

# GRAND THEATRE

## The Play That Goes Wrong

## The Play That Goes Wrong

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# AUDIENCE ENRICHMENT GUIDE

# AUDIENCE ENRICHMENT GUIDE DRAFT

## *THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG*

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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Set the stage for a powerful and entertaining live theatre experience! The Grand Theatre's 2025-26 Season Audience Enrichment Guides are designed to enrich and provide context for educators and students to engage more deeply with the production, both before and after visiting the Grand Theatre.

Each guide contains a range of material such as:

- Background information on the play and artists involved
- Plot synopsis, character lists, themes, curriculum connections
- Exciting insights specific to each production
- Classroom activities and reflection questions to guide discussions

## THE ROLE OF THE AUDIENCE

Live theatre requires an audience, so everyone has an important role to play! As we welcome you to the Grand Theatre, here are some **theatre etiquette tips** to remember:

- Before the performance:
  - Please **arrive early**, enabling enough time to find your school's assigned seats.
  - We are a **scent-free environment** that **values respectful behaviour**.
  - **Avoid bringing backpacks/large bulky items** as they will need to remain in the lobby and can not come with you to your seat (due to emergency exit regulations).
  - While there is no dress code, we respectfully ask that **hats are removed**.
  - *Have an open mind and let the performance surprise you!*
- During the performance:
  - Please **turn off your cell phone**/electronic devices. Vibrations, sounds, and screen light during the performance is very distracting for the performers and other audience members.
  - Please remember that **only bottled water** is allowed in the theatre; **no food** during the show.
  - **Using cameras or recording devices during a performance is never permitted.**
  - When the lights dim, that's your cue to stop talking and turn your attention to the stage to enjoy the show.
  - If you **must leave your seat**, wait for an **appropriate break** in the show and quietly head towards the closest exit. An usher will help you.
  - Clap, cheer, laugh, and **feel!** **Make sure your reactions are respectful to those on stage and around you in the audience.** Theatre is LIVE, so remember *you can be seen and heard!*
- After the performance:
  - **Remain in your seats** until your teacher/chaperone instructs you to leave. Exit the theatre in an orderly fashion. Please **take all belongings and any garbage with you.**
  - Take a moment to reflect: What new ideas or perspectives are you leaving with?
  - Theatre is meant to be shared! Tell someone about your experience!

## *THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG*

Five amateur actors. A semi-adaptable stage manager. A missing canine. One play that goes very, very WRONG. Comprised of a spiraling series of increasingly absurd mishaps, this whodunit is a certified trainwreck guaranteed to deliver non-stop laughter until the curtains fall. You'll be thinking, "It can't possibly get any worse than this... can it?" And the answer is yes, it can.

This Olivier Award-winning comedy offers a hilarious glimpse into the absolute worst-case scenarios that can unfold in the world of theatre. Premiering in 2012 in the UK, it went on to run over 745 performances on Broadway. Helmed by past Grand Theatre Artistic Director Dennis Garnhum, the production will now make its way to the Grand Theatre in London.

**Running Time:** 2h 10m, including one intermission.

**Age Recommendation:** 8+

### Content Advisory

This play contains comedic violence; mild language and sexual references; mentions of suicide, murder, and adultery. Production elements include sounds of gunshots, stage pyrotechnics (fire, sparks, smoke), and theatrical fog.

### Themes

- Love and Romance
- Grief and Loss
- Failure and Resilience
- Comedy and Satire
- Teamwork and Collaboration

### Curriculum Connections

#### **The Arts**

- Dance, Grade 1-8
  - A2, A3
- Dance, Grade 9 (ATC1O)  
Dance, Grade 10 (ATC2O)  
Dance, Grade 11 (ATC3M/ACT3O)  
Dance, Grade 12 (ATC4M/ATC4E)
  - B1, B2, B3, C2
- Drama, Grade 1-8
  - B2, B3

- Drama, Grade 9 (ADA1O)  
Drama, Grade 10 (ADA2O)  
Drama, Grade 11 (ADA3M/ADA3O)  
Drama, Grade 12 (ADA4M/ADA4E)
  - B1, B2, B3, C1, C2, C3
- Exploring and Creating in the Arts, Grade 11 (AEA3O)  
Exploring and Creating in the Arts, Grade 12 (AEA4O)
  - A1, A2, B1, B2, B3, B4, C1, C2, C3
- Music, Grade 1-8
  - C2, C3
- Music, Grade 9 (AMU1O)  
Music, Grade 10 (AMU2O)  
Music, Grade 11 (AMU3M/AMU3O)  
Music, Grade 12 (AMU4M/AMU4E)
  - B1, B2, B3, B4, C2, C3
- Visual Arts, Grade 1-8
  - D2, D3
- Visual Arts, Grade 9 (AVI1O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 10 (AVI2O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 11 (AVI3M/AVI3O)  
Visual Arts, Grade 12 (AVI4M/AVI4E)
  - B1, B2, B3, C2, C3

## English

- English, Grade 9 (ENL1W)
  - A1, A3, B1, C1, C2, C3, D1, D2)
- English, Grade 10 (ENG2D/ENG2P)  
English, Grade 11 (ENG3U/ENG3C/ENG3E)  
English, Grade 12 (ENG4U/ENG4C/ENG4E)
  - A1 Listening to Understand: A1.1-9; A2 Speaking to Communicate: A2.4-7; A3 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: A3.2; B1 Reading for Meaning: B1.2, B1.5-8; B2 Understanding Form and Style: B2.2-3; B3 Reading with Fluency: B3.2-3; B4 Reflecting on Skills and Strategies: B4.2; C1 Developing and Organizing Content: C1.3; C2 Using Knowledge of Form and Style: C2.1-3; D1 Understanding Media Texts: D1.1-6; D2 Understanding Media Forms, Conventions, and Techniques: D2.1-2
- Presentation and Speaking Skills, Grade 11 (EPS3O)

- A1 Identifying Elements of Effective Presentations: A1.1-5; A2 Assessing Presentations: A2.1-5
- The Writer's Craft, Grade 12 (EWC4U/EWC4C)
  - A1 Writing, Writers, and the Writing Life: A1.1-6; B1 Exploring Ideas, Forms and Styles: B1.1

### **English As a Second Language and English Literacy Development**

- English as a Second Language, ESL Level 1 (ESLAO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 2, (ESLBO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 3, (ESLCO)  
English as a Second Language, ESL Level 4, (ESLDO)
  - A1 Developing Listening Comprehension: A1.1-2; Socio-cultural Competence and Media Literacy; D4 Developing Media Knowledge and Skills: D4.1-2

## CHARACTER OVERVIEW

The action takes place on the opening night of the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society's production of the murder mystery play, *Murder at Haversham Manor*, written by Susie H.K. Brideswell. Below is a list of characters who take on roles within this murder mystery:

**Krista:** Head of the drama society and plays **Inspector Carter**. Rigid and uptight, Krista is the director of the show and this is the biggest day of her life.

**Robert:** Plays **Thomas Colleymoore**. A truly bad actor, Robert is unaware of others around him and never learns from his mistakes.

**Max:** Plays **Cecil Haversham** and **Arthur**. Childlike and naïve, Max has never been on stage before, so makes many fundamental mistakes.

**Dennis:** Plays the butler, **Perkins**. Dennis has no real desire to be involved in the theatre; he just wants to make friends (of which he has none).

**Trevor:** The play's **Lighting and Sound Operator**. A curmudgeon who doesn't care for actors, Trevor simply wants to get on with the show.

**Jonathan:** Plays **Charles Haversham**. Excited and having fun, Jonathan cares about the play, but not to the same extent as the others.

**Sandra:** Plays **Florence Colleymoore**. She is vain and possesses a huge ego, and will hurt anyone standing in the way of what she wants (but is smart enough to stay on the good side of someone who can help her).

**Annie:** The **Stage Manager**. Annie cannot bear to be on stage, but after being forced to step in, she is willing to kill for the role by the end of the play.



# Cornley Drama Society

presents *Murder of Haversham Manor*



**DENNIS**

Plays Perkins



**KRISTA**

Director, plays Inspector  
Carter



**JONATHAN**

Plays Charles Haversham



**MAX**

Plays Cecil Haversham and  
Arthur



**ROBERT**

Plays Thomas Colley Moore



**SANDRA**

Plays Florence Colley Moore



**ANNIE**

The company's Stage  
Manager



**TREVOR**

The company's Lighting  
and Sound Operator



**STAGE CREW**



## PLOT SYNOPSIS

### PRE-SHOW

Before the show starts, the action begins: the set is falling apart; the stage manager, sound and lighting operator are fixing things; there is a missing dog and CD. Things do not bode well for this production. The director of *The Murder at Haversham Manor* and head of the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society, Krista Bean, welcomes the audience. She shares Cornley Polytechnic's "illustrious" production history, and brags that this show, her directorial debut, will be their best show yet.

### ACT 1

The play begins, and there are problems immediately. Jonathan (playing the deceased Charles Haversham) trips on his entrance and is not acting terribly dead. As other actors prepare to enter, the door is jammed, and they can't enter the scene. Robert (playing Thomas Colley Moore) and Dennis (playing Perkins) finally find their way 'onstage' and speculate on Charles' cause of death.

Meanwhile, actors are forgetting their lines, props are not where they're supposed to be, and parts of the set are missing and falling down. Thomas Colley Moore calls in Inspector Carter (played by Krista), despite a "snowstorm." Florence Colley Moore (played by Sandra) arrives but cannot get through the door, either, so—as "the show must go on"—she attempts to perform her scene through the window.

Charles's brother, Cecil (played by Max), arrives and, finally, and with the help of the Stage Manager, Annie, gets the door open. We learn that Cecil and his brother had a strained relationship and that Charles was jealous and paranoid. Cecil believes his brother may have committed suicide. In Charles's final journal entry, we discover that he doubted whether Florence loved him at all.

Inspector Carter finally arrives. He plans to do an inspection of the body and the cast begins the process of removing it from the room. As you'd expect, this comes with its own challenges as Perkins and Thomas attempt to lift Charles from the chaise but cannot, so they roll him over and drop him face-first onto a stretcher resting on the floor. When they lift him, the canvas rips, so the two exit as if they were carrying a dead body out of the room. Inspector Carter follows. Then, Jonathan stands up and exits the scene. Cecil and Florence are the only two left in the room, and it becomes very clear that they are having an affair.

More incorrect props, missed cues, and an actual fire ensue. At one point, Jonathan, now upstairs, falls from the upper level of the set to the lower in a coughing fit, yet the actors go on. Inspector Carter questions Perkins first, followed by Florence. Near the end of her interrogation, Robert (playing Thomas) bursts into the room hitting Sandra (playing Florence) who collapses unconscious to the floor. Robert, Krista, and Max (playing Cecil) are now expected to finish the scene with an unconscious castmate.

Inspector Carter questions Cecil as Robert and Jonathan try to remove the unconscious Sandra by dragging her through a window. After revealing to Cecil that he knows about the affair, the Inspector leaves.

Thomas Colley Moore receives a call that £9,000 has been stolen from his bank account. When Thomas learns about the affair between Cecil and Florence, he defends his sister's honour, and Cecil and Thomas take their fight offstage. We hear the sound of multiple gunshots. Inspector Carter returns with Florence, except that now it's the Stage Manager, Annie, wearing Florence's dress and reading from a script. Cecil re-enters with three bullet wounds in his back and collapses, dead, on the chaise. The first act ends, like all good murder mysteries, with Perkins, Florence, and Inspector Carter realizing that Charles Haversham's murderer is still in the house with them.

### Activity Prompt: *Story Woosh*

Story Woosh is an interactive storytelling technique that enables any kind of plot to come alive, even without participants having prior knowledge.

The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.

As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.

At any time the teacher can say "Whoosh!", and students quickly return to their 'places' in a circle.

Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

## ACT 2

Krista, the director, appears again to address the audience, assuring them that this "hasn't been the worst first act Cornley University has seen." Act Two begins with Inspector Carter leaving the room to investigate the gunshots. Annie, filling in for Sandra, trips and scatters pages of script everywhere, losing her place, and causing all sorts of confusion. Max, who also plays Cecil, arrives as Arthur the Gardener. He was supposed to have left the grounds hours before, but the snowstorm forced him to stay.

During the scene, Max runs into the pillar supporting the upper level of the set and knocks it over, causing the entire second floor to tilt, nearly falling. Arthur the Gardener reveals a handkerchief he found on the grounds. It turns out to have traces of cyanide, the method used to kill Charles Haversham. Featuring the initials F.C., the handkerchief leads everyone to conclude that Florence must have killed Charles.

Annie (as Florence) is also knocked unconscious, and Sandra, who has come to, reappears in her underwear (since Annie is wearing her costume). She doesn't remain conscious for long, however, as she's knocked out by the door to the grandfather clock. Trevor, the sound and lighting technician we met before the show began, appears from inside the clock and is forced to read the role of Florence—that is, until Trevor falls under the

tilted second story bringing the props and furniture crashing down on top of him. Sandra, who had been stuffed inside the clock after falling unconscious, is awake again but now stuck in the clock.

When the Stage Manager regains consciousness, she resumes her role as Florence. For the rest of the play, the two women fight over who gets to play Florence. Perkins, the butler, reveals that he knows who killed Charles Haversham: Inspector Carter. The inspector pulls a gun on Perkins, when Charles Haversham bursts through the door! He wasn't dead at all! He never consumed the poisoned drink that the inspector had left him. Inspector Carter reveals that he had been working with Thomas Colley Moore all along and that he stole the £9,000 and was going to double-cross him. Thomas tries (and fails) to shoot Inspector Carter.

The play ends as the walls fall down, revealing the crew working backstage. In the final moments, Charles offers Thomas a glass of poisoned sherry, who drinks it and dies at length. We never do find out where this performance ranks in the Cornley Polytechnic Drama Society's list of worst productions ever.

### THE PLAY THAT GOES WRONG AND THE JOY OF SCHADENFREUDE

The Japanese say, "The misfortune of others tastes like honey." The French use the phrase *joie maligne*, a diabolical delight in other people's suffering, and in German, the term *schadenfreude*—taking pleasure in others' troubles.

Have you ever laughed when someone face-plants on the sidewalk? Or watching those physical comedy routines where folks step on a rake and get smacked in the nose, slip on a banana peel, or get a pie in the face. These classic comic gags remain funny because of our human response: *schadenfreude*.

What makes *The Play That Goes Wrong* so funny? Watching the utter failure of characters set up to succeed. We laugh together in the audience. Laughing at others' misfortune becomes a community experience.

So the next time you feel guilty laughing at someone who slips on the ice, just remember, *schadenfreude* is a healthy, community-building experience!

## ABOUT THE PLAY

### Meet The Playwrights

*The Play That Goes Wrong* was written by Henry Lewis, Henry Shields and Jonathan Sayer, who met while training at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and eventually became roommates. In 2008, they co-founded 'Mischief Theatre' - a British theatre company that creates award-winning comedy for stage, screen and beyond, with shows continuously playing in the West End for over a decade.

Following the success of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, Mischief Theatre expanded "Goes Wrong" into a series of new productions, such as *Peter Pan Goes Wrong* and *A Christmas Carol Goes Wrong*. For more interesting information about the playwrights' work, check out their website: [www.mischiefcomedy.com](http://www.mischiefcomedy.com)

### Production History

In an exclusive interview, Jonathan Sayer reflected on the origins of *The Play That Goes Wrong*:

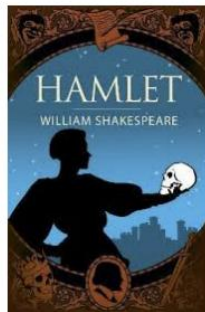
*"Henry Lewis worked with Michael Green at youth theatre and he wrote a book called The Art of Coarse Acting. He would encourage his class to write short plays featuring deliberate performance errors. This led to the foundations of The Play That Goes Wrong, which began as a drawing room murder mystery with a butler and a corpse on a sofa and that's where it's built from."*

The first production was staged at The Old Red Lion, a pub theatre in Islington, London. Following a successful initial run, it returned in early 2013 before transferring to Trafalgar Studios. The play was later expanded into a full-length production with the addition of a second act ahead of its 2014 UK tour.

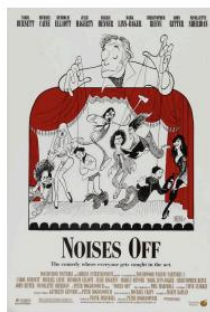
Since then, the play has gained global attraction, with long-running West End and Broadway productions and international tours across Australia, the United States, and beyond!

## THE PLAY'S THE THING: THE PLAY-WITHIN-A-PLAY CONVENTION

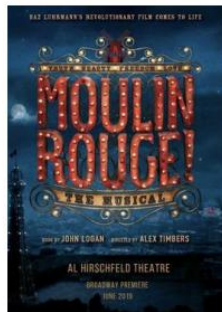
*The Play That Goes Wrong* isn't the only place you'll find actors playing actors playing characters.



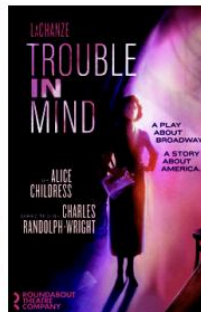
*The Murder of Gonzago*



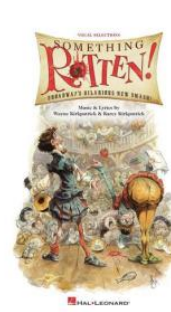
*Nothing's On*



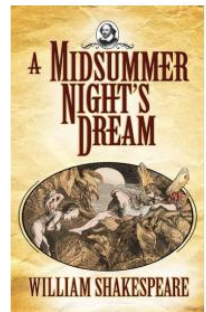
*Spectacular, Spectacular*



*Chaos in Belleville*



*Omelette, the Musical*



*The Craftsmen's Play*

## Theatre Roles 101

Here are 5 Things You Didn't Know About **Stage Managers**:

Stage managers provide practical and organizational support to the director, actors, designers, and stage technicians throughout the production process. They represent the director during performances, ensuring the production runs smoothly.

1. It's the stage manager who runs the rehearsal room (calling breaks, setting up and packing up props, etc.).
2. They are the go-between for the director and the design team, communicating the director's vision.
3. Stage managers record all of the blocking (actors' positions on stage), lighting and sound cues, and set transitions.
4. The stage manager runs the production beginning with technical rehearsals. They keep track of all of the light, sound, & set change cues in their prompt book.
5. They are responsible for communication between the director and the actors.

Now that you've learned about stage managers, let's explore even more **roles that bring a professional theatre production to life**. Below are a few descriptions and a detailed chart outlining key positions in a theatre company - from designers to technicians and everyone in between.

**The Playwright** writes the script - sometimes from an original idea, and sometimes adapted from a book or story - decides what the characters say and, often, gives the designers written guidelines on how the play should look.

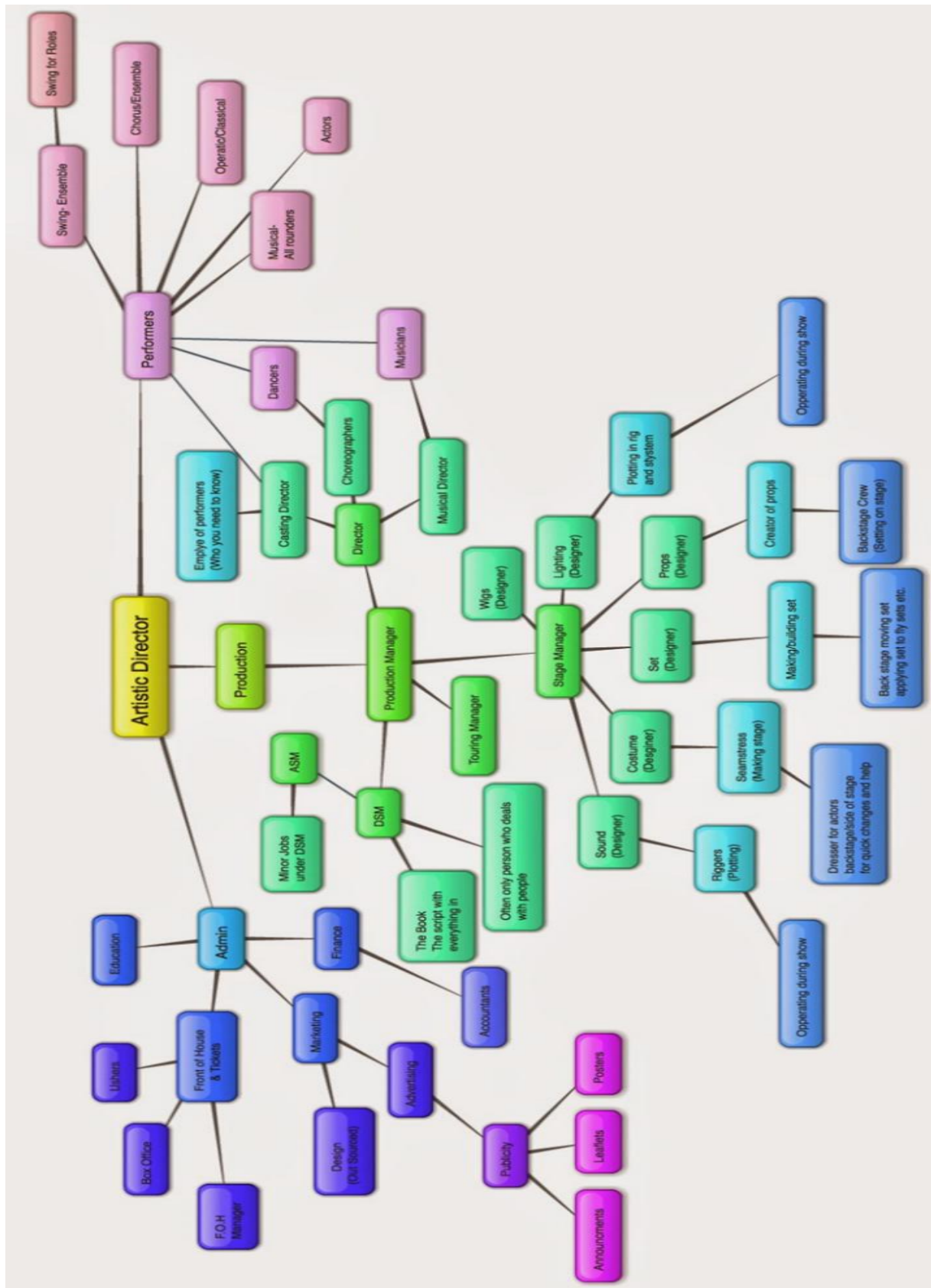
**The Director** creates the vision for the production, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

**The Actors** use their bodies and voices to bring the playwright's words and the director's ideas to life on the stage.

**The Designers** imagine and create the lights, scenery, props, costumes, and sound that will compliment and tell the playwright's story in a way that matches the director's vision.

**The Stage Crew** are a group of skilled workers who perform their duties actively during each performance. Examples include light and sound operators, dressers, and run crew.







## CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT

**Pre-Show** - Whether you have a few minutes or a whole class period, here are a few ways to thoughtfully engage with the themes, history and characters of *The Play That Goes Wrong* before watching the production.

### ***If You Have 15 Minutes: Think-Pair-Share***

**Question:** What's the worst thing that could happen during a live play?

- **Think:** Reflect and jot down your thoughts.
- **Pair:** Share with a partner. What do you agree on? What surprised you?
- **Share:** Share key takeaways with the class

### ***If You Have 30 Minutes: Collaborative Playwriting***

**Purpose:** Explore how writing in pairs can build creative dialogue and characters - just like Mischief Theatre did.

- **Get Started:** Explore how writing in pairs can build creative dialogue and characters. With a partner, begin your scene with a line that must include the phrase: "the show must go on."
- **Build the Scene:** Take turns writing one line at a time, responding thoughtfully to each playwright's previous line. Within the first ten lines of the scene, your scene should reveal the setting, characters, and their relationship.
- **Review:** Once you have a first draft, reread what's been written and ensure the dialogue makes logical sense, and that the characters are listening to one another. Read aloud to each other or the class!

### ***If You Have 1 Hour: Deconstructing Comedy***

- **Brief:** Introduce students to different types of comedy (slapstick, farce, parody, wordplay, etc.) with quick definitions and examples provided [here](#).
- **Build the Scene:** In small groups, students are assigned a style of comedy and must work together to create a short scene. Through improvisation or collaborative writing, work together to establish a setting, characters and conflict that embrace your comedic style.
- **Share:** Perform your short scene to the class. What styles do you think will appear in *The Play That Goes Wrong*?

**Post-Show** - Having watched *The Play That Goes Wrong*, use these questions and activities to deepen your understanding of the story's message and reflect on how the show made you feel:

***If You Have 15 Minutes: Think-Pair-Share***

**Question:** If you were to be part of a theatre company, which role would you want to have? See pg 10 for more details on the various jobs responsible for bringing a production to life.

- **Think:** Reflect and jot down your thoughts.
- **Pair:** Share with a partner. What do you agree on? What surprised you?
- **Share:** Share key takeaways with the class

***If You Have 30 Minutes: Sitting, Standing, Laying Down***

- **Prepare:** In groups of three, students familiarize themselves with [this excerpt](#) of Robert, Max and Dennis from Act 1 of *The Play That Goes Wrong*.
- **Perform:** Together, perform the scene with the instruction that at each moment, one actor must be sitting, one must be standing, and the third must be laying down. The more the actors change position, the more fun and challenging the scene becomes!
- **Improvise:** In the same groups, create a new improvised scene using the same position rules and desired characters or settings.

***If You Have 1 Hour: Designing a Rube Goldberg Machine***

- **Introduce:** Introduce the Rube Goldberg machine using [the slides provided](#), including the three video clips from PeeWee's Big Adventure, OK GO!, and America's Got Talent.
- **Design & Prepare:** Students select a simple task they want their machine to complete and sketch a 5-step plan showing how their machine will complete it. Draw each step on a folded page, identify the simple machines involved, and list materials needed to build the machine.
- **Present:** If time allows, start building the machine. Volunteers share their designs and explain the process to the class.

***Additional Reflection Questions***

1. Even a silly, hilarious story has a message that the author wants the audience to consider. What is that message for *The Play That Goes Wrong*?
2. When was the last time you faced failure and pushed through to the end anyway?
3. Jealousy becomes a huge problem in *The Play that Goes Wrong*. Have you ever had feelings of jealousy? How do you deal with those feelings?

## REFERENCES

Theatre Calgary: *The Play That Goes Wrong* Play Guide

[https://www.theatreocalgary.com/assets/downloads/Play-Guides/The-Play-That-Goes-Wrong\\_TCPlay-Guide.pdf](https://www.theatreocalgary.com/assets/downloads/Play-Guides/The-Play-That-Goes-Wrong_TCPlay-Guide.pdf)

Study Guide created by Aliza Sarian: <https://www.alizasarian.com/>

MasterClass: Types of Comedy

<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/types-of-comedy>

Rube Goldberg Machine

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/19PExFCDopLW52b6D4ISigKxu9ds3gOynUJ0YeGMfXg/edit?slide=id.p#slide=id.p>

*The Play That Goes Wrong* Excerpt

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BeYPIUKALo7mHKk\\_2Iz8vZKWWRkVhasN/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BeYPIUKALo7mHKk_2Iz8vZKWWRkVhasN/view)

Theatre Tonic: Interview with Jonathan Sayer

<https://theatreandtonic.co.uk/blog/interview-jonathan-sayer-the-play-that-goes-wrong>

## CONTACT US

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If you have any questions about this Audience Enrichment Guide or Education at the Grand Theatre, please reach out to ...



Visit our website for future events and information!



We look forward to seeing you!

