Goodman Theatre
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Student Guide

Rabbit Hole
By David Lindsay-Abaire

Directed by Steve Scott

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Exploring the Production
Our Playwright: David Lindsay-Abaire

David Lindsay-Abaire was born in 1969 and grew up in Boston, Massachusetts, in a working class family. His mother was a factory worker; his father a Chelsea Food Market worker. While attending public school, David was awarded a 6-year scholarship to Milton Academy Boarding School in Massachusetts. When he finished at Milton, he went on to study theatre at Sarah Lawrence College. After earning his degree, he was later accepted to the prestigious Julliard School to study playwriting with such greats as Christopher Durang (Betty’s Summer Vacation) and Marsha Norman (The Laundromat). During his career as a playwright he has received awards from Mixed Blood Theatre, Primary Stages, and the Berilla Kerr Foundation among others. His most famous plays, besides Rabbit Hole, are Fuddy Meers, Kimberly Akimbo, and Wonder of the World. Lindsay-Abaire has many influences, include Edward Albee, George Kaufman and Moss Hart, and the atypical playwriting influences, Abbott and Costello and the Marx Brothers. Last year Rabbit Hole was nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play. Lindsay-Abaire lives in Brooklyn, New York, with his wife Christine, and their son Nicholas.

Did You Know?

Lindsay–Abaire wrote Rabbit Hole after one of his mentors, Marsha Norman, challenged him to write about something that frightened him!

Our Director: Steve Scott

Steve Scott grew up in Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri. He began doing theatre while attending Shawnee Mission South High School. He attended the University of Kansas at Lawrence, where he studied Theatre Education and was planning on becoming a high school teacher. Scott went on to get his Masters Degree in Theatre History and Criticism from the University of Denver. While he was in college, he worked as an actor for a summer stock company. It was during that summer that he directed his first play, The Loveliest Afternoon of the Year by John Guare. Scott said of that experience: “I knew almost immediately that I was a better director than I was an actor– which has been proven to me a number of times through the years.”

While serving as the Associate Producer of the Goodman Theatre since 1987, Scott has overseen more than 150 productions, and directed such plays as Binky Rudich and the Two-Speed Clock and No One Will Be Immune for the David Mamet Festival, Dinner with Friends, Wit, the world premiere of Tom Mula's Jacob Marley's Christmas Carol, A Midsummer Night’s Dream (co-directed with Michael Maggio), and four seasons of A Christmas Carol. When he is not directing (his self-proclaimed favorite hobby), Scott enjoys reading, traveling, and going to the movies. Scott said his favorite project thus far was Love! Valor! Compassion! by Terrence McNally. He loved it so much that he saw it at least once a week during it’s 8 month run! When asked why he wanted to direct Rabbit Hole, Scott said: “It’s so moving, so real, and so honest about the situation it portrays. Also, I love the way in which the playwright (and the characters in the play) use humor to defuse some of the tragedy of the situation. This use of humor is what makes the play really ring true—in times of horror and real stress, our first impulse is to find a way to relieve the stress, which is often through humor.”
The tone of voice someone uses has a lot to do with how the person he or she is talking to reacts to what is being said. Likewise, using different tones can change the meanings and intentions of words. Let’s learn more about how tone can affect what we say and it's affect on how an audience responds to a piece of theatre.

Hopefully, your speech will differ between when you are at the library and when you are out with friends. The difference would be in language, volume, and tone. The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines tone as: “The style or manner of expression in speaking or writing.”

A parent may often use the line, “Don't you take that tone with me!”, in order to express dislike in the way he or she is being spoken to. The words “yeah, right”, can have a totally different meaning when used sarcastically or when used in agreement. Think about the tone you use when responding to different people around you. What sort of message is your tone sending out?

When playwrights create stories that mix humor and tragedy, as is the case with Rabbit Hole, a very important job of both the actors and director is to establish the tone they want to set for their audience. Finding the right tone can mean the difference between capturing the audience’s attention and alienating them. By determining the style and clear delivery choices, the actors can establish the tone that is appropriate for the play, and one that will in the end leave the audience with the story the director and actors want to tell.

### Activity
**Getting Toned Up**

- Break into three groups and read part of Act 2, Scene 1 (middle of pg 79–bottom of pg 83).
- Each group will choose a different tone and use it to act out the scene.
- Take 10 minutes and work on the scene using your particular tone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>Tragic or Melodramatic (think soap opera)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Magical or Comic (think cartoon or slapstick, physical humor)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Medium (find a tone somewhere between the first two)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Present your version of the scene to the class.
- Once all three groups have presented, as a class talk about what worked and what didn’t for each tone. Which tone seemed the best fit for the scene? Which tone was least effective?

Think About It:
As you watch the play, think about tone. In your opinion, does the tone that is being used on stage fit? Why or why not? What needs to change?
Casting a Play: Finding the right actors

Casting a play is a difficult job. A director must not only take into account the information about the characters in the character descriptions, but also what he or she feels is important in bringing the characters to life. All aspects of an actor are considered: willingness and ability to delve deep into challenging subjects (like the ones in this play), ability to collaborate with others, the right look, and attitude, just to name a few. A director will also use information about the characters he or she has taken from studying the script to help in the casting process. Here we’ll look at the process the Goodman Theatre uses to cast actors that are the right fit for the play.

**Step One: Read All About It!**
Before seeing any actors, the director must first read the script, often many times. The director must think about what he or she needs from the cast. Things like age, gender, special skills (for example, a dialect, dance background, or stage combat), and willingness to work hard are all considered.

**Step Two: The Meeting of the Minds**
The director and the casting director sit down and discuss their concepts for the characters. The director always has certain ideas in mind for the characters. The responsibility of the casting director is to oversee the audition process and be the eyes and ears for the director. He or she may know hundreds of actors at any given time, either from seeing them in other shows or from having them on file at the theater. This meeting gives both the director and the casting director an opportunity to talk through the many different types of actors to contact for auditions.

**Step Three A: Screening**
Before auditions, the casting director may hold “screenings”. The casting office will contact actors that might fit the director’s specifications. The actors audition for the casting director. If he or she thinks an actor fits what the director is looking for, the actor will be asked back for a formal audition. This step is beneficial in getting the best possible group of actors together for the director to choose from.

**Step Three B: It’s a Set-Up!**
The casting office will contact all the actors who meet the qualifications the director has for the roles and set up audition times. The casting office will send the actors (or an agency) the scenes that will be used in the audition. These scenes are called “sides”.

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“With any part you play, there is a certain amount of yourself in it. There has to be; otherwise it’s just not acting. It’s lying.”
- Johnny Depp

Movies like *The Producers* (far left) or *Waiting for Guffman* depict, humorously, the inner workings of theatre and the steps to creating, casting, and putting on a play.

**Think About It:**
What do you think is most important when choosing a cast? Is it how the actor looks? Their resume and previous experience? How well they read the part?
Step Four: The Audition
Once all the actors have been contacted, the auditions begin. Audition appointments are usually scheduled over 2 or 3 days, giving actors about 30 minutes each to audition, so the director can see as many people as possible. In the audition, the actor will read the sides they were given. The director, who is conducting the auditions along with the casting director, will often give the actor a “note”, or a piece of direction about their acting choice. This is to give the director a chance to see how well the actor takes direction and uses it.

Did You Know?
Many of the actors chosen to perform at the Goodman are members of the AEA—Actors Equity Association. It’s aunion which guarantees actors, as well as other artists, certain working rights and benefits. Some benefits include health insurance, minimum salaries, and regulated time off and breaks.

Step Five: If You Call Them, They Will Come
Once all the actors have auditioned, the director will choose whom he or she would like to see audition again in a “callback”. This gives him or her a chance to focus on fewer people, see them work together, and get to know them a little bit better.

Step Six: Put a Cast on It
Finally, after all the auditions and callbacks are complete, the director chooses his or her final cast. The casting office will contact the actors chosen (or their agency) by phone.

Step Seven: The Understudy
Once the director has chosen his or her cast, a second cast will be chosen to be the understudies. Even though at the Goodman an understudy is required to attend many rehearsals and all performances, he or she only goes onstage if the lead actor is unable to perform (usually due to sickness).

Activity
But How Do They Know?
Take a look at the character descriptions on the first page of the script. There is not a lot there for a director to go on. After reading the descriptions, become the director and cast the play yourself, using only the descriptions written in the script. Remember that even though directors are influenced by lots of things, for this exercise, use only those descriptions. Feel free to choose actors and actresses from television, movies, or other plays you have seen. As you read the play, try to imagine your cast in their roles. Do your actors seem to fit the characters? Why or why not? Share your casting choices with the class. As a class, see if you can all agree on one cast. Find some pictures of the actors and actresses you chose (either on the internet or in magazines) and create a collage. Hang it up in your classroom. Once you have seen the Goodman’s production, compare our actors to those you chose. How are they different? How are they similar?
Exploring the Text
Exploring the Characters in *Rabbit Hole*

While writing *Rabbit Hole*, David Lindsay-Abaire had the difficult task of creating well-rounded, complex, interesting characters to put in his play. Consider these 5 characters for a moment. What is it that we can learn from them? What kinds of people are they? How do you know? A playwright always hopes that his or her characters will become memorable to those who encounter them. Here we will take some time to better understand these characters.

**Activity**

**Perceptions**

As you read the play, write down your observations about these characters. What do they say about themselves? What do other characters say about them? Also, write down your feelings and impressions of each character.

**Becca**

**Howie**

**Izzy**

**Nat**

**Jason**

**Danny**

Since he is never seen on stage, all we have to go on is what others say about him. What do you think of him? What kind of child was he? How do people describe him? Get together in groups and discuss your observations and ideas about Danny.

**Activity**

*I Second That Emotion*

Creating characters is not just about writing things down on paper. It also involves getting up on your feet, figuring out how they move, and discovering their emotions at each moment in the play.

- As a class choose 6 emotions displayed in *Rabbit Hole* and write them on the board.
- Get everyone on their feet. Create an open space in the middle of the room where everyone can walk around. Begin walking around as yourself. Then, in turn, walk as you would feeling each of the emotions written on the board. Think about how the characters in the play might walk while feeling this emotion. If you were an actor in the play, how would you move to convey this emotion?
- After the exercise, discuss as a class the following questions:
  - How did it feel to move around using those emotions?
  - Why is it important for an actor to discover how to use emotions and the effect emotions have on movement?
  - Do you think the difficulty people have in showing emotions has to do with how they carry their bodies? Why or why not?
Vocabulary
That’s my word, don’t wear it out!

“Vocabulary enables us to interpret and to express. If you have a limited vocabulary, you will also have a limited vision and a limited future.” - Jim Rohn

When reading something new, there will sometimes be words that you don’t recognize or understand. Below is a list of all the words in *Rabbit Hole* that might be new to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accost (V)</th>
<th>Affront (V)</th>
<th>Arrogance (N)</th>
<th>Assumption (N)</th>
<th>Biscotti (N)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bosco (N)</td>
<td>Capable (A)</td>
<td>Condonence (N)</td>
<td>Contemplate (V)</td>
<td>Crass (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cringe (V)</td>
<td>Deliberate (A)</td>
<td>Dignity (N)</td>
<td>Essential (A)</td>
<td>Hubris (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypothetical (A)</td>
<td>Infinite (A)</td>
<td>Insolent (V)</td>
<td>Intention (N)</td>
<td>Irony (N)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karma (N)</td>
<td>Kitschy (A)</td>
<td>Leukemia (N)</td>
<td>Lobotomy (N)</td>
<td>Mourn (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nemesis (N)</td>
<td>Paillard (N)</td>
<td>Patronize (V)</td>
<td>Perpetuate (V)</td>
<td>Plausible (A)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plié (V)</td>
<td>Plying (V)</td>
<td>Prologue (N)</td>
<td>Ramekin (N)</td>
<td>Relent (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resent (V)</td>
<td>Sabotage (V)</td>
<td>Sadistic (A)</td>
<td>Scold (V)</td>
<td>Seduce (V)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-conscious (A)</td>
<td>Solemn (V)</td>
<td>Subconscious (N)</td>
<td>Torte (N)</td>
<td>Violate (V)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Activity**

*Sentence Structure*

Find each of the above words in the play and make a note of the page it’s on. Break up into small groups and try to figure out what each word means. Use the context surrounding it to help you. Write down your ideas. Then, grab a dictionary and look up the definition. Check and see how close you were. **HINT: One of the words is French.**

Each of the words in the list is either a verb (V), noun (N), or adjective (A). Once you have the definitions, create a sentence using as many of these words as you can. Be sure to use at least one from each category (V, N, A) in your sentence. **Here’s an example:** The biscotti deliberately resented the torte and was affronted by its sabotage. Choose two of your best sentences and hand them in to the teacher, who will read them to the rest of the class. As a class, vote for your favorite.

Continue being creative and write a paragraph or short story using as many vocab words as possible.
Dramatic Tension and Conflict

When Things Get Uncomfortable

Have you ever been in an awkward situation? One where everyone is uncomfortable and tense? While it may be difficult to be in, tension makes for interesting theatre. Here we will explore the importance of conflict and tension within a play.

Merriam–Webster’s Dictionary defines conflict as “the opposition of persons or forces that gives rise to the dramatic action in a drama or fiction”. When writing conflict into a play, a playwright may use such tools as mystery, surprise, empathy, universality, or high stakes. Subtext (which is a meaning implied or understood by the reader or audience) is also a useful vehicle for creating conflict. If there is no subtext or if the characters agree on everything, conflict will not happen. Think about how boring a play or movie would be without conflict!

Tension is the result of conflict. According to the philosopher Aristotle, suspense (or dramatic tension), is important in building drama. He says, “Suspense consists of having some real danger and a ray of hope.” Dramatic tension is the feeling of uncertainty about what will happen, or is happening, in a story or play. It can be created through structure, action, atmosphere, and character. Tension and conflict are essential parts of a successful play.

Write About It:
Write a journal entry answering these questions.
• What are some moments of dramatic tension in the play?
• Which characters create the most conflict? When do they do this? Why do these characters create more conflict than others?
• How are these conflicts resolved? Or are they?

“Conflict is the fundamental element of fiction, fundamental because in literature only trouble is interesting. It takes trouble to turn the great themes of life into a story: birth, love, sex, work, and death.”

- Janet Burroway

When the Audience Feels Uncomfortable
As you watch Rabbit Hole, think about the conflict and tension happening on stage. Is there ever a time that you as an audience member feel uncomfortable? Why do you think you feel that way? Sometimes playwrights will make the audience uncomfortable on purpose. Many playwrights want you, the audience member, to have an emotional response to the play. But, with that comes the chance to feel uncomfortable, especially when dealing with difficult topics (like the ones in this play). Think of a movie that was sad, suspenseful, or made you uncomfortable. What effect did that have on you? Which parts of Rabbit Hole were difficult to watch? Which parts do you think would be difficult for a parent to watch? Why?

Activity
Conflict Resolution Scenes
Find a partner and a space in the room where you can rehearse. You and your partner will act out this scenario: Two people are walking in the hallway and bump shoulders while passing. With your partner, make a list of all the possible outcomes for this conflict (both positive and negative outcomes). Practice for 10 minutes, exploring as many outcomes as you can. Perform 2 scenes with solutions for the class (one positive and one negative). Discuss as a class why the positive one worked and why the negative one didn’t. How could the negative outcome be changed to become positive? In front of the class, improvise a positive end for that scene.
Embellishment in Storytelling: Making it Interesting

Many years ago, way before television and movies, people told stories to each other as a primary source of entertainment. Stories were also told for education and for preserving one’s heritage. Now, we often tell stories to share details about experiences with others, to make each other laugh, or sometimes to scare each other. But, even the best storyteller gets a little carried away.

How many times have you told a story and made a few things up to make it more interesting? We’ve all done it. Maybe you say the guy was yelling a bit louder than he really was. Or the teacher was a little more mean than in real life. Embellishment is a way of making our stories more exciting.

It’s important to know the difference between adding a few details to a story for effect and lying. When you lie, there can be serious consequences. Embellishing is adding a few details to an already established story. Lying is totally making up a story and pretending it’s the truth.

"Look, I went out. I got into a fight. I thought it was a funny story. I thought you’d be amused.”
- Izzy (Act 1, Scene 1)

Activity

A Tall Tale

Find a partner and a space in the room. Sit facing your partner in order to be able to best hear what they say. Think of something that you did last night. It doesn’t have to be interesting; in fact, the more boring the better. Tell your story to your partner exactly how it happened. Once you and your partner have both told your stories, let the embellishment begin. You will now take on your partner’s story and make it more interesting and exciting. Add lots of embellishments. Make it scary, funny, or crazy. Tell the new version to your partner. They will do the same for you. When everyone is finished, get volunteers to share their new and improved stories. Try to determine which parts of the stories are true and which were embellishments. Which story was more fun to tell? The first or second? Which was more fun to hear? Why?

Think About It:

Think about some of the stories you have told in the last week. How many of them were exactly what happened? How many had a few additional, more interesting details? How many were flat out lies? If you embellished or lied, why did you do that? What are some of the consequences of lying? Are there consequences to embellishment? Try to go one week without embellishing any stories and see what happens!

Think About It:

Think back to the first scene in Rabbit Hole, where Izzy is relaying to Becca her version of the incident with the woman in the bar. How much of that story do you think is what really happened? Is there room to embellish in a story like that? How would the story have been different if you were telling it?
Exploring the Context
What is grief?

While it may be difficult to talk about, understanding grief is an important part of understanding the characters in *Rabbit Hole*. In this section we'll learn more about what it is, how it can affect a person, and the idea of a time limit on grief.

Grief is an intense physical, emotional and/or psychological response to loss. It’s a common response to the death of a loved one: family, friend, or even pet. It can also occur after other types of loss: home, job, status, possessions, or sense of safety and order. One’s response to grief may also vary based on culture, family, personality, or religious beliefs.

Talk About It: Grief and Time

A grief study released in February 2007 stated that at six months after a loss, a person should be entering a stage of acceptance. What is interesting to note is that *Rabbit Hole* begins eight months after the death of Danny. By these guidelines, are these characters on track? For those who are not, do you think there is something wrong with them or with the study? What about Jason’s grief process? For what do you think he is grieving? The new study involved primarily elderly people who were dealing with the loss of a loved one due to natural causes (illness, old age, etc.). How do you think the study would have differed if unnatural deaths (suicide, accidents, etc.) had been included? What is the impact of the demographic of participants (primarily older, white, middle class women) on the results? Would it be different if the participants were more of a varied group? Discuss as a class.

The Health Effects of Grief

Grief is usually accompanied by many health effects. Some of these include shock and confusion, crying, loss of appetite, low or no energy, and lack of sleep. Effects such as these can be bad for a person's general health. Some emotions that can go through a grieving person’s mind are anger, guilt, and depression. These are common emotions tied to grief. One may find him or herself angry at a situation or another person. He or she may take this anger out on those around him or her, whether warranted or not.

Activity: Art and Grief

Grab a camera and go out into your community. Look around at the people, things, and animals. Take some pictures of things that remind you of grief or grieving. Bring them in and show the class.

Make a collage of grief. Use pictures, magazine clippings, words, colors and your own ideas. Hang them up in the classroom.

Think About It:

- What are your experiences with major loss? How long did it take for you to grieve?
- Do you have to know someone personally in order to grieve for them?
- What is Becca’s stage of grief at:
  - the beginning of the play?
  - the end of Act One?
  - the end of the play?
- What are Howie’s stages of grief throughout the play? Has he progressed by the end of the play? Why or why not?
- In what ways are Howie and Becca’s grief similar? Different?
Responding to Grief

People respond to grief differently. While everyone may go through the same stages, one person’s definition, ideas, and experiences of each stage will be different from another’s. Think about that as we explore the various models of dealing with grief.

In 1969, Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross wrote a book called *On Death and Dying* which later became an important part of how people perceive death and how to deal with it. She included 5 steps in this book, which are known as the Five Stages of Grief. These stages are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. The Kübler-Ross model is most commonly used in regard to terminally ill patients, but, it can be applied to those who have had a devastating loss, like the death of a loved one.

In 1961, John Bowlby, a British psychiatrist, outlined the process of grief. He focused on experiences, process and the dynamics of people as individuals. The steps he outlined for grief were: Shock and Numbness, Yearning and Searching, Disorganization and Despair, and Reorganization. He noted that there are increased health risks to those involved in the grief process, especially stress related illnesses.

Did You Know?
Teens are at a 5x’s greater risk of suicide after the death of a parent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Months After the Loss</th>
<th>Peak Stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Month</td>
<td>Disbelief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Months</td>
<td>Yearning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Months</td>
<td>Anger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Months</td>
<td>Depression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Months</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These two graphs show the path that each of the stages of grief, according to the new study, travels after the death of a loved one.

In February 2007, a Yale Bereavement Study was released with some interesting findings. It said that yearning, in regards to grief, is a far more dominant stage than depression. And, although the majority of people follow the same pattern, some do not. The study found that many grief-stricken people move through the negative stages of grief and enter the acceptance stage around 6 to 24 months after the death of a loved one. The step of bargaining, while it may be prevalent in dealing with the impending death of an ill loved one, is not usually apparent in those grieving an unexpected death. What was startling to the researchers was that each stage peaked in the exact same sequence: disbelief, yearning, anger, depression, and acceptance. Disbelief peaked at one month, yearning at four months, anger at five months, depression at six months, and acceptance continued all the way up to 24 months, when the study concluded. What this study finds is that both Kübler-Ross and Bowlby were right in some ways. The newest findings of the grief process incorporates elements of both models.
Dealing With Grief: 
Faith, Hope and “The Plan”
How do these concepts affect the way people live?

“Faith helps people cope. What’s wrong with that?”
-Nat (Act 1, Scene 3)

What is Faith?
Webster’s Dictionary defines faith as:
1: Belief in the traditional doctrines of a religion.
2: Firm belief in something for which there is no proof.
3: Complete trust.
4: Something that is believed with especially strong conviction.

Whether it is faith in a higher being, faith in others, or faith in yourself, faith can be a powerful tool in life. It can be especially helpful when dealing with grief. Like Nat says, faith gives people hope. Many people rely on faith when there is no tangible way to explain an incident or accident. They believe that as long as a supreme being or higher power has control, and is looking out for them, then everything will be fine. Faith can bring people together, but can it also tear people apart? How do you think it does that? What effect does faith have on the play’s characters?

What is Hope?
Webster’s Dictionary’s definition:
1: To cherish a desire with anticipation.
2: To desire with expectation of obtainment.
3: To expect with confidence.
Hope is an emotion and a belief in the positive outcome of a situation. It’s also a result of faith.

In Rabbit Hole (pages 53-57), the family discusses the concept of “God’s Plan”. Within the realms of Christianity, some religious scholars believe “God’s Plan” could be considered this: There is a specific path and reason for each of us on Earth. No matter what happens in our lives, everything is a part of the plan. Everything is all laid out for us, and we are merely walking along a path that has already been created. If you do not believe in a higher power, these may be new ideas to you. But, if you do, be it Christian or not, perhaps you have heard of such a concept. How do you think Becca feels about this concept? Why do you think that is? How do the other characters in the play feel about it? How do they express those feelings? How do you feel about the idea of “a plan”? Discuss as a class.

Activity
The Great Debate
Break the class up in half. Each half will debate one side of the issue “The Plan vs. No Plan”. When your team has the floor, one person will come to the center and make a statement in support of the issue. If the opposing team disagrees, they can say “objection!” and will be given a chance to say why they object. After that, the judge (your teacher) will decide the validity of the opposing statement. If the statement is found valid, the opposing team may continue to present their statement. If not, it’s back to the original side. Before the debate, spend some time as a team researching your side of the issue. Find facts and information supporting your side. During the debate, use that research as well as personal experiences.

Talk About It:
Discuss the following questions as a class.
• Do you believe in a higher power?
• Must someone believe in a higher power in order to have faith?
• How do you think faith can help someone in the grieving process?
• Why is Nat’s faith so strong while Becca’s is all but lost?
• Do you think Becca ever really had faith? If so, why did she lose it?
• Can Becca still have hope? What would you hope for in her situation?
• If there is “a plan”, was Danny’s death really an accident?
• What religion is the family in this play?
When people suffer a loss, many try to find comfort in the company of others. Therapy and support groups are two resources people use when coping with a difficult situation. Here we'll explore different types of coping skills and counseling (like Becca and Howie tried in the play).

**Coping Skills**

Everyone copes differently. A coping skill or coping mechanism is something used to help overcome a problem or adversity without solving or eliminating the problem. Some negative coping skills are the use of drugs or alcohol. Positive coping skills, however, can be very effective. Some positive coping skills may include breathing exercises, meditation, writing in a journal, or talking to someone (like a friend or counselor).

**Support Groups**

A grief support group is a gathering of people who get together to discuss their experiences with loss. But support groups are not strictly for grief-stricken people. Alcoholics Anonymous, Parents of Suicides, and even Weight Watchers are examples of support groups. Support groups are good for those who cannot communicate with family (maybe due to location or negative relationships). They are also a good chance for people to vent and rage without risking the potentially damaging effects their emotional outbursts may have on family members. Support groups are sometimes led by a certified therapist and other times are simply a group of people getting together to talk. These groups can meet daily, weekly or monthly, depending on the needs and availability of the members.

**Group Therapy**

Group therapy is different from a support group because it is always led by one or more therapists. The size of the group is regulated in order to facilitate discussion. Group therapy does cost money but may be more cost effective than individual therapy (which is just you and the therapist). When engaging in group therapy, it is important not to expect to be "fixed" or that the counselors will "make it all go away". Discussing how to measure progress with a counselor and having others around will also help in achieving realistic goals.

**Talk About It:**

Discuss the following questions as a class.

- What are good coping skills someone could utilize?
- What coping skills is Becca using? Do you think they are working? Why or why not?
- How do you think Jason is coping? Do you think he would benefit from counseling or therapy? Why or why not?
- Was therapy working for Becca? Is it an effective tool for Howie? Why or why not?
- If you were in Becca and Howie's situation, would you choose to go to therapy? If not, how would you choose to cope?

**For More Information About Counseling, Support Groups or Group Therapy:**

- www.compassionatefriends.org
- www.teencentral.net
- In Chicago:
  - www.CaringInfo.org
  - www.family-institute.org
  - www.griefcounselor.org

**E-Counseling: Support at a Distance**

A popular new mode of counseling is called e-counseling. People can contact psychiatrists and psychologists online and get the help they need with a certain amount of anonymity. These counselors give their clients the skills, tools, and advice needed to begin the healing process. It can be as effective as in-session counseling, but is not appropriate for those who may be suicidal or in need of emergency services.
For years, the American people have been fascinated by the Kennedys, a prominent family involved with US politics and business. From this famous family came our 35th president, the late John F. Kennedy. Along with his wife, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and his brothers, Senator Ted Kennedy and the late Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, JFK and the rest of the Kennedy family have long endured both heartbreak and joy. Because of numerous tragedies that have befallen them, some believe that there is a curse upon this family. Here we'll take a look at the history of the Kennedys - America's most famous family.

“I ALL THOSE GOOD-LOOKING PEOPLE FALLING OUT OF THE SKY LIKE THAT. IT'S A FRICKIN' WASTE. BUT IT ISN'T A CURSE. IT'S JUST RICH PEOPLE ACTING STUPID.”

- NAT (ACT 1, SCENE 3)

We start our timeline with Rosemary's lobotomy because it is the first documented "tragedy" of the Kennedy family. It's also where the timeline Howie references in the play starts.

The Kennedys in 1931.

Did You Know?
Irish folklore says a Kennedy ancestor destroyed a fairy dwelling, thus cursing all future generations.

The Kennedys: A Tragic Timeline

- **1941**: Rosemary Kennedy, sister to Bobby and JFK, believed to have mental retardation, is given a lobotomy. The surgery, which is in experimental stages, is intended to cure her. The procedure has devastating results, landing Rosemary in an institution until her death in 2005.
- **1944**: Joseph Kennedy Jr., brother to JFK, is killed in a plane crash in WWII.
- **1948**: Kathleen Kennedy Cavendish, sister to Bobby and JFK, is killed in a plane crash in France.
- **1955-1956**: Jackie Kennedy suffers a miscarriage. Then, a year later, her and JFK's first child, Arabella, is stillborn.
- **August 1963**: The second son of Jackie and John, Patrick, dies 2 days after birth.
- **November 1963**: John F. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas.
- **1964**: Ted Kennedy, brother to Bobby and JFK, is involved in a plane crash. He survives, but 2 others are killed.
- **1968**: Immediately following his win in the California Democratic presidential primary, Bobby Kennedy is shot multiple times. He dies the next day.
- **1969**: Ted Kennedy drives his car off a road in Massachusetts, killing his companion. He suffers minor injuries.
- **1984**: David Kennedy, son of Bobby, dies from a drug overdose.
- **1997**: Michael Kennedy, son of Bobby, dies in a skiing accident in Colorado.
- **1999**: John F. Kennedy Jr. dies in a plane crash which also kills his wife, Carolyn, and her sister.

JFK Jr. and Carolyn in 1996.
IS THERE A CURSE?

“A NATION REVEALS ITSELF NOT ONLY BY THE MEN IT PRODUCES, BUT ALSO BY THE MEN IT HONORS, THE MEN IT REMEMBERS.”

- JOHN F. KENNEDY

Did You Know?
Aristotle Onassis, whom Nat mentions in the play, was a wealthy merchant and businessman. He was born in 1906 in Smyrna (now Turkey) and became a formidable man in the world of shipping. He had 2 children, Alexander and Christina, with his first wife Athina. In 1968 he married Jackie Kennedy. After the death of his son in a plane crash in 1973, Aristotle was said to have given up on living. He tried in earnest to find a reason for his son's death, but could never uncover one. He died in France in 1975.

Activity
Relating to the Kennedys
For many adults that were alive in the 1960’s, the moment JFK was shot is something they will never forget. Find 3 people in your family or community who were alive when he was killed. Interview them and find out what they specifically remember about that day and the days after it. Present your interviews to the class.

Although recent generations have never witnessed a presidential assassination, we have all experienced large scale tragedy.

- Think about what you remember of 9/11. Share your experiences of where you were and what you remember about that day with the class.
- What are some events you can think of that have brought us together as a nation?
- How about the city of Chicago?
- Your community?
- Your family?
- What events have affected you as an individual?

Compare and contrast the effect 9/11 had on our nation to the effect Danny’s death had on Becca and Howie.

Talk About It:
Discuss the following questions as a class.
- Now that you know a bit about the Kennedys, do you think there is a curse? Support your theory.
- Why are so many Americans fascinated by this family?
- Nat says their problem is that they have too much time and money – do you agree? Why or why not?
- Compare and contrast the tragedies in the Kennedy family to those in Nat’s family.

Think About It:
Are there any other people or families you know of that could be considered “cursed”? What are some signs of a cursed person or family? What has happened to make you think that they might be cursed? How can someone break a curse?

Members of the family at JFK’s funeral, 1963.
Down The Rabbit Hole: Alternate Reality

The idea of parallel universes and alternate realities seems like one straight out of a science fiction novel. The concept has been glorified by all forms of media: movies, television, radio, and books. But, how much fact is there to these fantastical theories? Let’s investigate these ideas further.

A parallel universe is a separate self-contained reality different from our own. Modern physics says that space is infinite and filled with matter (which is anything that has mass and occupies space, examples being trees, animals, people, shoes, etc.). If that is the case, then somewhere there must be an infinite number of other planets with infinite other versions of you, doing different things than you are right now. They may have the same appearance as you, but they have alternate memories and feelings because they are living out all the other infinite possibilities of your life. These are the parallel universes. Much of what scientists believe is hypothetical, and we have no known way to prove or disprove their theories. This is the general idea that Jason and Becca discuss when they meet in Act Two, Scene Three.

A “rabbit hole”, in regard to parallel universes, is the portal or entryway into these universes. It is the connector between our reality and a different reality. If you have seen The Matrix, you have an idea about the concept of movement between two realities. The characters in that movie use telephone and computer lines to travel in and out of the matrix (the alternate world) and the real world. In the book and movie Alice in Wonderland, Alice literally falls down a rabbit hole and finds herself in an alternate world.

Talk About It:

- Do you think there are parallel universes and alternate realities?
- If they are real, do you think we could ever travel between them? Where would we find these rabbit holes? Should we even look for them?
- Becca says the idea of another reality is comforting to her. Why do you think it comforts her? Is it comforting to Jason? Why or why not? Is it comforting to you?
- How do you think Howie and Becca’s lives would be different in a parallel universe? How would they be the same?
- What’s something you think your alternate self would be doing? What is one thing you would change about yourself in one of the alternate realities?

Activity

Two Realities

Grab a piece of paper and draw a line on it the entire length of the page (turn it sideways for more space). At one end is the best version of your life right now. The other end is the worst imaginable version. Write each of these down at their respective ends. In the middle is where you are now. Write a story about each of these alternate realities (the best and the worst) and what happens in each. Include how it is that you came to that point. Share your stories with the class.

Activity

Movies

Watch one of these movies and give a class presentation on how it deals with the idea of alternate realities and parallel universes.

“If space is infinite, then there are tons of you’s out there and tons of me’s...and those other versions exist. They’re actual, real people.”

–Jason (Act 2, Scene 3)
Exploring the Social Issues
Empathy: Putting Yourself in Someone Else’s Shoes

Have you ever known someone who was going through a hard time and you felt like you knew exactly what they were going through? Empathy can be a powerful tool in dealing with other people. Let’s find out what empathy is.

Empathy is a word derived from the Greek language meaning “to suffer with”. It is the ability to recognize and feel the emotions of others. R.R. Greenson put it this way: “To empathize means to share, to experience the feelings of another person.” Many people relate it to putting oneself in another’s shoes. It’s important to know that we don’t have to agree with how or what the person thinks, just be supportive and sensitive to how and what they feel.

Talk About It: Empathy vs. Sympathy
Sometimes people hear the word empathy and assume it’s the same as sympathy. Look up the definition of sympathy and discuss the differences between it and empathy.

Think About It: How can someone show that they are empathetic to another person? Which character do you empathize most with? Least with? Why? What can you do to understand the character you empathize least with? Is it important for an actor to be empathetic to the character he or she is playing? As you watch the play, try to decide if the actors on stage are being empathetic to their characters. How can you tell?

Activity One: The Sculptures
- Read part of Act 2, Scene 1 (pages 86-91).
- Break into 5 groups, each group representing a different character from the scene.
- Take 10 minutes to create a frozen picture/sculpture expressing how your group's character feels in that scene.
- Make sure everyone in your group is doing something different but still participating the sculptures.
- Present the frozen pictures to the rest of the class.

Activity Two: Empathy, Conflict, and You
- Choose a conflict within the script involving two characters.
- Write two sentences from each character’s perspective. The sentences should be structured like this:
  “I’m upset with ___________ because _______________. I wish s/he would _______________.”
- Here’s an example:
  Becca: “I’m upset with my mother because she constantly compares Danny to Arthur. I wish she would respect the difference between our losses.”
  Nat: “I’m upset with my daughter because she refuses to talk to me about her pain. I wish she would let me help her.”
- Now, think about a simple, personal conflict you have had recently. Maybe with a friend, boy/girlfriend, or family member. Write two sentences from your perspective and then two sentences from the other person’s perspective. Really try to imagine his or her point of view.
- Find a partner and swap your personal conflict sentences with him or her. Improvise a scene that would encompass the perspective of each “character”. Have your partner assume the role of you in the scene; you will play the other person. Be sure to create a scene for your partner’s conflict too.
- Act out the scenes for the rest of the class.
Guilt and Blame: Who Done It?

Feeling guilty is a natural part of being human. We have all done something and felt guilty about it. Although blame can sometimes be negative, it too is a natural part of life. Here we'll learn about these topics.

**Guilt**

Sometimes when something bad happens, friends or members of the family will experience guilt. “If only I had done this...” or “If only I had said that...” Guilt is an emotion that is felt when someone believes they have done something wrong, or on the other side, when they feel they have not done something they should have.

Dealing with guilt can be a difficult task. Some believe punishment is appropriate (as can be the case when the law is involved), while others believe that remorse and forgiveness are enough.

**Blame**

Blame is an act of making someone responsible for something they did or did not do. Blaming someone else takes responsibility off of the person who did the act in question. Conversely, if someone feels guilty about something, blame (either on him or herself or another person) can help him or her get past that feeling of guilt.

Many times people blame others for their mistakes because they don't want to get into trouble. Think back to when you were a child. Did you ever blame a sibling or friend for something you broke in your house? What about now? Have you ever blamed someone else for talking in class, passing notes or other things? Why did you do that? Can blame have positive consequences? What are they? Is it better to place blame or take responsibility?

**Activity**

*Win, Lose, or Draw*

For many years, cartoons have been a great way for people to get their thoughts and ideas across in a creative way. Now, it's your turn. Draw a 4-6 frame comic strip (just because it says “comic” doesn't mean it has to be funny) about either the topic guilt or blame. For extra points, use both topics. Create a simple story about a few characters (lots of characters can sometimes get overwhelming) and incorporate the topic of your choice. The topics can just be implied or exactly what the characters are talking about. It’s up to you! Feel free to use colors, texture, abstract images, and lots of creativity. When you are done, present your comic strip to the class.

“Why is Becca so mad at me? Is it because I’m pregnant or...is it because she blames me? A little bit maybe?”

-Izzy (Act 2, Scene 1)
Responding to the Play
Writing Your Response Letter

So now that you have discussed the play in class and come to the theater to see it, we want to know what you think. Choose one of the artists involved with *Rabbit Hole* (an actor, a designer, or the director) and write him/her a letter giving your feedback on his/her work. Be honest and go ahead and ask questions. You may just get a response. Your teacher will send us the letters and we’ll forward them on to the right person. If possible, please use a computer and type your letter. If you can’t, make sure to write your letter legibly. Most importantly: have fun! Don’t forget: please pick a specific person to write to.

Things to make sure you have in your letter:
1. Your name, age, and grade.
2. Your school, the school’s address, and your teacher’s name.

Including these things make it easier for the artists to respond!

Send your letters to:
Goodman Theatre
Education Department
170 N. Dearborn
Chicago, IL 60601

Dear James A. Williams,

I attended the February 13, 2007 showing of *Radio Golf* and I was fairly impressed. I enjoyed the play thoroughly but I did have some questions. When I first read the text of the play it struck me as a somewhat surprising shift in Roosevelt Hicks’ character when he decided to buy out Harmond. It was evident from the beginning that he was a fairly materialistic person, but his friendship with Harmond seemed fairly important to him. When I saw the play staged, the suddenness of the shift was not diminished. I was wondering if you felt that Roosevelt was always greedy, or if he became more materialistic throughout the course of the play.

A more general question I had about the play was the nature of pragmatism. Clearly, August Wilson meant for Harmond Wilks to be the protagonist and Roosevelt to be the antagonist of the play (by the end), but many members of my class came to identify with Roosevelt as much as Harmond. I wondered if you thought August Wilson intended for audiences to have difficulty considering Roosevelt an antagonist, or was it something of an accident that Roosevelt comes across as essentially a “likeable jerk”- greedy but human and fairly friendly.

Overall, I think that *Radio Golf* will be remembered as one of August Wilson’s better plays (which is saying a great deal, since all of his plays have been notable works). Your acting rendered a very human character, one who slowly evolved from a friend of the protagonist to the closest thing the play has to an antagonist while still remaining fairly sympathetic. I salute your acting skills and very much hope that *Radio Golf* is a hit on Broadway, as it raises important questions that need to be considered.

Sincerely,
Trevor Wagener

Dear Mr. Chisholm,

Your performance as Old Joe in *Radio Golf* was not only entertaining, but also insightful. I thought you were really able to capture the inherent wisdom and exasperation at the unwelcoming actions of modern society. One striking skill that I noticed you have is the ability to make the experiences of the character your own. I could actually see in your face the subtle recall of events that were taking place. Did you develop a sort of life story of this character in your head or did you use other methods to get this result?

As far as the overall production, I thought it was very well done. We had to read the play prior to the performance, and I thought at first that the script itself stood on its own as far as the message and theme conveyed by August Wilson. In this belief I was mistaken. I was surprised to find that the performance added to my understanding of the play’s significance. Much of that was due to your acting, in bringing to life the important memories of an oddly wise man. For that, I think you.

Sincerely,
David Kaplinsky
Study Guide Questions

1. Think about a mentor (a trusted counselor or guide) you have in your life, like a teacher, coach, or religious leader. Imagine this person asked you to write a play about something that frightened you (like Marsha Norman did for David Lindsay-Abaire). What would you write about?

2. What affect does tone have on a play?

3. List the steps to casting a play. If you were a director, would you follow these steps? Are there any steps you would add? Any you would remove? Why?

4. Why are dramatic tension and conflict so important to plays? Can a play be successful without either of these elements? Can you think of a play or movie that is lacking in either tension or conflict?

5. What is the difference between embellishing a story and lying? Are they completely separate or is there a grey area?

6. List the 5 stages of grief explained in the 2007 study. Define each of these stages in your own words.

7. How do you feel about the idea of “God’s Plan”? Why do you feel this way? How do faith and hope apply to the idea of “a plan”?

8. What affect has the Kennedy family had on society? How would our country be different if JFK (or his brother, Bobby) had not been assassinated?

9. What might some of the social, economic, religious, or global ramifications be if “rabbit holes” were to be found? How would our government react to such a finding?

10. What would happen to our society if “rabbit holes” became readily accessible to the general population?

11. Why is empathy such an important characteristic to have? Can someone be too empathetic?

12. Why are guilt and blame such difficult topics to deal with?
Text Questions

BEFORE THE PLAY BEGINS
1. What do we know about the characters in the play before the play begins? What are their relationships to one another?
2. According to the playwright, where and when does this play take place?

ACT ONE
Scene One
1. What is Becca doing at the beginning of this scene?
2. What happened to Izzy at the bar? Summarize her story in three sentences.
3. How does Becca feel about Izzy’s story?
4. What excuse does Izzy give for the way she behaved? How does Becca feel about this excuse?
5. What does Izzy have for a snack? Why won’t Becca let her eat it straight out of the fridge? What does she have to do to the snack first?
6. From where did Izzy recently get fired?
7. What is Izzy’s relationship to each of the two people in the story she tells in this scene?
8. What big news does Izzy share with Becca? Who else in the family knows about this news?
9. Who was Danny? Do we know what’s happened to him?
10. What does Becca want to save for Izzy? Why do both women decide against this?
11. What does Izzy need Becca to pretend?

Scene Two
1. How does Howie seem to be reacting to Izzy’s news?
2. What is Becca planning to get Izzy for her birthday?
3. What does Howie think of this gift idea?
4. Who are Rick and Debbie?
5. What are two things we learn in this scene about what happened to Danny?
6. Why is Howie playing Al Green and rubbing Becca’s shoulders? How does Becca react?
7. Who does Howie want Becca to see? Why?
8. What does she tell Howie she wants to do in regards to their house? Why does she want to do this? How does Howie feel about it?
9. What is different about Howie’s experience in the house compared to Becca’s?
10. Why can’t Becca go back to work?
11. What does Becca do when Becca goes upstairs? What does he watch?

Scene Three
1. What is happening at the beginning of this scene? What is being celebrated?
2. What did Howie get for Nat? How do Becca and Izzy feel about it?
3. What curse are they discussing? What does each of the characters think about the idea of this curse?
4. What gift does Izzy receive from Becca and Howie? How does she react?
5. What does Izzy receive from her mother? How does she react? How does Becca react?
6. What does Becca want to do after she sees what Nat gives Izzy? Why?
7. Who is Taz? What do Howie and Nat disagree about in regards to him?
8. Why did Nat bring up the Kennedys in the first place? What story does she tell?
9. Where does Becca refuse to keep going? Why?
10. Which people does Becca not like, according to Howie? Why doesn’t she like them? What does she call them? Of what is she jealous?
11. Who is Arthur? Why is Becca upset that Nat keeps comparing Arthur to Danny?
12. Does Becca believe in God?
Text Questions

Scene Four
1. Where does the beginning of the scene take place? How often does Becca go in this room?
2. Who is Jason Willette?
3. Why has he written Becca and Howie a letter? What did he include with his letter? What would he like their permission to do?
4. What is on the tape Howie starts to watch? What should be on the tape – what has Becca taped over? What does Howie accuse Becca of trying to do, even if she's doing it subconsciously? What evidence aside from the tape does he give her?
5. Why does Becca say she's been doing the things that bother Howie?
6. What are Becca and Howie doing in different ways? What “sucks” right now according to Becca?
7. What does Becca want to get back? Will he wait any longer for it?

ACT TWO
Scene One
1. How much time has passed since the end of Act One?
2. What is going on at the house? What is Howie doing?
3. What business advice does Izzy give Howie in regards to the house?
4. Why does Izzy think Becca might be mad at her?
5. What question does Izzy ask Howie? What's the prologue to her question? How does Howie respond?
6. Where have Becca and Nat been? What happened while they were there?
7. Why was Becca so upset about the actions of the woman she encountered?
8. Who appears at the front door? Why is he at the house?
9. How does Howie react to the visitor? How does Becca?

Scene Two
1. What are Nat and Becca doing?
2. What book which used to be Becca’s do they find?
3. What does Nat find that stops her? What does Becca tell her about how to keep going?
4. What kind of class is Becca taking? What book is she studying? What does Becca like best about the class?
5. What is different about Becca’s experience with Debbie compared to Nat's experience with her friend Maureen? What did Maureen say she wanted to share with Nat? How did Nat respond?
6. What is Jason’s story (which Nat finds) about? What does Becca tell Nat she plans to do regarding Jason?
7. What story does Nat tell about Danny?
8. What big question does Becca ask her mother? What does Nat say in response?

Scene Three
1. Name two things Becca and Jason discuss before he says what he’s come to say.
2. What has Jason come to say to Becca?
3. In what year of high school is Jason? What does he plan to do after graduation?
4. What is Jason telling Becca about when she begins to cry?
5. Of what Greek myth does Jason's story remind Becca?
6. How does Jason explain why he believes in parallel universes?
7. What “version” of them does Becca tell Jason this must be? What is a nice thought for Becca in regards to the idea of parallel universes?
8. What does Jason want Becca to tell Howie?
Text Questions

Scene Four
1. What things is Becca giving to Izzy? What did she especially want Izzy to have, according to Nat?
2. Why is Becca surprised to see Howie – to what did she think he had to go?
3. What does Howie say he wants to try to do without for a while?
4. Who did Becca call? Where have she and Howie been invited?
5. What’s coming up that’s going to be tough for Howie and Becca?
6. What does Becca seem ready to reconsider?
7. How does Howie outline their next steps?
8. What does Becca do at the end of the play? What physical action does she take?