

# Our Town

A play in three acts

By  
Thornton Wilder

A classroom study guide  
Prepared for Ferndale Repertory Theatre  
By Nanette Voss

“You’ve got to love life to have life, and  
you’ve got to have life to love life...It’s  
what they call a vicious cycle.”

- *Stage Manager*

# Ferndale Repertory Theatre 2002-2003

Marilyn McCormick, Executive Director

Joe Collins, Technical Director

Presents

## **Our Town**

A play in three acts

By Thornton Wilder

Director	David Hamilton
Assistant Director	Dillon Savage
Set/Lights Designer	Adam Liston
Costume Designer	Tiffany Groom
Sound Designer	Gabriel Groom
Stage Manager	Chris Ayers

## The Cast(s)

<i>Stage Manager</i>	<b>The Strawberry Phosphates</b>	<b>The Ice Cream Sodas</b>
<i>Dr. Gibbs</i>	Daniel Scott Marcus	Bridget Fenner
<i>Joe/Jill Crowell</i>	Gil Peters	Henry Kraemer
<i>Howie Newsome</i>	Margaret Fence	Margaret Fence
<i>Mrs. Gibbs</i>	Sterling Johnson-Brown	Sterling Johnson-Brown
<i>Mrs. Webb</i>	Bethany Adams	Devan King
<i>George Gibbs</i>	Jessie Shieman	Megan McBride
<i>Rebecca Gibbs</i>	Andrew Nelson	Keenan Hand
<i>Wally Webb</i>	Morgan Mae Pearsale	Lillian Damron
<i>Emily Webb</i>	David Martinez	Daniel McBride
<i>Professor Willard</i>	Amanda Schreiber	Cassie McBride
<i>Mr. Webb</i>	Elizabeth Wright	Elizabeth Wright
<i>Woman in Balcony</i>	Halsey Demant	Halsey Demant
<i>Beligerent Woman</i>	Sarah Daniels	Sarah Daniels
<i>Lady in the Box</i>	Mike Hansen	Rachel Cardoza
<i>Simon Stimson</i>	Rachel Cardoza	Sarah Daniels
<i>Mrs. Soames</i>	Brandon Marcus	Brandon Marcus
<i>Constable Warren</i>	Laureen Tipple	Laureen Tipple
<i>Si Crowell</i>	Keegan Demant	Keegan Demant
<i>Basball Players</i>	David Martinez	Daniel McBride
	David Martinez	Daniel McBride
	Keegan Demant	Keegan Demant
	Mason Demant	Jon Fisk
<i>Sam Craig</i>	Mason Demant	Jon Fisk
<i>Jolene Stoddard</i>	Hillary Hall	Szasha Ozard
<i>Live Sound</i>	Rachel Adams	Rachel Adams

## Letter of Introduction

To whom it may concern,

When I was a junior in high school, I read *Our Town* in my American Humanities class. For two weeks, we discussed the content of the play, the strange aspects of its composition, the form, the absence of plot; we read parts of the show out loud to imitate the sound of an actual performance. And yet, after all that studying, I never felt that I understood the show. My teenage, egocentric mind was unable to grasp the larger meanings embedded within the play. Through high school graduation and college graduation, I have not given the great American drama of *Our Town* another thought, until now.

With this study guide, I have attempted to bring to light all of those greater themes and lessons projected through this play that make it a pillar of classic American literature. I looked to my past experience with this work and decided to satisfy all of the qualms and answer all of the questions that I had concerning the plot, the scenery, the presentation, all of the elements that I did not understand in my earlier years. My primary goal was to capture the essence of the play, the parts most admired by those who truly understand it and the parts most criticized by those who cannot relate to the situations presented within the script. In order to harness this “essence,” I researched the life of Thornton Wilder; I read conversations he had and letters that he wrote to journalists and friends in which he explained his intentions for writing the show. I also asked the director of the Ferndale production to describe his take on the show, his approach, execution and the themes and messages he intends to project through his rendition. With these insights, I have approached *Our Town* not as a historical representation of the lives of our ancestors, but as a concept play in which the situations presented are true to both the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

*Our Town* is a story of human life, of life, love and death. The events and emotions that make up the plot parallel events and emotions in our own lives today. I hope that this study guide aids you and your students in better understanding the timeless, universal themes presented in this simple, yet profound work of literature.

Enjoy!

Nanette Voss

## Thornton Niven Wilder (1897-1975)

- 1897 Born 17 April, in Madison, Wisconsin
- 1906-11 7 May, arrives in British crown colony of Hong Kong where his father is Consul General. Attends school there for six months.  
Attends China Inland Mission School, Chefoo.
- 1912 Attends Thatcher School at Ojai valley in California and acts in school plays.
- 1913-15 Transfers to Berkeley High School; begins writing three minute plays.
- 1915 Sent by father to Oberlin College in Ohio, continues writing.
- 1917-20 Enters Yale in New Haven, Connecticut; wins Bradford Brinton Award for his four-act drama, *The Trumpet Shall Sound*; leaves Yale to serve in the U.S. Coast Guard Artillery Corps. Returns to Yale. Receives his B.A.; sails for Europe.
- 1920-21 Resides at the American Academy in Rome where he becomes involved in archeological studies.
- 1921-22 Returns to U.S. Teaches at the Lawrenceville School for boys in New Jersey.
- 1925-26 Attends Princeton University in New Jersey and receives a master's degree in French literature. *The Trumpet Shall Sound* opens in December of 1926 at the American Laboratory Theatre.
- 1927 *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* is published in November; becomes a best seller.
- 1928 Receives a Pulitzer Prize for *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*; remains at Lawrenceville. *The Angel That Troubled the Waters* is published.
- 1929 Begins construction of "House the Bridge Built" in Hamden, Connecticut.
- 1930 *The Woman of Andros* is published. Accepts position at the University of Chicago teaching writing and classics in translation.
- 1931 *The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays* is published.

- 1932-33 Translates André Obey's *Le Viol de Lucrece* as *Lucrece*, which is produced at the Belasco Theatre, December 30, 1932 and published in 1933.
- 1934 Meets Gertrude Stein in Chicago. She becomes a close friend.
- 1935 His first "American" novel, *Heaven's My Destination*, is published.
- 1936 Father dies. Wilder leaves Chicago "to be a Writer." Visits Stein in France and Freud in Austria.
- 1937 Wilder's adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* opens on Broadway.
- 1938 *Our Town* opens at Princeton, moves to Boston, and then to Broadway. It receives the Pulitzer Prize for drama. *The Merchant of Yonkers* opens on Broadway; closes after only five weeks.
- 1939 Filming of *Our Town* by Sol Lesser begins.
- 1942 In Hollywood, collaborates with Alfred Hitchcock on screenplay for *Shadow of a Doubt*. Commissioned as a captain in the Army Air Corps Intelligence in 1942; serves until 1945. *The Skin of Our Teeth* opens in New York in November.
- 1943 Receives the Pulitzer Prize for *The Skin of Our Teeth*.
- 1946 Mother dies.
- 1947 Receives Litt.D. from Yale.
- 1948 The *Ides of March* is published; begins *The Emporium*, which he never finishes. Translates Jean-Paul Sartre's *Morts sans sepulture*. It's produced in Greenwich Village as *The Victors*.
- 1950-51 Receives LL.D. from Harvard. Awarded honorary doctorates by Harvard and Northwestern, 1951.
- 1952 Receives Gold Medal for fiction from American Institute of Arts and Letters.
- 1955 *The Matchmaker*, a revision of *The Merchant of Yonkers*, is successfully produced on Broadway.
- 1957 Awarded German Book Sellers' Peace Prize.

- 1962 *Plays for Bleecker Street* are performed at Circle Square in New York. Wilder retreats to Arizona, to write.
- 1963 Begins work on *The Eighth Day*. Awarded Medal of Freedom by President John Kennedy who is assassinated before it can be presented.
- 1964 *Hello, Dolly!*, adapted by Michael Stewart from *The Matchmaker*, with music and lyrics by Jerry Herman, opens on Broadway 16 January and becomes a hit.
- 1965 Receives the National Book Committee's Medal for Literature at the White House.
- 1967 *The Eighth Day* published; it wins the National Book Award for fiction.
- 1973 *Theophilus North* published; best-seller for twenty-one weeks
- 1975 Dies 7 December at the "House the Bridge Built" in Hamden, Connecticut
- 1988 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary revival of *Our Town* opens at Broadway's Lyceum Theatre and wins Tony for best revival

# Cast of Characters

Two casts alternate these roles performance to performance

**Stage Manager – narrator, also plays Mrs. Forrest, Mr. Morgan and the Minister**

Dr. Frank Gibbs – Grover’s Corners physician, father of George and Rebecca

Joe Crowell – paper delivery boy

Howie Newsome – milkman for Grover’s Corners

Mrs. Julia Gibbs – wife of Dr. Gibbs, mother of George and Rebecca

Mrs. Myrtle Webb – wife of Mr. Webb, mother of Wally and Emily

George Gibbs – eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs, Rebecca’s brother

Rebecca Gibbs – younger child of Mr. and Mrs. Gibbs, George’s sister

Wally Webb – younger child of Mr. and Mrs. Webb, Emily’s brother

Emily Webb – eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Webb, Wally’s sister

Professor Willard – geology professor from the state university

Mr. Charles Webb – Editor of the Grover’s Corners *Sentinel*, husband of Mrs. Webb, father of Wally and Emily

Simon Stimson – Choir director and organist of the Congregational Church

Mrs. Louella Soames – Member of community, friend of Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb

Constable Warren – Grover’s Corners keeper of the peace

Si Crowell – paper delivery boy in Act II, Joe Crowell’s younger brother

Sam Craig – funeral attendee, Emily’s cousin

Jolene Stoddard – undertaker of Grover’s Corners

*Our Town* Synopsis:  
A skeleton sketch of actions and events

***Act One: The Daily Life***

Setting: Dawn. Grover's Corners, New Hampshire. May 7, 1901.

The play opens with the Stage Manager describing the daily routines of a typical small, American town at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two families prepare for a new day. The children get ready for school, the mothers cook breakfast and the fathers inquire into the content of everyone's day. The mothers see their children off and resume their daily chores; the fathers leave for work. Periodically, the Stage Manager interrupts the actions of each family and provides insight into the past and future of this New England town and its inhabitants. The children return from school, homework plans are discussed between a boy and girl, the eldest siblings of each family. As afternoon turns into evening, the mothers go off to choir practice, while the fathers spend time with the children. Everyone grows enchanted with the moonlight as night approaches and homework, singing, and conversation dwindle into the vastness of the darkening sky and the universe beyond.

***Act Two: Love and Marriage***

Setting: Morning. Grover's Corners, N.H. July 7, 1904.

Two families prepare for a wedding. The mothers fuss over their children's appearances. The groom tries to see the bride before the service. The bride's father gives the groom expert advice on the role of the husband. The Stage Manager interrupts the wedding preparation to present a flashback of the bride and groom falling in love and the proposal. The parents of the groom also discuss their initial reaction to the news of the engagement, their reluctance at allowing the young couple to wed at such a vulnerable age. The present action picks up at the wedding ceremony. The young bride and groom express their doubts; they seek consolation from their parents and proceed with caution, while members of the congregation weep tears of joy.

***Act Three: Death and The Grave***

Setting: Morning. Grover's Corners, N.H. Summer, 1913.

The town undertaker supervises the digging of a new grave. Those left of the two families partake in a funeral service. The bride from Act Two takes her place among the dead, next to her mother-in-law and other previously prominent members of the town. The dead discuss the living,

pointing out their faults and the things they never notice. The bride's living husband and relatives periodically visit their tombstones, dropping flowers and tears to demonstrate their grief. She, unable to adjust to her new place outside of the living, asks to return for a moment to her 12<sup>th</sup> birthday. The criticisms of the dead are proven true as the bride vainly attempts to get her family to "look" at her. She returns to the grave wiser, ready to accept her fate and the ignorance of the living. The Stage Manager closes the play with a final monologue.

## *Our Town* Glossary of Terms

**hollyhock** – a tall widely grown perennial Chinese herb with large coarse rounded leaves and tall spikes of showy flowers

**heliotrope** – any herbs or shrubs related to forget-me-not flowers

**burdock** – a coarse herb related to the daisy that has globular flower heads with prickly bracts

**gingham** – a fabric usually of yarn-dyed cotton in plain weave

**phosphate** – an effervescent drink of carbonated water with a small amount of phosphoric acid or an acid phosphate flavored with fruit syrup

**highboy** – a tall chest of drawers mounted on a base with long legs

**legacy** – something left to a person by will

**savant** – a learned person, a scholar

**pince-nez** – eyeglasses clipped to the nose by a spring

**basalt** – a dark fine-grained igneous rock

**province** – an administrative district or a division of country

**shale** – a rock that is formed by the consolidation of clay, mud, or slit with a finely layered structure and easy to split

**outcropping** – exposed bedrock

**brachycephalic** – having a head that is relatively short from front to back or relatively wide from side to side

**telegraph** – an apparatus for communication at a distance by coded signals

**spool** – a cylinder with a rim at each end and usually a hollow center and on which material is wound, such as thread

**languid** – drooping or flagging from or as if from exhaustion

**overshoes** – an outer-shoe, a galosh

**incubator** – an apparatus providing suitable conditions (warmth or moisture) for incubating something, usually eggs

**hypocrisy** – a pretending to be what one is not or to believe what one does not

**gocart** – a stroller

**rheumatism** – various conditions characterized by inflammation or pain in muscles, joints, or fibrous tissue

**gangling** – lanky, spindly

**whooping cough** – an infectious bacterial disease especially of children marked by a convulsive spasmodic cough

**proscenium** – the wall that separates the stage from the auditorium and provides an arch that frames the stage

**genealogist** – a person who traces the descent of a person or family from an ancestor

**wean** – to turn away from something long desired or followed

**lumbago** – usually painful muscular rheumatism involving the lumbar region

**epitaph** – an inscription (on a tombstone) in memory of a dead person

## Director's Notes: *Our Town*

The play *Our Town* is a script designed to break all of the rules. In theater there are some very firmly set guidelines that playwrights typically work within—Wilder throws these all out the window.

Wilder's play does not deal with major characters, it does not revolve around an intricate plot line, it does not have a recognizable climax. Characters continually break the metaphorical "fourth wall," communicating with—and even sitting in—the audience. For these reasons the work can be best described as a concept play, perhaps more interesting for its unusual structure than for its story, the kind of play that should never have become popular with a mainstream theater audience.

And yet it did. *Our Town* has been produced in countless theaters across the country. Almost every high school drama department has done at least ONE production of the play in their history. Wilder's work is almost as widely performed as Shakespeare's, and the play has just returned to Broadway with Paul Newman playing the crucial role of the Stage Manager.

I think the reason is simple, and it is contained within the words of the Stage Manager's monologues. This is a story about the real lives of regular human beings. "This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying." It is a play that reaches out to everybody, everywhere. It contains an undeniable human element, which is universal to ANY town. In a theater setting, that can be fun to play with.

I have given my actors freedom—and even encouragement—to find little places in the script where they can twist the author's words to better fit our own community. Normally I consider the author's lines to be sacred, but I don't think that Wilder would mind in this particular instance because this is a show about everybody. So don't be surprised if you find that your neighbor is waiting to flag the 5:45 to Boston or that the congregational church sits somewhere near the Red Front Store. It's a play about human interaction, and most of all I have encouraged my actors to try new techniques and enjoy their time with each other in Wilder's universe. There's a good reason that theatrical productions are called PLAYS, and I have tried to encourage my cast to play – break down everything that they have ever known about acting and just experiment with the raw emotion that comes from within them. When you take away the sets and the fancy technical elements, Theater is all about people and how we react to each other.

I hope that you all will come play with us.

David Hamilton  
Director

## Thornton Wilder on *Our Town*

“(*Our Town*) is an attempt at complete immersion into everything about a New Hampshire village which, I hope, is gradually felt by the audience to be an allegorical representation of all life.”

“*Our Town* evades every possible requirement of the legitimate stage. It is pure description, entirely devoid of anything even resembling conflict, expectation or action, which are usually considered the component parts of any play.”

“At first glance, (*Our Town*) appears to be practically a genre study of a village in New Hampshire. On second glance, it appears to be a meditation about the difficulty of, as the play says, ‘realizing life while you live it.’ But buried back in the text, from the very commencement of the play, is a constant repetition of the words ‘hundreds,’ ‘thousands,’ ‘millions.’ It’s as though the audience – no one has ever mentioned this to me, though – is looking at that town at ever greater distances through a telescope. I’d like to cite some examples of this. Soon after the play begins, the Stage Manager calls upon the professor from the geology department of the state university, who says how many million years old the ground is they’re on. And the Stage Manager talks about putting some objects and reading matter into the cornerstone of a new bank and covering it with a preservative so that it can be read a thousand years from now. Or as a minister presiding at the wedding, the Stage Manager muses to himself about all the marriages that have ever taken place – ‘millions of ‘em, millions of ‘em...who set out to live two by two...’ Finally, among the seated dead, one of the dead says, ‘My son was a sailor and used to sit on the porch. And he says the light from that star took millions of years to arrive.’ There is still more of this. So that when finally the heartbreak of Emily’s unsuccessful return to life again occurs, it is against the background of the almost frightening range of these things.”

“*Our Town* is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire village: or as a speculation about the conditions of life after death (that element I merely took from Dante’s *Purgatory*). It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life. I have made the claim as preposterous as possible, for I have set the village against the largest dimensions of time and place. The recurrent words in the play (few have noticed it) are ‘hundreds,’ ‘thousands,’ and ‘millions.’ Emily’s joys and griefs, her algebra lessons and her birthday and her birthday present- what are they when we consider all the billions of girls who have lived, who are living and who will live? Each individual’s assertion to an absolute reality can only be inner, very inner. And here the method of staging finds its justification- in the first two acts there are at least a few chairs and tables; but when Emily revisits the earth and the kitchen to which she descended on her twelfth birthday, the very chairs and tables are gone. Our claim, our hope, our despair are in the mind- not in things, not in ‘scenery.’...The climax of this play needs only five square feet of boarding and the passion to know what life means to us.”

“When you emphasize *place* in the theatre, you drag down and limit and harness time to it. You thrust the action back into past time, whereas it is precisely the glory of the stage that it is always ‘now’ there.”

## A Note on Allegory

An allegory is a narrative in which the agents, actions and sometimes setting are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the literal level of significance, and at the same time signifying a second, correlated order of significance. Simply put, the characters, events or setting of a story are allegorical if they indirectly represent a subject through another similar subject. Still confused? Here's an example: In Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," the title character leaves his wife, Faith, and the civilized, pious townspeople of Salem, to meet the devil in the forest. His journey into the forest becomes an "allegorical" representation of the journey into his own soul and the struggle to keep his faith. The deeper he gets, the darker the forest becomes and the darker his soul becomes as his faith begins to slip away. Because the soul is intangible and amorphous, it must be represented by something temporal, something earthly that everyone is familiar with. Many fairy tales also use the forest as a representation of a journey into one's self. Little Red Riding Hood enters the woods a naïve girl, discovers that there are dangers within and exits an experienced, aware young woman. The forest in this fairy tale functions as an allegorical representation of aging and losing one's innocence. But forests are not the only vehicles for allegory; one could use a person, a place, an object or an action to explain a concept that is formless. *Our Town* is an allegorical tale about life, love and death, using a common, American town and common, American people and events, as its vehicle for representation.

Thornton Wilder described *Our Town* as an "allegorical representation of all life." The residents of Grover's Corners represent all human beings in all towns or cities all over the world. The year, although explicitly stated as 1901, could be any year over time, from 476 A.D. to 2003 A.D. The characters are written with few individual character traits as they are merely to represent girl, boy, mother, father, no more beyond that. For example, George likes baseball and isn't very good in school. He could be any American boy in the early twentieth century. Emily likes school and worries about her appearance. She could be half of the American teenage girl population in 2003. The major events that take place within the story are milestones in the lives of all human beings. We all deal with birthdays, marriages and funerals sometime in our lives. Allegories encourage, force, the reader to make larger, timeless connections to life. The reader must find clues within the story that connect to concepts and ideas beyond the plot. By presenting *Our Town* as an allegory, Wilder is teaching us to look beyond the plot into our own lives and to examine our own convictions and beliefs about love and death.

## Discussion Questions

1. Is the Stage Manager like the other characters in the play? How is he different? What is his function?
2. What is Grover's Corners like? What seems to be the attitude of its residents? Use textual examples.
3. How does Professor Willard describe Grover's Corners? How is his description of the town different/similar to the Stage Manager's or Mr. Webb's description? What is its significance?
4. Why are the names of the acts so important? What was the name of Act I? Act II? The title of Act III is never directly mentioned. What do you think the implied title of Act III is? How does it connect to the first and second acts?
5. What is the function of the flashback in Act II? Why do you think Wilder chose to show it out of order and not as it happened?
6. What is the Stage Manager's explanation for death and its effects? What has this to do with the play?
7. What are the differing views of life related to Emily by the dead? Why do they tell her to pick an "unimportant day" to go back to?
8. Near the end of Act III, Emily says, "We don't have time to look at one another." Write an interpretation of what she means, giving examples from your own observation or experience.
9. Discuss the Stage Manager's final monologue. How does his speech take us back to our own time and lives?
10. *Our Town* is an American play, written by an American author, set in an American town, yet it has been produced around the world—in Poland, Germany, Russia, China and elsewhere. Why and how does this play "translate" into so many other languages and cultures?
11. Thornton Wilder was very passionate about the theater, life, time and love. Discuss how the philosophies and observations stated within the following quotes from Thornton Wilder are reflected within *Our Town*. How do the themes, motifs and lessons portrayed within the play relate to the author's personal beliefs. Offer your understanding of what Wilder is saying in each quote and how each connects to the play.  
  
"A dramatist is one who believes that the pure event, an action involving human beings, is more arresting than any comment that can be made upon it."

“It is only in appearance that time is a river. It is rather a vast landscape and it is the eye of the beholder that moves.”

“On the stage it is always now; the personages are standing on that razor edge, between the past and the future, which is the essential character of conscious being; the words are rising to their lips in immediate spontaneity. The theater is supremely fitted to say: “Behold! These things are.”

“There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.”

“I am not interested in the ephemeral—such subjects as the adulteries of dentists. I am interested in those things that repeat and repeat and repeat in the lives of millions.”

“Time is something we create, we call into being, not something we submit to – an order outside us.”

## AFTER THE SHOW

1. Thornton Wilder once said, “Many plays—certainly mine—are like blank checks. The actors and directors put their own signatures on them.” How was this philosophy of Wilder’s reflected on the stage? Did the stage look like a “blank check”? Did you use your own imagination to create scenery and the layout of the town as the Stage Manager was describing it in Act I? If you had been the director, what would you have done differently?

2. How did you feel about the absence of props and scenery? Did it add or detract from your theater experience? Did the actors clearly pantomime their actions so you could tell what they were acting out? Would you have liked the show better with or without props and scenery? Why?

3. Did you enjoy the interaction between the actors and the audience? For example, how did you feel about the question and answer session with Mr. Webb at the beginning of Act I? Did it take you out of the story or put you further into it? Did you feel as though you were part of the town, or did you feel like an outsider looking in?

4. Was it difficult to follow the story with all the jumps in time, as you were watching it? Would you have preferred Wilder to give the story a more substantial plot and a more concrete timeline? Why do you think Wilder didn’t do those things? How are his philosophies about theater (see question #11) reflected in the stage performance?

5. Who were your favorite characters? Why did you like certain characters more than others? Did any of the actors or actresses performances stand out to you? Why?

## Writing prompts/Group activities

1. Do some free-writing about your own town as it is, and as you wish it could be.
2. Near the end of Act I, the Stage Manager discusses the items that have been chosen to go in the cornerstone of the new bank in Grover's Corners in 1901. Choose at least five items to put in a cornerstone or time capsule in 2003—items that will represent the present, and help people understand our time a hundred or a thousand years from now. Explain your choices, sharing your opinions about what they mean to the present and what they might mean to the future.
3. Use the Stage Manager's speech at the beginning of Act III as a model for your summary of the most important changes you've seen in your own lifetime.
4. At the end of the play, Emily says, "They don't understand, do they?" In a short essay, short story, or poem, illustrate what she means.
5. Near the end of Act II, the Stage Manager compresses life into a list followed by a sentence. Use this as a model to write your own compressed description of modern life:

"The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will.—Once in a thousand times it's interesting."

6. In Act III, the Stage Manager says, "Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em very often." State your own philosophy about the things we all know.
7. Using textual evidence, get to know one of the characters better. Collect information about a character's age, gender, occupation, hobbies, habits, etc. For example, George is the oldest child; he has a younger sister who annoys him constantly, he doesn't like school, but he does like baseball, farming and Emily. Once you have a feeling for the character, compose a creative writing piece that describes the daily routine of the character you have chosen. Feel free to add your own insights, thoughts or actions not directly within the script, such as errands ran during the day, things the character's read, or internal dialogue. Use your imagination.

### 8. Class Activity:

Thornton Wilder plays with time throughout *Our Town*, shifting gears from present to past to future and back again. As a class, construct a timeline for the play, and discuss whether Wilder's manipulation of time is dramatically effective or ineffective—and, in either case, why.

# Ferndale Repertory Theatre

Ferndale Repertory Theatre is a non-profit educational community organization governed by a Board of Directors elected annually by its members. Construction of the building began in 1918 under the name of the Hart Theatre. As one of the first theaters in the Eel Valley of Northwestern California built specifically for the showing of motion pictures, the Hart Theatre opened on December 8, 1920 with a showing of "The Mollycoddle," a silent adventure comedy accompanied by a pianist hired from the Minor Theatre in Arcata. Admission in 1920 was 25 cents for adults, 15 cents for children. For nearly 40 years, the Hart Theatre provided the community with entertainment from movies to vaudeville shows. But in 1956, the movie house closed and the building remained stagnant for sixteen years.

By the early 1970's, enthusiastic members of the Ferndale community decided to renovate the old movie theatre into a playhouse, and on April 28, 1972, the doors of the newly named Ferndale Little Theatre reopened with a performance of the old-style melodrama "Ten Nights in a Bar Room." The success of the Ferndale Repertory Theatre spawned a passion for community theater and led to the establishment of the North Coast Repertory Theatre of Eureka in 1983. The "little" was changed to "repertory" in 1980, and for the past 30 years the Ferndale Repertory Theatre has produced nearly 200 plays from big Broadway musicals like "Evita" to serious dramas such as "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" to Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Not only do residents of the north coast community appear in Ferndale Repertory productions, but the building itself has appeared in several Hollywood productions, such as "A Death in Canaan," "Salem's Lot," "Hyperion Bay," "Outbreak," and "The Majestic."

# General Theatre Etiquette

1. Please arrive early to allow yourselves ample time to find your seats. Be advised that there is **no late seating**.
2. Remind your students that they are sharing the theatre with many theatre patrons and their actions greatly affect the theatre experience of all.
3. All students must have adult supervision. Please seat chaperones throughout the group.
4. Running, jumping, and climbing over seats is disruptive and will not be tolerated.
5. Remind students to stay in their seats and keep all aisles free.
6. Students may not climb on the stage or handle any props without prior permission and/or supervision.
7. Please respect the actors and other playgoers by turning off all electronic devices, audio beepers, and cellular phones before the play begins.
8. No photography or recording is permitted in the theatre without proper authorization.
9. Please refrain from talking, chewing gum, and unwrapping candy during the performance, as it is disruptive to the cast and surrounding audience.
10. Food and beverages are not allowed in the theatre area.
11. Patrons who leave the theatre during the performance (to go to the bathroom, make a phone call, etc.) will not be allowed to return to their seats until intermission.

Thank You and Enjoy the Show!

# Teacher Resources and Works Cited

## Websites:

*Barron's Booknotes*: <http://www.pinkmonkey.com/booknotes/barron/ourtown1.asp>

David Hamilton's *Our Town* website: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~dch9/>

*Ferndale Repertory Theatre*: <http://www.ferndale-rep.org>

*Teachers.net* lesson exchange bank: <http://www.teachers.net/lessons/posts/1283.html>

*Thornton Wilder Society* webpage: <http://www.thorntonwildersociety.org>

## Books:

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Bryer, Jackson R. (Ed.) *Conversations with Thornton Wilder*. Jackson: UP of Mississippi. 1992.

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Walsh, Claudette. *Thornton Wilder: A Reference Guide 1926-1990*. New York: G.K. Hall & Co. 1993.

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