Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2007/2008 Season

Student Guide

Shining City

By Conor McPherson
Directed by Robert Falls

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Dashed circles surround questions for you to consider as you discuss the play and other related topics. Rather than focusing directly on the text, most questions will encourage you to relate ideas from the play to your personal experiences.

All quotations are in cursive writing inside boxes. The quote below doesn’t have anything to do with the rest of the guide—it’s just Elizabeth’s favorite. However, all other quotes will relate to the topics of the pages on which they appear.

“Dream as though you’ll live forever; live as though you’ll die today.”

- James Dean
Exploring the Production
At the age of 36, Conor McPherson is already the author of more than 13 plays in addition to Shining City. His playwriting career began roughly 15 years ago in Dublin. In 1995, the 23-year-old recent graduate of University College Dublin co-founded his own theater company and put up his new play about a drunken academic, This Lime Tree Bower. He was discovered and signed by a British theatrical agent and quickly received commissions from London theaters.

His success continued through 1997, during which he premiered his one-man show, St. Nicholas, a narrative of a downtrodden drama critic who falls hopelessly in love with a young actress. In his pursuit, the critic makes a deal with vampires in exchange for eternal life.

McPherson trumped the success of St. Nicholas with his next project, a haunting epic entitled The Weir, which premiered at Royal Court Theatre in London. The Weir takes place in a pub in rural Ireland where a group of regulars attempt to scare a young visitor from Dublin with ghost stories. The tables are turned on the regulars when they become terrified of the tales the outsider contributes to the evening. The Weir’s successful runs in both New York and London elevated McPherson to international success: he won a London Critics Circle Award for Most Promising Playwright in 1997, and the prestigious Laurence Olivier Theatre award for Best New Play in 1999.

In 2004 Shining City burst onto the scene, bringing with it a Broadway run directed by Goodman Theatre’s own Artistic Director Robert Falls. His latest production, The Seafarer, had a successful run in London and is currently thriving on Broadway.

McPherson has directed the premieres of many of his own works including Shining City, St. Nicholas and The Seafarer. He has also directed for Royal Court Theatre in London and Abbey Theatre in Dublin.
Robert Falls has been the artistic director of Goodman Theatre for 21 years. An advocate of racial and cultural diversity in the theatre, Falls led Goodman to be the first theatre to produce all 10 of August Wilson’s plays, culminating with Radio Golf last January, as well as overseeing the genesis of Goodman’s Latino Theatre Festival during the 2002-2003 season. Wanting to take on shows that were “risky and edgy” for his 20th anniversary last season, Falls directed a contemporary version of King Lear that incorporated brutal, graphic imagery in what the Chicago Tribune called “a post-apocalyptic Eastern European world of guns, vodka, petty fiefdoms and crushing sexual cruelty.” The show’s opening lines were delivered by men at urinals, and Lear divided his kingdom by cutting a cake at a lavish, drunken party in his honor. And that was just the beginning.

Before the Shakespearean classic, Falls directed the Broadway debut of Shining City in the spring of 2006. His acclaimed London revival of Death of a Salesman, starring Brian Dennehy, completed its long run in 2005, and his production of Elton John and Tim Rice’s Aida for Walt Disney Theatricals played in Germany, Japan and South Korea after opening on Broadway in 2004. Both productions won numerous Tony Awards. Falls’ other directing credits for Goodman Theatre include Edward Albee’s The Goat or, Who is Sylvia?, Eugene O’Neill’s Long Day’s Journey into Night (which went on to receive several Tony Awards), and Horton Foote’s The Young Man from Atlanta (another Broadway transfer), as well as numerous world premieres by new playwrights.

Falls’ directing credits outside Chicago include The Iceman Cometh at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Eric Bogosian’s subUrbia at Lincoln Center Theater in New York (for which he won an Obie Award) and productions for the Guthrie Theatre, Metropolitan Opera and Grande Théâtre de Genève.

Recent Broadway Credits and Tony Awards

From the Internet Broadway Database (www.ibdb.com)

Talk Radio (2007)
Directed by Robert Falls
❖ Nominated for two Tony Awards: Best Revival of a Play and Best Actor in a Play (Liev Schreiber)

Shining City (2006)
Directed by Robert Falls
❖ Nominated for two Tony Awards: Best Play and Best Actor in a Play (Oliver Platt)

Directed by Robert Falls
❖ Won three Tony Awards: Best Revival of a Play, Best Actor in a Play (Brian Dennehy) and Best Actress in a Play (Venessa Redgrave)
❖ Nominated for four additional Tony Awards, including Best Direction of a Play (Robert Falls)

Aida (2000-2004)
Directed by Robert Falls
Book co-written by Robert Falls
❖ Won four Tony Awards, including Best Original Musical Score (Elton John and Tim Rice) and Best Actress in a Musical (Heather Headley)

Death of a Salesman (1999)
Directed by Robert Falls
❖ Won four Tony Awards: Best Direction of a Play (Robert Falls) Best Revival of a Play, Best Actor in a Play (Brian Dennehy) and Best Featured Actress in a Play (Elizabeth Franz)
❖ Nominated for two additional Tony Awards for Best Featured Actor in a Play

“...I don’t think you can have a major regional theater in this country without being responsible to the whole community. That’s particularly true in Chicago, where there’s so much richness from African-American culture and the emerging Latino culture.”

- Robert Falls
USA Today, Dec. 12, 2006
Willa J. Taylor: What attracted you to *Shining City* to begin with?

Robert Falls: It came to me in an unusual way, meaning it wasn’t a play that I read and kind of pursued. It was given to me. I was approached by the Manhattan Theatre Club to do the [Broadway] production. [...]Conor McPherson] suggested me as a director. We had met, wildly enough, in 1992 when I was working on The Iceman Cometh in Dublin, and this young man – 21 years old – introduced himself to me, that he was a playwright, and that he had been very very influenced by David Mamet’s work in Chicago, and did I know David Mamet? And I said yes, I knew Mr. Mamet very well. We had started our careers together. And that began a kind of friendship way before [Conor] became an internationally acclaimed playwright. [...] Manhattan Theatre Club sent me the play, and it’s just one of those plays – the moment I read it, I fell in love with it... it was a page-turner to me, literally, meaning every page. I didn’t know where it was going and I was surprised at every turn of the page. And I think that’s the same experience – I could tell – the audience would have, which I really enjoyed about it [...]and it had an unusual truthfulness about the human condition, and... I have spent a lot of time in Ireland, and I come from a sort of Irish background. I’d never really done an Irish play before, so I thought all of those things were good reasons to do it.

WT: Do you look at it as a sort of ghost story in the traditional sense?

RF: No, I don’t see it as a ghost story. Unlike his play *The Weir*, which really is a series of stories that are quite supernatural and ghostly... I mean, [*Shining City*] can be sort of described, I suppose, as an urban ghost story, a Dublin ghost story, because the initial image, of course, is a man who comes in to his therapist’s office saying, “I’ve seen the ghost of my dead wife.” But for me, that quickly gets dispensed with, and there’s so much else going on in the play and in the characters and in the stories of their lives, that I sort of forget that and have a lot to work on around that – so that when the ghost does make its appearance, I think that’s both a surprise and I think that’s a very interesting part of the play, but that’s not particularly what interests me about the play.

WT: What does interest you about the play?

RF: Human behavior, the complexity of the human condition. Of how essentially we are all alone. How communication is extremely difficult for all of us and essential. It’s a play, for me,
they’re reaching out to make connections in a sort of… very modern, hectic, complex world, where it’s just as easy to become isolated and alone as to reach out to another human being.

**WT:** The thing that was really amazing to me is there are very few complete sentences of dialogue in the play, but there was not a single time watching it that I didn’t understand exactly what people were thinking or what they were doing. How do you direct this kind of play, where all the text is not on the page?

**RF:** Well I love the music of the play, and it is inspired. David Mamet does a very similar thing. David Mamet was an influence as a young man, and I think – Conor has certainly gone on to develop his own style. And I think Mamet, of course, was influenced by Pinter, so there’s a sort of backwards tradition in this play, of people who are inarticulate. All three of them – Pinter, Mamet, and McPherson – explore and like exploring sort of half thoughts, disconnected dialogue where people don’t finish their thoughts. And the play is filled with that. I think when you are working on a play like that, there’s a sort of music you’re conducting, but you also have to make sure the actors themselves know exactly what it is they’re saying. So when you’re working on the play, even though there are sort of half-lines where they break off in mid-sentence, you just have to make sure the actors are crystal clear in what it is they were going to say, if they were going to say anything. […] That’s part of the rehearsal process. And I spent a lot of time working around the table, just reading the play to make those decisions before we even got on our feet to stage it.

**WT:** Why go back to it after you had done it in NY?

**RF:** Well, you know, it was a real “A,” a real success in New York. It was nominated for a number of Tony awards. It was virtually on every New York critic’s 10-best list, and it was widely acclaimed critically by audiences. […] from the moment I did it in New York, I thought, “well this will be a fun show to do at the Goodman.” I also knew that we had a lot of other things on our plate so it would probably take at least a year for us to do the play. But I just thought, well, this would be fun to do. […] And I wanted to do it with a Chicago cast. I knew there would be a great group of Chicago actors, and indeed there were four wonderful Chicago actors, some people I’d worked with, some people I hadn’t, who would bring something new to it a second time around.

**WT:** I’m not sure that people in Chicago appreciate the quality of the actors and the quality of theater here. Everybody sort of sees New York as the “holy grail,” but it’s amazing the breadth of talent that is in Chicago.

**RF:** Yes, absolutely, and […] I always knew we’d cast the show every bit as well as we cast it in New York. […] There’s no doubt that we underestimate our actors. That an actor like John Judd, who’s making his Goodman debut – he’s a major American actor who has starred in many, many productions all over Chicago. He’s virtually unknown or completely unknown in New York, but as fine an actor as any in New York, or anywhere, I think, in America or the world. […] We have a tremendous group of actors who live and work and are committed to working in Chicago.

**WT:** How much dialect work did you do?

**RF:** We did a lot. I tell you, it’s hard to cast actors … no matter how good an actor is, some actors have a natural affinity, an ear, for working in dialect. Just some do, some don’t. […] I wanted actors who I thought have an affinity for this kind of work, and then we worked with Linda Gates who’s a dialect coach, and she did a gat deal of wonderful work with the and they were all very, very diligent in wanting to be as perfect as they could with the Irish accents, because that’s an important part of the music of the play. And it’s not just as Irish accent, it’s Dublin, which is very specific. You know, same thing: if you were doing a New York accent that’s very different from a Chicago accent, and you want to make the difference.
WT: I also thought that the scene with Nicole, who plays the girlfriend, Neasa... There are gonna be a lot of students in our audience who can really connect with her predicament...

RF: I think they will, to Neasa. I think so, too.

WT: This woman who has gotten pregnant and believed all the promises of this guy, and then essentially is being dumped. And I think it will be wonderful for them to see her because they saw her in Passion Play, which is a very different kind of play. What is it that you hope —besides the amazing experience and exposure to a writer like Conor — what do you really hope students especially get out of the production?

RF: Well, you know, I haven't even thought about that. I mean, I just always think of our audiences in general and I always think of our students as part of our audience in general. I think they're mature and have seen work that we've done and sometimes, yes, we are pushing different themes, sometimes more mature themes on them than they might have experienced in other forms of entertainment. I don't know. I think what I want from them is what we always get, which is a personal connection to these characters and their various dilemmas. [...] John will probably be an interesting character for them to either relate to or not relate to. John is very much a middle-aged man. John is very much a man who's been married for 20 years, in a childless marriage, but he's a man who has guilt, he's a man who is confused. He's a man who's going through something that — because of the trauma and grief of his wife dying, and the guilt he feels around that and the manifestation of a ghost, whatever that means [...] I mean there's a lot to talk about there. But I do think that Neasa's situation, and I think the situation also of the two younger people, is a very interesting one. The situation of Ian, who is obviously very confused. He's confused about... I mean we find this out, of course, that he was a priest, that he has impregnated this woman, who I think at one point he did love. We also then find out that his sexuality is still conflicted in the fact that he brings this other young man home. And then it's kind of really, I think, a very interesting thing to discuss, for example, what does it mean at the end of the play when he says he's going back down, he's leaving his work in Dublin, to go back and be with her in Limerick? And you know, I can remember audiences saying, "Ah, that's a good thing because, look, he's gonna do the right thing. He's gonna go back and be a father to that child and maybe he's back in that relationship, and that's a good thing." Well, you know, I go, "Hmm, I'm not so sure that's a good thing." But I understand people saying that, being optimistic about that, you know? But I do think that poor character of Ian is really struggling with who he is. I don't think he knows who he is. And there's a lot there to talk about, I think, for students. It's a complicated topic as we know — sexuality and all sorts of things when you're a young person. There's a lot of confusion, there's a lot of fears, there's a lot of stuff. But to me it's a play about people who carry guilt. It's a play about responsibility. What is our responsibility in the world, to having a child in the world? She talks about how she didn't want to bring that baby into the world. He (Ian) insisted on bringing that baby into the world. He's got a big responsibility there. I think she is a very interesting character. She's obviously a strong girl, a strong woman, but she's also struggling. She's got her problems. She's got all sorts of things to cope with. And all of them do really, and they're all struggling with being alone in the world, trying to make commitments. [...] and all four of the characters in this play are struggling. They're all struggling. The young man, Lawrence, is a very complex character. He has a son and he's obviously involved in prostitution. He's a guy who's sorta struggling just to make do. He probably has a drug problem he's paying for. He, too, clearly, is not connected to his family and the son he has. I think he's a really interesting character because he's not like he... he's real to me.

[...] I think it's interesting to look, for younger people, at the process of therapy. Because I'm a big believer in therapy. I think therapy is fantastic — self-analysis, self-awareness — young people should be taught that and I think they're not. And I wish they were. So much of therapy is breaking patterns and habits and trying to recognize that we are who we are. We do things not just out of the blue; we make choices because of the families we've been in, what we've observed from our mothers and fathers and our brothers and sisters. We make choices because of what we've observed in our families and in our larger societies. And we are products of patterns [...] and I think therapy and self-analysis is very important.
Exploring the Text
You know. I don’t know if you have children, and I don’t mean anything, because this is nothing about those people, but you know, I found, we found, that, okay, of course we were invited to places, you know, to parties and everything. But that’s what there was to talk about, you know? ‘Oh my sons are ten and eleven.’ ‘Oh my son is eleven!’ You know?

And of course! Look, that’s what people talk about. Of course they do. It’s perfectly normal to want to talk about the things that are happening in your life. But, you know, that was what we were always sort of on the edge of. You know, those conversations. You know, you’d be trying to, waiting for the subject to change and then of course, some stupid fucker would turn around and go, “Do you have any kids, yourself, John?” And I’d be, and I know that this happened to Mari too, I’d be like, “Eh, no, no actually, I don’t.” Which’d be then… “Oh! Right! Okay!” You know?

- John, *Shining City*

What’s different about this dialogue from other plays you’ve read? Why do you think McPherson made these specific choices with the text?

How do you think John feels about being childless? How does he feel about people who have children? How can you tell?

Try reading this passage out loud. Does it read differently out loud than it does silently? Why or why not? What do you notice about the sounds of the words, rhythm and flow? If you read *Passion Play: a cycle in three parts*, how does this text compare to Sarah Ruhl’s?

Can you think of any other playwrights, authors, song writers or poets who give their characters very realistic dialogue? Who? How are these authors’ styles similar and/or different than McPherson’s writing?
The following words can be found in the text of *Shining City*. How a word is used in the text—its context—can often help you figure out what the word means, even if you don’t know its exact definition. Hint: familiar words and phrases near the unknown word in a sentence can help!

- anorak
- bereaved
- debilitating
- untoward
- frantic
- kip
- boxroom
- spoof
- reluctance
- bollocks
- banger
- prattling
- skanger
- amenities
- cowered
- envisaged
- sulking
- bewilderment

**Think About It:**

**Word Imaging**

Read some of the vocabulary words aloud. Do their sounds add to their definitions? Why or why not?

Choose one word and draw how it sounds on a piece of paper. What images do you think of when you hear the word? What emotions? Share your “word imaging” with your classmates, then look up the actual definition to see if your picture fits.
Get together with another student in your class and take turns telling each other short stories about something that happened to you. It doesn’t have to be elaborate—anything from a conversation you had with a friend at lunch to how you got ready for school that morning would be appropriate. Just make sure you can tell the whole story in under two minutes, and speak slowly!

While your partner is telling his/her story, write it below, exactly the way it is told to you. Include pauses with ellipses (…), as well as whatever other non-word sounds s/he makes (eh, um, ah, etc.) while telling the story. If you miss a word or two, that’s all right: keep going. The goal is to record as much of your partner’s natural speech as possible. After you’ve told your stories, trade books and read over what you “sound” like on paper.

♦ What is most surprising about the way you speak? Are there certain phrases or non-verbal sounds you use more often than you thought? What do you think your speech patterns say about you?

♦ Was it hard writing your partner’s story? Why or why not? Do you think it would be difficult to make up a story that sounded just as “realistic”? What sort of process do you think McPherson used to write Shining City?
Exploring the Context
In the 1600’s, the English held political control of Ireland; however, there were numerous uprisings from Irish Catholics against the Protestant Crown in their attempts to gain independence. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, the English saw a military triumph over the revolting Irishmen and, as a result, the native Irish people were brutally suppressed. Their lands were confiscated and given to Protestants, and they were subjected to a penal code that deprived them of numerous civil liberties. Office holders and members of the Irish Parliament had to take oaths of allegiance to the Protestant faith, and Catholics were forbidden from becoming teachers or marrying Protestants.

During the American Revolution of 1775–83, British troops were withdrawn from Ireland for service in America, and invasion by the French (who supported the American colonists against Britain) seemed imminent. The Irish formed a “patriot” volunteer force to resist invasion, and the Irish Parliament was ultimately granted its independence in 1782.

When the potato crop failed in 1846—having been the staple diet of the Irish peasantry for some 200 years—the resulting famine killed tens of thousands. Many Irish tenants were evicted by their landowners, and about 1.5 million people emigrated to the USA and Canada. Irish resentment at the seemingly uncaring landowners and the indifference of the British government led to a renewal of nationalist unrest and the formation of several organizations, including the Home Rule Association and Irish Land League. Guerrilla warfare against the British army began with the formation of the Irish Republican Army in 1919, and in December of 1921 Ireland was declared a free state. The Protestant northeast, however, united to protect its status and prestige. Northern Ireland remains under British rule to this day, as a constituent country of the United Kingdom.

A large Viking fleet set up its winter home on the Liffey River in 837, and Viking buildings and fortifications soon appeared, as well as the first records of a city called Duiblinn. For the rest of the ninth century, Dublin functioned as the most important—and only permanent—Viking trading post in Ireland.

When the Vikings settled and built permanent residences, they became prone to attack. Their whereabouts were common knowledge, whereas before, no one knew where they were until their longships came into view. As the ninth century wore on, hundreds of Vikings were killed by the Irish.

Fighting went on for many years, until two Irish kings in 902 attacked the Vikings in Dublin together, effectively taking back the city for the Irish people.
Ireland is home to a rich tradition of oral storytelling, and ghost stories are no exception. In fact, one of Conor McPherson’s most celebrated plays, *The Weir*, is based around the telling of ghost stories in a rural Irish pub. As you read *Shining City*, consider how the play relates to other ghost stories you’ve heard, read or seen in movies/TV shows. Then answer the questions below.

What ghost stories do you already know?
List a few of them here:

What do the ghost stories you know have in common? Do all of them have an actual ghost? Do you think it’s necessary for a ghost to appear in these stories?

Reading *Shining City*, would you consider it to be a true ghost story? How does the ending play into your decision?

How would you design the set for this production? The costumes? Draw pictures of your designs, then compare them to the designs in the actual show. How dare they similar or different?

“The past is a ghost, the future a dream, and all we ever have is now.”

- Bill Cosby

For fun links to sites listing fictional and (allegedly) real Irish ghost stories, visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!

Stay away from me gold at the end of the rain-boo!
John is having a meeting with some businessmen at the Longford when Vivienne calls him for the first time.

John meets Viviene at this hotel.

For more information on Dublin or to take a tour of Ireland through maps go online to Knowledge Nucleus.
Before seeing the ghost of his dead wife, John meets his brother, Jim, for a pint at Clontarf Castle.

John takes Mari for a fancy lunch at the Westbury Hotel.

Dollymount House

A popular Dublin pub.

Built in the early 19th century to keep clear the channel to Dublin Port for trade ships. Bull Island formed from sand buildup after the completion of the wall.
Interesting Facts About the Irish in Chicago

Irish immigrants accounted for about one-fifth of Chicago's population in 1850, partly owning to the great number who came to America during the Great Potato Famine (1845-49).¹

Chicago ranks number one in the nation for most Irish restaurants and most bars and pubs, coming in ahead of such cities as Boston and Milwaukee.⁴

In the decades after the Great Chicago Fire (1871), the Irish dominated the Democratic party and emerged as the single most important ethnic group in Chicago’s politics. In fact, Irish Chicagoans (including current Mayor Richard M. Daley and his late father, Richard J. Daley) have occupied the mayor’s office for 45 of the past 53 years, despite the fact that persons of Irish background make up no more than six percent of the city’s current population.¹

Irish dancer Michael Flatley, star of the widely-acclaimed Riverdance and Lord of the Dance, was born and raised in Chicago.¹

Year of Chicago’s first St. Patrick’s Day Parade: 1843.⁵

Year of Ireland’s first St. Patrick’s Day Parade: 1996.²

The Chicago River has been dyed green for the St. Patrick’s Day Parade celebration for the past 43 years.³

The St. Patrick’s Day parade was moved from its original location on Chicago’s south side to downtown in 1960. 19 years later 2 south side residents organized a second parade, the South Side Irish Parade which today hosts more than 250,000 attendees each year.⁶

Exploring the Social Issues
What’s all the talk about?

Before reading the terms below, write your own definition of therapy. When you hear “therapy,” what comes to mind?

Counseling — “professional guidance in resolving personal conflicts and emotional problems” (Random House Unabridged Dictionary).

Therapy — a broader term that can refer to personal conflict resolution or the treatment of mental and emotional disorders by a doctor.

Psychologists — doctors of psychology, who talk to patients to resolve their problems.

Psychiatrists — doctors of psychiatry, who prescribe medications for mental illnesses, including depression, schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Seeking Professional Help

In Shining City, John goes to talk to Ian at the advice of his doctor because he is troubled by the fact that he has seen the ghost of his dead wife. However, other-worldly sightings are not the only reason people seek out professional therapists, counselors and psychologists for advice and help. As Ian tells Laurence in Scene Four, the type of people who come to see him are... people who might just feel a little bit... stuck, you know? And maybe they... just need a... just another point of view on what’s going on, if they’re carrying, you know, a big burden, you know? Of some guilt maybe. [...] or maybe it’s just that they have some old feeling... Maybe even from years ago, just even sometimes things can happen to us when we’re children, and that, you know, maybe that sets the tone for how people get on later.

Ian says he can invite the people he counsels to “consider something that maybe they didn’t think was that important before.” In what circumstances do you think people get “stuck,” unable to think of ways to solve their own problems? Why might people choose to see a therapist instead of talking to a close friend or family member? What are some differences and similarities between what a therapist can offer and what a friend can do for you?

Think About It: Too Close for Comfort

Have you ever had a problem that you didn’t feel you could discuss with a friend or family member? What about the problem made you feel that way?

Did you see a school or outside counselor to discuss the problem? If so, was the experience beneficial to you? How? If not, why did you decide not to get help? Were you able to resolve the issue on your own?
According to a 1999 Surgeon General’s report, only one third of people suffering from a mental health disorder receive treatment.¹ A study published by two doctors in the Journal of Counseling Psychology states that the main reason people decide not to seek out therapy or other psychological treatment is their discomfort revealing personal thoughts or feelings to another person.²

However, many people who choose not to speak with a mental health professional in person choose instead to take their problems into a much broader arena: the public forum. People seek advice and/or vent their problems on radio shows, in chat rooms on the internet and numerous television programs, including talk shows and reality TV. In this way, they reveal personal thoughts and feelings to not one, but hundreds—even thousands—of people.

An article in Psychology and the Internet³ speculates that people are comfortable engaging in text-based therapy online because of the improbability of real life repercussions for what is shared. “People feel free to express themselves in an unrestrained manner” because of the perceived safety in online confessions. Additionally, online groups and chat rooms are different from face-to-face meetings “in their ability to engender a sense of community among people who hardly know each other or are in fact total strangers.” Without body language and other nonverbal clues, there are less ways to “judge” people we meet online.

Of course, that still leaves Oprah. And Dr. Phil. And innumerable other TV and radio personalities. Appearing on a talk show or disclosing information on the radio is much less “safe” in terms of keeping your identity secret. Why do you think some individuals go to public figures for advice instead of a friend, family member or therapist? Is there a different between venting in a public forum (such as online) and seeking advice publicly?


**Activity**
**Seeking Advice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>High school counselor</th>
<th>Other prof. counselor</th>
<th>Close friend</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doctor of Psychology</td>
<td>Casual friend</td>
<td>Internet friend</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling</td>
<td>Guardian</td>
<td>Parent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other relative</td>
<td>Internet chat room</td>
<td>Self-help website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-help book</td>
<td>Dear Abby or other column</td>
<td>Radio show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV talk show</td>
<td>Reality TV</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In your daily life, where do you go for advice and help when you are dealing with a difficult issue? Using the word bank and any other sources of advice you can think of, fill in this chart, deciding where you would or wouldn’t seek advice.

On what did you base your decisions? Would this change depending on the issue you were facing? If so, why? Which sources do think are most credible? Are these the same sources where you are most likely to seek advice? Why or why not?

Would seek advice from

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</tbody>
</table>

23
Facebook Friends
Social Network or Social Isolation?

Online Social Networks: The Benefits and Pitfalls

In *Shining City*, several characters express that they feel isolated despite the literal presence of other people in their daily lives. As Neasa tells Ian, who lives with her in his brother’s home:

*...I was just always on my own! [...] I didn’t have anyone even that I could just have a normal talk to.*

Neasa looks outside her relationship with Ian to find a man she can “have a normal talk to.” In *today’s society, where emails and instant messages and cell phone conversations are becoming much more common than face-to-face exchanges, people often go online for social networking.*

“An on-line community is one of the easiest ways to meet new people,” according to an article in *Psychology and the Internet.*¹ It is “very low-risk... due to the essential informality of on-line conversation,” and “just like any other social situation, the basic currency is human attention [...] you communicate with groups that may have as many as several hundred people involved.”

However, connecting with more people online may also have adverse effects. Sociologist Lynn Smith-Lovin, co-author of the study “Social Isolation in America,” found that over the past 20 years the number of people who feel completely isolated—reporting they have no one to talk to about personal issues—has doubled. She speculates that *our increasing technology has brought with it less face-to-face contact and, as a result, fewer intimate friendships.*

Isolation by the Numbers

♦ 25% of Americans say they have no one they can talk to about their personal issues
♦ 25% of Americans only have one person they can talk to about their difficulties
♦ The average American has only two close confidants
♦ Half of Americans feel they can count on support from a close friend in times of need

The above information is from “Social isolation prompts some to ‘outsource’ intimacy” in the *Deseret News* on June 30, 2006, and “Social isolation growing in U.S., study says” from *The Washington Post* on June 23, 2006.

Think About It: Online Friends

Do you have friends that you communicate with exclusively online (email, IM, Facebook, MySpace)?

*How are your online friendships different or similar to the face-to-face friendships you have with other people? Which friends do you feel closer to? Why?*

In the movie *The Matrix*, Neo discovers the truth about who he is by selecting a red or blue pill. (And then going on an elaborate sci-fi adventure.) In *Shining City*, as in the real world, the path leading to who you are is not always laid out before you.

Even large, life-changing decisions do not always provide the whole answer. At the start of *Shining City*, Ian has left the priesthood to become a therapist; however, this drastic change in his career and faith is not the end of his journey. As he tells Neasa:

*I had to make that big decision— and it was a huge thing for me—to turn my back on the Church?!—that was a huge thing for me. [...] But... the fucking huge mistake I made was thinking that that was the end of the journey for me—and it wasn’t.*

**How much choice do you think you are presented with in your own life?**

Do you feel as though you can select your career, education, sexuality, gender and/or personal relationships? Or are some parts of your journey encouraged/forced upon you? If so, is this always a bad thing? Why or why not? Where do you draw the line between what people want or expect from you and what you want for yourself?

For more information and activities on navigating your post-high school path visit our Knowledge Nucleus online!

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**Life After High School**

If you decide not to go to college—or just want more time to think about your future—there are many alternatives! This list is edited from “Taking Time Off After High School: You Have a High School Diploma—Now What?” by the College Board (www.collegeboard.com) and “Next Step After High School? Some Alternatives to College” by Dr. Randall S. Hansen (www.quintcareers.com).

**Defer Admission**

If you do take time off, it doesn't mean you shouldn't apply to college while in high school. If you get accepted, you can ask for a deferred admission.

**Learn a Trade**

If you have an interest in a particular trade, such as technology or construction, seek out jobs that will not only give you valuable experience but guide you toward advancement by helping you with the certifications or licenses you need to succeed in a career within that industry.

**Volunteer**

Gain skills and experience volunteering at a local hospital, tutoring, coaching a sport, offering to moderate your church youth group, or performing other service. Nationally, Americorps and the Student Conservation Association have hundreds of programs.

**Travel Abroad**

If all you can think about is getting out of your town and exploring another part of the world, then traveling may be for you. It's a great way to experience other cultures, gain valuable life experience and learn more about who you are.

**Ease into College Life**

Think about starting with a couple of classes at your community college, where courses are cheaper and admission much easier. You can also follow a certification track or advance toward your associate's degree. Credits often transfer to 4-year colleges, if you decide to attend at a later date.

**Join the Military**

Joining the military offers you a chance to serve your country, make a career in the service and/or earn money toward a future college education.

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"To get through the hardest journey we need take only one step at a time; but we must keep on stepping." - Chinese proverb

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**Down the rabbit hole Where does your journey lead?**

"In *The Matrix*, Neo discovers the truth about who he is by selecting a red or blue pill. (And then going on an elaborate sci-fi adventure.) In *Shining City*, as in the real world, the path leading to who you are is not always laid out before you."

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When Ian pays a male escort to visit him in Shining City, it’s the first time he’s ever been with another man in his life. He’s in his forties. However, today many individuals are experiencing same sex sexual experiences far earlier than this, many before they reach high school.

**People may be exploring their sexual orientation and coming out at earlier ages today because more Americans consider homosexuality acceptable.** Gallup polls show that in 2006, 54% of Americans found homosexuality acceptable, compared with 38% in 1992. Among 18-29 year olds the numbers are even higher: 62% believe homosexuality is acceptable. Additionally, gay-straight alliances —once prevalent only in colleges—are now growing in numbers in high schools across the country. From the mid-1990s to today, the number of such organizations has grown from several dozen to over 3,200.¹

The average age people “come out” has also changed. According to a new four-year study of LGBTQ youths the average age a teenager now comes out is 13.² In the 1970s, it was 21.³

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You may be in an abusive relationship if any of these warning signs sound familiar:

- S/he acts differently when you are alone than when you are with other people.
- S/he isolates you from your friends or only wants the two of you to hang out with his/her friends.
- S/he does not take responsibility for his/her actions and/or twists the truth to make you feel you are to blame.
- You sometimes think, What's wrong with me? I shouldn't feel so bad.
- When s/he takes the opposite view from you on an issue, his/her opinion isn't stated as "I think," but as if you're wrong and s/he is right.
- S/he makes fun of you in front of other people, or does nothing when his/her friends insult you.
- You have communication problems: what s/he thinks you said and what you heard him/her say.
- When you feel hurt and try to talk, the issues never get resolved. S/he might refuse to discuss your upset feelings, claim s/he has no idea what you're talking about, or threaten to hurt him/herself for being such a bad person to you.

The physical violence and swearing within this confession are red flags for an abusive relationship. However, signs of abuse are not always clear—especially when the abuse is not explicitly physical. The biggest thing to remember is that when something doesn't feel right, it isn't.

Signs of Emotional and Verbal Abuse

Adapted from "Teens in Abusive Relationships" by the Teen Unit of the Brooklyn Alliance (www.momsandkids.org), "Abusive Relationships" reviewed by Dr. Michelle New for TeensHealth (www.kidshealth.org) and The Verbally Abusive Relationship by Patricia Evans.

Think About It: Defining Abusive Relationships

What does violence in a relationship look like to you? How can you tell when a relationship has become abusive? Where do you draw the line? What might be some of the reasons people stay in abusive relationships?

Coping with an Abusive Relationship

1. Admit to yourself that abuse is occurring.
2. Make sure you are safe—if you need to immediately leave the relationship, do so.
3. Tell someone about the abuse and make a plan.
4. If you have been assaulted physically or sexually, consider pressing charges.
5. Know your needs are important and deserve to be met! Seek help from parents, friends, crisis hotlines, counselors and anyone else who can help you fulfill those needs.
Happily Ever After
Romantic Idealism vs. Reality

Activity
Picture Perfect

What is a “perfect” relationship? What are the ideal traits you’re looking for in a romantic partner? List them below—and be as extravagant as you want. Think of your ultimate fantasy, whether it’s marrying a pro football player, building a house worthy of MTV’s “Cribs,” or simply someone who tells you 20 times a day how much s/he loves you and is always right there supporting you. Who do you envision as your ideal partner in life?

[Blank lines]

Now look back at the list you’ve made. How many of these things do you really need? Which are so important that you would not consider a relationship without them? Which are your “happily ever after”?

While none of our lives will end up “perfect,” it’s all right—even necessary—to know what you deserve in a romantic relationship. Don’t sell yourself short!

It’s a term that used to apply to fairy tales only—but today, “happily ever after” is everywhere from movies to video games to TV commercials. It’s smiling couples with sparkling white teeth letting us know that their lives together are nothing less than perfect. It’s Spiderman saving the city with just enough time left over to propose to Mary-Jane. It’s people getting what they want and who they want—exactly who they want.

Of course, in the real world, things don’t always end up perfect. We grow up with all sorts of expectations that aren’t met. As John tells Ian in Shining City:

You know, when you’re young. And you’re told about… what to expect I suppose. It is kind of happy ever after. But it’s… you know, it’s weird to accept what happiness really is, you know, or what it is… nothing is ever like anyone expects, is it, you know? Like, it’s not a fairy tale… I mean, it has to be just kind of ordinary, you know? A bit boring even, otherwise it’s probably not real, you know?

[...]we probably had it, you know? I mean when I think of it, really, we… we had it all, you know? But it’s, it’s hard to… accept… that this is it. You… you go… searching, not searching, I wasn’t going anywhere searching for anything, but, I think I was always slightly… waiting… you know?

Think About It:
“What Happiness Really Is”

Have you been told what to expect in a relationship? If so, where do you get this information? John says relationships have to be “just kind of ordinary,” otherwise they’re probably not real. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Can any relationship be too good to be true?

John also says “it’s weird to accept what happiness really is” in a relationship. What do you think he means? Can you think of any small things that might go unnoticed in a relationship, but if noticed, could lead to happiness?
Read about the traditions, rituals and beliefs that the four cultures below hold about death. Then, in the spaces beneath each description, consider what you like and/or dislike about these traditions and what you’d like to add to them!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>West Africa</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>China</th>
<th>Ireland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Traditions, rituals and beliefs about death</strong></td>
<td>West African cultures believe strongly in the connection between the spirits of the departed and the world of the living. Through offerings, prayers, and songs, the living attempt to interact with their deceased ancestors. These rituals often include elaborate masks and costumes, as well as sacred sculptures that are said to invoke the spirits of the dead.¹</td>
<td>In Mexico, Nov. 1 is known as Dia De Los Muertos or “Day of the Dead.” On this day families create alters beside the graves of loved ones who have passed on. These alters often include photos of the deceased and a few of their favorite things, including their favorite foods! Often calaveras (skeletons dressed as the deceased) are created as toys, as a lighthearted way of remembering the dead.²</td>
<td>The Chinese festival of Yue Lan or “Hungry Ghost Festival” is a month long period when spirits are said to roam the earth not only in search of food, but also entertainment. In some parts of Hong Kong believers build roadside fires to guide spirits on their journey while others stage elaborate processions in order to provide the spirits with the entertainment they seek.³</td>
<td>In Ireland, when a family member dies there is a portion of the wake set aside for a tradition known as “keening.” Keening refers to loud wailing or audible moaning to express the sorrow felt for the loss of the deceased. Another legend tells of a spirit known as the “Banshee,” a wailing ghost whose cries forewarn the death of someone nearby.⁴</td>
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</tbody>
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| What do you like about this tradition? What do you dislike? What would you add? | | | | |

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Critical Thinking

Other questions to consider

1. Are certain groups of people less willing or able to access therapy than others? Why or why not? How does your community and/or family feel about counseling? Do stigmas about therapy still exist? If so, for whom? How can we put an end to such stigmas?

2. Do you think forming online relationships is an effective way to cope with social isolation? What about a text-messaging relationship, like the one John forms with Vivien? Why or why not? Can these types of relationships provide adequate support?

3. Concerning education, relationships, spirituality, professional and/or trade skills what are some of your goals? Why are these goals important to you right now? Who are the people or what are the devices you will use for support?

4. Have you ever been or known someone who was/is in an abusive relationship? What made it abusive? Did you or that person report it? Can you think of some reasons why someone might stay in an abusive relationship?
5. If, as studies indicate, most young people in this country consider same sex relationships acceptable, why do you think there are such high instances of verbal and physical abuse against LGBTQ students? Does peer pressure factor into this? If so, how?

6. Besides TV talk shows, the radio and internet chat rooms, where else do people vent their feelings publicly? Can you think of a musical artist who does this? What are the differences or similarities between public venting and professional counseling?

7. Is it necessary to have a romantic partner to live “happily ever after”? Why or why not? What can you do to fulfill your own needs? How can you ensure that your life is just the way you want it without relying on external needs or other people?

8. What do you think about ghosts, spirits, and the supernatural? Do you think spirits exist? Have you or someone you know ever seen, heard or experienced a ghost? Describe the experience. What do you think happens after we die?
After you have seen the show and discussed your responses in the classroom, it’s time to let us know what you thought! Your response letter plays an important role at Goodman Theatre. All of the letters we receive are forwarded to our artists, and you may get a response!

Pick one of the artists involved with *Shining City* whose work was particularly memorable to you—an actor, designer or the director—and write that artist a letter describing your experience at the show and your feedback about his or her work. Be honest and ask any questions that are on your mind.

Your teacher will send us your letter, and we’ll forward it on to that artist!

**Important information to include:**

- Your name, age and grade
- Your teacher’s name, school and the school’s address

*Including these things will make it easier for our artists to respond!*

Send your letters to:

**Education and Community Programs**

**Goodman Theatre**

170 North Dearborn Street

Chicago, IL 60601

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**Here are two great student letters we received in response to *Passion Play: a cycle in three parts***:

Dear Ms. Noonan, (*Village Idiot and Violet*)

The *Passion Play* was one of the most fascinating, and brilliant plays I’ve ever attended in my life. It was full of action and drama that allowed me as an audience member to engage myself within the play and become one with the characters. The character that I was most intrigued by was the village idiot played by Polly Noonan. In my opinion the village idiot had the biggest role and really took a lot of courage and focus in not only one’s self but also the character in order to bring the character to life.

I was able to develop not only a very strong claim but also gather a very powerful message from the *Passion Play*. The claim is that the passions you have within your life inevitably shape your religious beliefs. If you believe in pre-marital sex and feel that abortions should be legal chances are that your religious beliefs will be branched far away from the views of Christianity. Pontius Pilate is a good example of this claim. Pontius believed in killing and gutting the bellies of fish and he also believe din pre-marital sex. He felt as though he needed nothing or no one to help him find what he believed in religiously. He killed fish because he feels as though fish are Christ leading him into the direction of Christian views.[...]

The village idiot in this play seems to be the character that everyone is afraid of hearing out because she speaks the truth that no one is ready to hear. She carries along with her this jack in the box that seems to talk to her and almost gives her direction on how she should properly live her life. This jack in the box to me represents religion because before taking even the slightest step forward the village idiot consults with the jack in the box for direction. The village idiot was the most cunning and cultivating character throughout the *Passion*. [...]

Overall this was a great play. The cast really worked hard on bringing the characters to life and pulling the audience in along for the journey throughout the *Passion Play*.

A student from North Lawndale College Prep

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Dear Allen Moyer, (*Set Designer*)

I must say, when I walked into Goodman Theatre I was very surprised by the set. Most of the theatres I have been to had elaborate sets, with detailed props and complicated environments. However, upon seeing the simple design on the stage, I became very curious as to how the show would go, concerning the set. I must say, my doubts were very short-lived.

I really loved the way the simple design worked with the play. The actors were able to interact with it easily and efficiently. For instance, in Act 1, there was a lot of running and jumping around, and I think if it weren't for the design this would not have been possible.

Despite the fact that I enjoyed the set’s initial design, I also liked when it started to become more and more elaborate without becoming tacky. Sometimes a show has way too many things in one scene that it confuses and distracts the audience, and I liked how you avoided that.

One thing I wasn’t sure about was that period after Act 2 when a lot of the actual walls of the theatre were visible. I was wondering if this was intentional, and what kind of effect you were hoping for in doing this if it was.

My favorite aspect of the set was the way it worked with the parallelism of the play. A lot of situations and scenes repeated throughout the play, and I thought it was interesting how the facets of each play (like the repeated scene of the actors and director rehearsing for a show) were shown in a unique way each time.

In short, the play’s amazing set greatly contributed to its success, and it could not have worked out so smoothly without your deeply beneficial design.

A student from Whitney Young H.S.
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