in your production of *Oklahoma!*?

Are there any celebrities or people you know who would make a good Laurey?

A good Aunt Eller? A good Curly?

How would you stage the dream ballet?

Section 2: Take the part of costume designer and think about the following questions:

You could also alter the time period—what would Laurey be wearing in the 21st century?

What would everyone be wearing for the Box Social?

What separates the farmers and cowmen in terms of their costumes?

What colors are various characters wearing?

When the sections are done, have the designers show their projects. Why did they choose the things they chose? How did the production change with each new person's vision?



Tom Gleadow as Andrew Carnes and Stephen Thorne as Ali Hakim

UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 2: TO DESIGN OR NOT TO DESIGN?

Continuing in the style of design, this is your chance to design the set of *Oklahoma!*. The set design of a show can be very important to how the audience perceives the play. Separate the class into two groups. Each group is tasked with a different design of *Oklahoma!* with a different audience set up. Consider how you would accommodate all of the different scenes that happen during the play. Draw a picture of your dream set for *Oklahoma!* and explain why it looks like it does and what scenes would happen where.

Group 1: Design *Oklahoma!* in the round, with the audience on all sides and the stage in the center.

Group 2: Design *Oklahoma!* as a proscenium, with the audience all on one side and the stage on the other.

Some questions to ask:

How big is the audience?

Where is the stage?

What's on stage?

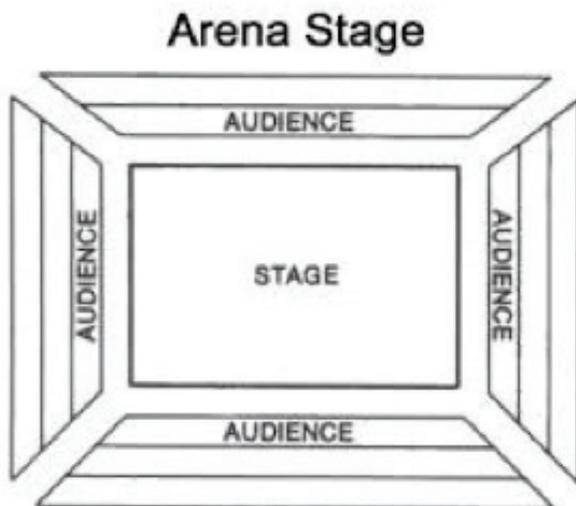
How do we show progression of time?

How do we portray a desert?

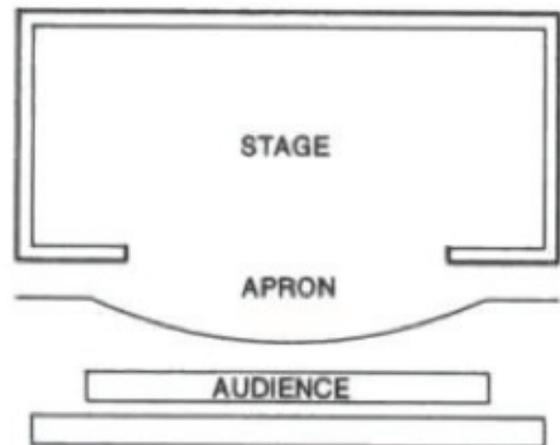
Where is the house?

Where do the actors enter and exit?

1. Round



2. Proscenium



UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 3: SOCIAL CONSCIOUSNESS & CHANGE

One of the main themes in *Green Grow the Lilacs* that filtered into *Oklahoma!* is displacement and self sufficiency. In our production of *Oklahoma!*, there is a giant wall on the stage that helps to portray some of these themes. What is it like when a person is taken or moved from an area that they once occupied to another space? What is it like to only be able to rely on your farm for your way of life? In the times before Oklahoma's statehood, poverty, land and society's ways of dealing with it was a huge political issue, as it still is today in the context of immigration.

Questions to consider:

Who are the people in today's society who are most displaced?

What structures in society exist to help these people? Are there any?

Do these structures work?

What is good and bad about them?

What could be done to improve upon them?

Exercise: Using newspapers, magazines, and websites, find images or stories of today that remind you of the characters and situations in *Oklahoma!* that early settlers would have struggled with. Make a collage of what wealth, poverty and immigration look like today and compare it to the early settlers' life that is shown in the musical. What has changed? What has stayed the same? What images or stories speak most strongly to you?



Charlie Thurston as Curly McLain and Rachael Warren as Laurey Williams

UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 4: ACTING THE SCENE

While acting, it's important to know what is driving the character. Many times, actors will give themselves active verbs or phrases to play with in order to see what it does to the character and to their scene partner. In the glossary is a scene between two characters. First, pick one student to play Character 1 and the other to play Character 2. Next, pick their wants. What does each character want in the scene. Does Curly want Laurey to admit that she's in love with him? Does Aunt Eller want Laurey to leave her alone so that she can do work?

Separate the class into two sections:

One side is rooting for Character 1 and the other for Character 2. Have the students pick active verb phrases from below that they think would help their section win. Have the students playing Character 1 and Character 2 first act out the scene without any help from their sections. Then have them act it out again, this time let the sections pick an advocate that will say the phrase to Character 1 and Character 2 before they start. Each side must present what they saw, how the phrase changed the way the characters went about getting what they wanted and if they think the character finally got what they wanted.

Active Phrases

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| To accuse | To adore |
| To admonish | To amuse |
| To brush off | To annoy |
| To buddy up | To apologize |
| To caress | To applaud |
| To celebrate | To invade |
| To challenge | To invite |
| To charm | To lure |
| To admire | To attack |
| To bestow | To bask |
| To boast | To beg |
| To brag | To belittle |
| To brood | To patronize |
| To check out | To retreat |
| To coax | To ridicule |
| To comfort | To question |



UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 5: SONG LYRICS EXERCISE

In our production of *Oklahoma!*, it has been stressed that songs come out of heightened emotions when words fail. Is there a song that you would eliminate? Is there a place where you think a song should be?

Read the lyrics of songs from the play. Songs can be found in the glossary below. See if you can find themes that were talked about and maybe even more themes. How do they relate to the themes from the play? Then, have the students perform the songs as though they were monologues/scenes.

Questions to consider:

What makes these lyrics different from other musicals that the students may know?

What do we learn about characters and their situations from songs?

How would the play change if there was no music but the songs were still present?



UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 6: WRITE A LETTER HOME

Most of the time, when people moved west, they left family members back on the east coast. The main communication of the time was through written communication. Have the students pick a character from the play and have them write a letter to a loved one that is not in the state with them. What would they want the loved one to know? What wouldn't they want the loved one to know? Is the letter urgent and telling of an emergency? Is the letter happy, sad, courageous, expectant?

When the letters are written, make sure that they sign it as the characters and then pass the letters around to be read by another student. Are there recurring themes that pop up in the letters? Why or why not?

UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

EXERCISE 7: SPEAKING THE TIMES

The differences in language between Oklahoma in the 1900s and present day New England are very obvious when reading the play. Below is a scene from the play. Have the students read it and then put it into their own words. What does it sound like with 2016 slang?

(A grove on Laurey's farm. Singing girls and Gertie seated under a tree. A girl, Vivian, is telling Gertie's fortune.)

Vivian: And to yer house a dark clubman!

Laurey: Girls, could you—could you go som'eres else and tell fortunes? I gotta be here by myself.

Gertie: Look! She bought 'at ole smellin' salts the peddler tried to sell us!

Laurey: It ain't smellin' salts. It's goin' to make up my mind fer me. Lookit me take a good whiff now!

Gertie: That's the camphor.

Laurey: Please, girls, go away.

Ellen: Hey, Laurey, is it true you're lettin Jud take you tonight 'stid of Curly?

Laurey: Tell you better when I think ever'thin' out clear. Beginnin' tp see things clear a'ready.

UNIT THREE: ENTERING THE TEXT

GLOSSARY OF SCENES/SONGS

Scene 1: Laurey & Curly

Curly: You knowed it was me 'fore you opened the door.

Laurey: No sich of a thing.

Curly: You did, too! You hearded my voice and knowed it was me.

Laurey: I hearded a voice a-talkin' rumbly along with Aunt Eller. And hearded someone a-singin' like a bullfrog in a pond.

Curly: You knowed it was me, so you set there a-thinkin' up sum'n mean to say. I'm a good mind not to ast you to the Box Social.

Laurey: If you did ast me, I wouldn't go with you. Besides, how'd you take me? You ain't bought a new buggy with red wheels onto it, have you?

Curly: No, I aint.

Laurey: And a spankin' team with their bridles all jinglin'?

Curly: No.

Laurey: 'Spect me to ride on behind ole Dun, I guess. You better ast that old Cummin's girl you've tuck sich a shine to, over acrost the river.

Curly: If I was to ast you, they'd be a way to take you, Miss Laurey Smarty.

Laurey: Oh, they would?

Scene 2: Ado Annie & Laurey

Ado Annie: Hello, Laurey.

Laurey: Hello. Will Parker's back from Kansas City. He's lookin' fer yer.

Ado Annie: Will Parker? I didn't count on him bein' back so soon!

Laurey: I can see that! Been ridin' a piece?

Ado Annie: The peddler-man's gonna drive me to the Box Social. I got up sort of a tasty lunch.

Laurey: Ado Annie! Have you tuck up with that peddler-man?

Ado Annie: N-not yit.

Laurey: But yer promised to Will Parker, ain't yer?

Ado Annie: Not what you might say promised. I jist told him mebbe.

Laurey: Don't y'like him no more?

Ado Annie: 'Course I do. They won't never be nobody like Will.

Laurey: Then what about this peddler-man?

Ado Annie: They won't never be nobody like him, neither.

Laurey: Well, which one d'you like the best?

Ado Annie: Whatever one I'm with!

Scene 3: Jud & Curly

Curly: Howdy.

Jud: Whut'd you want?

Curly: I done got through my business up here at the house. Just thought I'd pay a call. You got a gun, I see.

Jud: Good un. Colt forty-five.

Curly: What do you do with it?

Jud: Shoot things.

Curly: Oh. That's a good-lookin' rope you got there. Spins nice. You know Will Parker? He can shore spin a rope. 'S a good strong hook you got there. You could hang yourself on that, Jud.

Jud: I could what?

Curly: Hang yerself. It would be as easy as fallin' off a log! Fact is, you could stand on a log or a chair if you'd rather-right about here-see? And put this here around yer neck. Tie that good up there first, of course. Then all you'd have to do would be to fall off the log-or the chair, whichever you'd ruther fall off of. In five minutes, or less, with good luck, you'd be dead as a doornail.

Jud: Whut'd you mean by that?

Curly: Then folks would come to yer funeral and sing sad songs.

Jud: Yea!!

Curly: They would. You never know how many people like you till you're dead. You'd probably be laid out in the parlor. You'd be all decked out in yer best suit with yer hair combed down slick, and a high starched collar.

Jud: Would there be any flowers, d'you think?

Curly: Shore would, and palms too- all around yer coffin. Then folks would stand around you and the men would bare their heads and the women would sniffly softly. Some would probably faint-ones that had took a shine to you when you was alive.

Jud: What women have took a shine to me?

Curly: Lots of women. Only they don't never come right out and show you how they feel less'n you die first.

Jud: I guess that's so.



Joe Wilson Jr. as Jud Fry and Charlie Thurston as Curly McLain



Song 1: Oklahoma!

There's never been a better time to start in life-
It ain't too early and it aint too late!
Starting as a farmer with a brand new wife-
Soon be livin' in a brand new state!
Brand new state - gonna treat you great!
Gonna bring you barley, carrots and pertaters,
Pasture for the cattle, spinich and termaters,
Flowers on the prarie where the June bugs zoom,
Plen'y of air and plen'y of room,
Plen'y of room to swing a rope!
Plen'y of heart and plen'y of hope.

OOOOk-lahoma, where the wind comes sweepin' down
the plain,
And the wavin' wheat can sure smell sweet, When the
wind comes right behind the rain.
OOOOk-lahoma, Ev'ry night my honey lamb and I, Sit
alone and talk and watch a hawk makin' lazy circles in
the sky.

We know we belong to the land (yo-ho)
And the land we belong to is grand!
And when we say
Yeeow! Aye-yip-aye-yo-ee-ay!
We're only sayin'
You're doin' fine, Oklahoma!
Oklahoma O.K.!

Song 2: Kansas City

I got to Kansas City on a Frid'y
By Sattidy I larned a thing or two
For up to then I didn't have an idy
Of whut the modren world was comin' to!

I counted twenty gas buggies goin' by theirsels
Almost ev'ry time I tuk a walk.
'Nen I put my ear to a Bell Telephone and a strange
womern started in to talk!
(Whut next! Yeak whut!)
Whut next?

Ev'rythin's up to date in Kansas City
They've gone about as fur as they c'n go!
They went and built a skyscr*per seven stories high,
About as high as a buildin' orta grow.

Ev'rythin's like a dream in Kansas City,
It's better than a magic lantern show!
Y' c'n turn the radiator on whenever you want some
heat.
With ev'ry kind o' comfort ev'ry house is all complete.

You c'n walk to privies in the rain and never wet your
feet!
They've gone about as fur as they can go,
(Yes sir!)
They've gone about as fur as they can go!

Ev'rythin's up to date in Kansas City
They've gone about as fur as they can go!
They got a big theayter they call a burlesque.
Fer fifty cents you can see a dandy show.

Song 3: Many a New Day

Why should a woman who is healthy and strong,
Blubber like a baby if her man goes away?
A-weepin' and a-wailin' how he done her wrong,
That's one thing you'll never hear me say!
Never gonna' think that the man I lose is the only man
among men.
I'll snap my fingers to show I don't care;
I'll buy me a brand new dress to wear;
I'll scrub my neck and I'll brush my hair,
And start all over again.
Many a new face will please my eye,
Many a new love will find me;
Never've I once looked back to sigh over the romance
behind me;
Many a new day will dawn before I do!
Many a light lad may kiss and fly,
A kiss gone by is bygone.

Never've I asked an August sky, "Where has last July
gone?"
Never've I wandered through the rye, wondering where
has some guy gone;
Many a new day will dawn before I do!
Many a new face will please my eye,
Many a new love will find me;
Never've I once looked back to sigh over the romance
behind me;
Many a new day will dawn before I do!
Many a light lad may kiss and fly,
A kiss gone by is bygone.
Never've I asked an August sky, "Where has last July
gone?"
Never've I wandered through the rye, wondering where
has some guy gone;
Many a new day will dawn before I do!
Many a red sun will set!
Many a blue moon will shine before I do!



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