

The Goodman Theatre
Student Subscription Series
2005-2006 Season

Student Guide

A Life in the Theatre

By David Mamet

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Robert Falls

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NOTE:

In this study guide, the spelling *theater* refers to the art form, and *theatre* refers to the physical space in which performances happen. Direct quotations use the spelling of the author.

*Exploring
the
Production*

DAVID MAMET:

THE BEGINNING

David Alan Mamet was born in the Chicago suburb Flossmoor, Illinois, in November of 1947. He participated in his high school's theater program, and he spent evenings waiting tables at Second City or working backstage at Hull House Theatre. He attended Goddard College in Vermont, and he spent his third year of college studying acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York City under Sanford Meisner. During this time he began writing plays and acting in professional theaters while on his summer breaks.

1947-
1970

ACTIVITY

David Mamet began his life and his career in Chicago. As you learn more about him, think about how his plays and other work reflect his (and your) hometown. Mamet was in high school from 1961 to 1965. Do you have any family members who were living in Chicago at that time? Ask them what the city was like for teenagers in the '60s.



THINK ABOUT IT

Early in his career, David Mamet supplemented his income by working as a cab driver, an office manager, and a waiter. Have you heard of any other artists who struggled early in their careers, but went on to become famous and successful?

THE STARVING ARTIST YEARS

After college he returned to Chicago, where he drove a cab and worked as an office manager until he was offered a teaching position at Marlboro College in Vermont. He and his students formed the St. Nicholas Theatre Company; two years later they returned to Chicago where two of his early plays were produced. Mamet took odd jobs working in restaurants and telemarketing, and tried to work in theaters as often as possible. When one of his plays, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago*, was successfully staged in 1974, the St. Nicholas Company changed its name to the St Nicholas Players, reorganized, and began producing work again. In the next decade, David Mamet would write some of the most celebrated American plays of the Twentieth Century.

1970-
1980

HIS LIFE IN THE THEATRE

1980-
Today

SUCCESS

Beginning in 1975 with the Goodman Theatre's production of *American Buffalo*, David Mamet's work has garnered attention, admiration, and acclaim. In 1977, after moving to New York, Mamet saw his work produced on Broadway and in London's West End Theatre District. He also explored the world of film, and in 1980 began writing screenplays. In 1984 David Mamet was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Glengarry Glen Ross*. The award established Mamet as one of the foremost voices in contemporary American Theater. From a shed behind his farmhouse in Vermont, he continues to write plays, screenplays, fiction, and essays. He occasionally directs films and teaches classes on theatrical performance and production.

Plays

Romance (2005)
Boston Marriage (1999)
The Old Neighborhood (1998)
The Cryptogram (1995)
A Life with No Joy in It, and Other Plays and Pieces (1994)
Oleanna (1991)
Speed-the-Plow (1988)
Where Were You When It Went Down? (1988)
The Poet and the Rent (1986)
The Revenge of Space Pandas or Binky Rudich and the Two Speed-Clock (1986)
The Frog Prince (1988)
Vint (1985)
The Shawl (1985)
Prairie du Chien (1985)
Vermont Sketches (1984)
Glengarry Glen Ross (1983)
4 A.M. (1983)
The Dog (1983)
Film Crew (1983)
The Disappearance of the Jews (1983)
Edmond (1981)
Donny March (1979)
A Sermon (1979)
Shoeshine (1979)
The Sanctity of Marriage (1978)
Mr. Happiness (1977)
The Water Engine: An American Fable (1977)
The Woods (1977)
A Life in the Theater (1977)
All Men are Whores (1977)
Dark Pony (1977)
Reunion (1977)
American Buffalo (1975)
Sexual Perversity in Chicago (1974)
Duck Variations (1972)
Lakeboat (1970)
Camel (1968)

Activity

*Many of David Mamet's stage plays have been adapted for the big screen. As you read *A Life in the Theatre*, try to imagine it as a movie. What kinds of changes would have to be made to the script? What do you think are the challenges of adapting a play or a book into a movie?*

THINK ABOUT IT

David Mamet has also written four works of fiction and ten non-fiction books; fifty-six works in total! AND he wrote many of his pieces while working day jobs elsewhere. Do you think his success is related to his perseverance?

Screenplays

Edmond (2005)
Spartan (2004)
Hannibal (2001)
Heist (2001)
State and Main (2000)
The Winslow Boy (1999)
Ronin (1996)
The Edge (1998)
The Spanish Prisoner (1997)
Wag the Dog (1997)
American Buffalo (1996)
Oleanna (1994)
Glengarry Glen Ross (1992)
Hoffa (1992)
We're No Angels (1989)
Things Change (1988)
House of Games (1987)
The Untouchables (1987)
The Verdict (1982)
The Postman Always Rings Twice (1981)

ROBERT FALLS: DIRECTING ARTISTICALLY SINCE 1977

Robert Falls's successful career in theater can be attributed both to his extraordinary talent and his exceptional timing. He grew up in Southern Illinois and attended the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. When he was a junior in college, he directed a play called *Moonchildren*, which was remounted in a professional Chicago theater the following year. During the late 1970s, the Chicago theater scene exploded; innovative young artists were forming their own companies, exciting and experimental new work (some of it written by David Mamet) was being produced, and Robert Falls arrived just in time. He was appointed Artistic Director at Wisdom Bridge Theatre in 1977 soon after graduating from college. During his ten years at Wisdom Bridge, Mr. Falls helped the company make a number of professional advances, including the implementation of a fundraising campaign and the addition of a Managing Director and a Board of Trustees. In 1986, he was named Artistic Director of the Goodman Theatre, where he introduced the concept of a director-driven theatre in which a core group of directors would work together season after season. He has directed many Jeff Award-winning productions, the Tony Award-winning revival of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in 1999, and the Tony Award-winning revival of *A Long Day's Journey into Night* in 2003. In 2000, Mr. Falls directed Elton John's Broadway musical *Aida*, which is currently being performed worldwide. Next year, he will celebrate his twentieth season at the Goodman.

So what does an Artistic Director do?

He or she has a lot of responsibilities, including:

1. selecting plays the theater will produce in a given season
2. inviting artists to join the theater company
3. conducting research and keeping up with artistic trends
4. providing creative guidance to marketing and outreach campaigns
5. acting as the public face of the theater at formal events
6. meeting with sponsors, donors, and patrons to help with fundraising efforts
7. directing plays throughout the season

Most importantly, the Artistic Director encourages the staff of the theater to focus on the company's stated goals. There are over 200 theaters in Chicago, and each was formed with a particular purpose. Can you think of any specific reason a group of artists might decide to form their own company? What might their goals include?

Production Numbers

29,600: approximate number of people who will see *A Life in the Theatre* at the Goodman Theatre

168: APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF HOURS SPENT IN REHEARSAL

At least **60** people worked behind the scenes on this production.

28 days of rehearsal before the first preview performance

26 costumes required for each actor

12 hours of costume fittings

10 preview performances

6: AVERAGE HOURS PER DAY SPENT IN REHEARSAL

4 designers working on the production

2 actors

1 day off per week

Activity:

1. The set designer for this production is Mark Wendland. Google him, take a look at some of his work and try to predict what his set will look like for *A Life in the Theatre*.
2. As you read the play, think about all of the different costumes that will be required. Try to imagine how each costume will look. Now try to think about how costume changes will happen in the very short breaks between scenes. Can you think of any creative ways to meet this challenge?

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What do you have in common with David Mamet?
2. List a few jobs David Mamet had before he was able to make a living as a playwright. Apart from the money he earned, how do you think these jobs might have been beneficial to him as a writer?
3. Think about Robert Falls's main responsibility as Artistic Director. List a few jobs outside the theater that have a similar objective.
4. Based on what you've learned about the people involved in making this production happen, which design elements do you expect will be most noteworthy?

*Exploring
the
Text*

VOCABULARY

ACTIVITY: MAKE A DEPOSIT IN YOUR WORD BANK

- Find each of the following words in the play, and make a note of the page number where you found each word.
- Use context clues (the word's placement in a sentence) to form a guess about what it means. Write down your guess.
- Look the word up in the dictionary and write its definition below your own. Keep track of the words you defined correctly by yourself.
- Try to find a way to use each word in conversation; practice with a partner in your class.

abutting	detract	indice	phenomena
acute	discerning	justify	perposterous
aesthetic	emanates	leitmotif	presumption
antecedents	emphatically	lunatics	raspy
appetite	enviable	marooned	receptive
aspirations	ephemeris	miffed	retractor
attentive	etiquette	modesty	sable
barricades	famished	mutual	scorching
breach	fetish	negotiable	slanders
capitalizes	fulfilled	neurotic	splayed
cenotaph	germinate	optimum	stilted
component	gratified	organically	succor
dalliance	humanism	parry	vicious
descant	humidor	perquisite	vital

CREATING A CHARACTER (OR NOT)

Actors don't need to put on some extraneous character. Their character exists in the words. The best actors . . . Are not pretending to be a character; they're saying the words and letting the story tell itself . . . Looking for a "character" to imitate may be fun for the actor, but it's less fun for the audience. When you listen to Glenn Gould playing Bach, you don't say what great technique he has. You say how great Bach's music sounds. It's the same thing with acting.

—David Mamet, 1997 interview, www.salon.com

Many actors learn that the most important thing he or she can do is to create a character: develop a backstory for the character, search for similarities between oneself and one's character, and begin to internalize the character's emotional responses. As you can see from the quotation above, David Mamet does not believe it is an actor's job to create a character; Mamet believes that playwrights are responsible for creation, and actors are responsible for delivery. Use the chart below to help track the process by which the characters Robert and John might have been created. For each section try to think about Robert and John individually, consider the dynamics of their relationship, and the world that they inhabit.

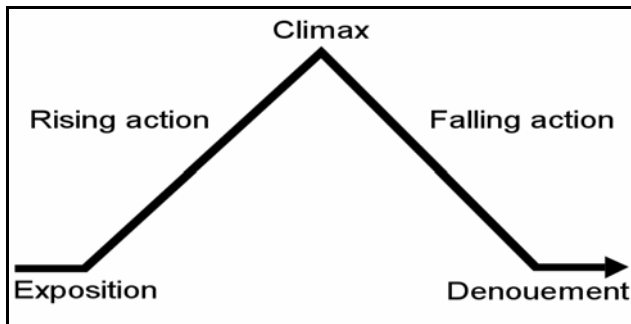
What you READ:	What you THINK:	What you SEE:
Write down any specific details that are included in the text of the play. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Write down any thoughts you had about the characters, their relationship, and their world that are not explicitly discussed in the text. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Write down any details you noticed in the performance that were not explicitly derived from David Mamet's script. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Dramatic Structure:

“You start from the beginning, go through the middle, and wind up at the end.”

—Robert, *A Life in the Theatre*, scene 5

Gustav Freytag's Pyramid



Gustav Freytag (1816-95) was a German author and playwright who developed this simple pyramid as a means of analyzing works of fiction and drama. According to Freytag the five elements of any dramatic work are:

- Exposition**—the background information you need to understand the story
- Rising Action**—when things become more complicated, conflict builds and builds until . . .
- Climax**—the point in the play with the most dramatic tension; a major turning point in the action
- Falling action**—when the conflict of the play begins to move toward resolution
- Denouement**—(from French meaning “to untie”) the conclusion, or outcome, of the play

ACTIVITY: According to Freytag—and to Robert in the quotation above—every play should have a distinct beginning, middle, and end. Try to create a pyramid for your favorite book, movie, or TV show. Now try to make one for *A Life in the Theatre*. Do you think this play follows traditional rules for dramatic structure? Why or why not?

Did you know?

Some critics and scholars think Mamet writes plays comprised of short scenes and lots of blackouts because he was influenced by the structure of the sketch comedy at Second City.

SCENE BREAKDOWN—by location

Backstage scenes	1	2	4	5	6	7	8	10	12	13	14	15	17	19	20	21	22	23	25	26
Onstage scenes		3						9	11				16	18					24	



THINK ABOUT IT

- Why do you think Mamet includes the “onstage” scenes? Why is important to see John and Robert as actors at work?
- **Juxtaposition** means the relative placement of two or more things. What do you think about the juxtaposition of the scenes in *A Life in the Theatre*? For example, does it mean something that the first and last onstage scenes involve life and death situations?

ACTIVITY:

As you think about each scene and it's placement within the play, try to come up with a creative title for each one.

MAMETSPEAK:

WHAT MAKES MAMET'S DIALOGUE FAMOUS?

One of David Mamet's most important contributions to Twentieth Century American Theater is the unique way that his characters speak. In fact, theater scholars and artists use the term "MAMETSPEAK" to describe his distinctive dialogue. Take a look at these three elements of Mametspeak, and try to find other examples of each in *A Life in the Theatre*. Then, on your own, try to identify some other techniques that make Mamet's writing stand out.

Mametspeak is written to be performed. You should practice reading scenes out loud to understand the eccentricities and the flow of the dialogue. Scene 19 of *A Life in the Theatre* is an especially good one to practice.

Again and Again and Again

Mamet uses repetition over and over and over and over. Often characters repeat the same word or phrase to emphasize its importance; in Mamet's scripts, repetition generally exposes something about the character who is speaking or the power dynamic between characters in the scene. It also impacts the rhythm and pace of the play.

The Ellipsis (. . .) is a punctuation mark indicating a pause, an omission of words, or a speaker trailing off. Try to find three different examples of ellipses in *A Life in the Theatre*. How and why does Mamet use ellipses in each of these scenes? Now read each of your examples out loud, does the ellipsis change the way that you read the lines?

Fragments are . . . What I mean is . . . A lot of Mamet's; sentences don't . . .

Often Mamet's characters need a few tries to express themselves completely. What effect does this have on conversations between John and Robert? Think about your own manner of speech; are your sentences any more or less complete than Mamet's? The following example from Scene 1 is full of fragments, how would you deliver the line?

Robert: You have a job to do. You do it by your lights, you bring your expertise to bear, your sense of rightness . . . fellow feelings . . . etiquette . . . professional procedure . . . there are tools one brings to bear . . . procedure.

ACTIVITY

Take a few minutes to listen carefully to a conversation in which you are not participating (in a restaurant or on the train, for example) Try to write down what they say word for word. What are the differences and similarities between the dialogue you overheard and Mamet's? Take the activity one step further by rewriting the conversation in MAMETSPEAK.

THINK ABOUT IT:

All of these elements are used primarily to establish a particular rhythm. What are some other types of performance in which rhythm is this important?



A METRONOME is a device that musicians use to keep exact rhythms by a regularly repeated ticking sound. The metronome can be set to tick at any interval, which allows musicians to achieve a very specific tempo. Early in his career, David Mamet brought a metronome with him to rehearsals to make sure that actors understood the exact rhythms he had intended.



STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. According to David Mamet, who is responsible for creating a character? Do you agree with him? Why or why not?
2. What makes the dialogue in David Mamet's plays distinctive?
3. List the five elements of Freytag's Pyramid. Define each element in your own words.
4. What is juxtaposition? How does it relate to *A Life in the Theatre*?

*Exploring
the
Context*

HOW THEATER HAPPENS: a basic production timeline

STEP 1: SOMEBODY WRITES A PLAY.
 Nearly every play produced started out this way: one man or woman writing. Sometimes there are thousands of years in between this step and the next one. Sometimes the playwright is rushing to fine tune a scene before the final dress rehearsal.

Step 2: Somebody decides to produce it.
 Once a play is written, someone needs to organize the artists and the money to put it in front of an audience. Often a theater company chooses all of the plays it will produce in a season (which is roughly the same as a school year) as part of a larger campaign to reach new audiences or as part of a strategy to best utilize the talent and materials of its members. Other times an artist will decide that he or she would like to work on a specific play and form a company to make that happen.

STEP 3: Who's running the show?
 When a director becomes attached to a particular play, he or she spends a lot of time doing research, creating a concept for the designers, and thinking about the direction he or she will give the actors. Usually a director selects the designers with whom he or she will work, and the design process (from concept to completion) can take up to a full year.




STEP 5 A: REHEARSALS
 Rehearsals give the members of the cast a chance to work with the director on character development, line delivery, and blocking (how they will move on stage). Most productions are in rehearsal anywhere from one to two months.

STEP 4 A: Auditions
 Auditions are the process by which a director chooses the actors he or she wants in the play. (They happen a bit like the first few episodes of *American Idol*.) The actors who are selected are called the cast. Auditions are usually the last major step before rehearsals begin.

STEP 4 B: Production Meetings
 In production meetings, the design team meets with the director to make sure that their designs work both practically and artistically.

STEP 6 A: OFF BOOK
 Actors are "off book" when they have all of their lines memorized. Each actor has a different system of memorizing, so it takes each a different length of time, but they should be off book at least 3 weeks before opening night.

STEP 7: TECH/DRESS REHEARSAL
 This is the final set of rehearsals before the play opens to audiences, so it's the last chance to make changes and get things right.




STEP 6 B: FITTINGS & ADJUSTMENTS
 Costumes, set pieces, and lights are adjusted for practicality and safety.

STEP 5 B: CONSTRUCTION
 Sets and costumes are built or sewn. Should be complete at least 2 weeks before opening.

There is one constant in the theater: actors will never turn down free food. Everything else changes with each season, each production, each performance. With that in mind, the following flowchart should give you a basic idea of the order in which things usually happen to get a play from the script to the stage. Remember that there are exceptions to every rule, that each company and each artist works differently, and that everyone (actors, designers, and crew) work very hard. In the chart below, the division after step three shows the different paths that various theater professionals take to get to opening night. While the actors are rehearsing, many people are at work backstage to make sure the show looks and sounds great.



“An actor’s life for me.”

—Robert, *A Life in the Theatre*, scene 26

My closest friends, my intimate companions, have always been actors. My beloved wife is an actor. My extended family consists of actors I have grown up with. I have been, for many years, part of various theatre companies, any one of which in its healthy state more nearly resembles a perfect community than any other group I have encountered.

I wanted to be an actor, but it seemed that my affections did not that way tend. I learned to write and direct so that I could stay in the theatre, and be with that company of people. . . .

Acting is not a genteel profession. Actors used to be buried at a crossroads with a stake through the heart. Those people’s performances so trouble the onlookers that they feared their ghosts. An awesome compliment.

Those players moved the audience not such that they were admitted to a graduate school, or received a complimentary review, but such that the audience feared for their soul. Now that seems to me something to aim for.

—David Mamet, *True and False*, 1999

Think about it:

In the quotation on the left, David Mamet describes the theater companies in which he has been involved as “communities” and his fellow theater artists as an “extended family”. In the play, Robert has a similar view of the professional bonds that exist between actors. Can you think of other careers that foster close bonds between co-workers? What might those professions have in common with the theater? Do you think that you would like to work in an environment where co-workers are so close?

Activity

An actor’s life is not all red carpets and expensive shoes. In fact most actors never get to ride in limousines. Working actors have A LOT to do in between rehearsals, and most of it is related to finding the next job. Select one of the following tasks and do a little research, then share what you’ve learned with the class.

Monologues are single-character selections from plays that actors use to audition. Most theatres ask to see one classical and one contemporary monologue. There are plenty of books and websites for actors regarding proper auditioning techniques. Find out how long a monologue should be and what a casting director is looking for, then try to find a monologue of your own to present to the class.

Headshots are special photos that actors submit with their resumes when they audition for a play. Many local photographers specialize in taking headshots. Figure out what a headshot is supposed to look like and how much money an actor just getting started would spend on headshots. If you have access to a camera try to take some headshots of your friends and family; make sure to have someone take a headshot of you!

Agents are responsible for getting their clients (actors) jobs. Figure out what specifically agents do, how difficult it is to get an agent, and how much the average agent gets paid. Then decide whether or not you would want an agent if you were an actor. Let your classmates know what you decided and why.

Look it up

Today celebrity actors are some of the wealthiest and most admired people in our society, but attitudes towards actors have changed drastically throughout history.

Try to find out what people thought about actors in the past, then write a paragraph that reflects how views have changed. Include your own opinion about an actor’s place in society.

Superstitions of the Theatre

“We don’t want any blood upon the stage.”

—Robert, *A Life in the Theatre*, scene 4

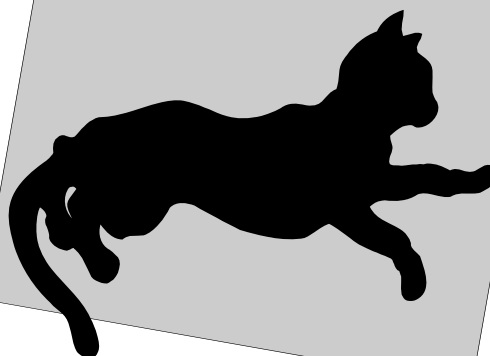
Life in the theatre is full of superstitions. Just as athletes have certain rituals to bring them luck on game-day, many theater artists are constantly preoccupied with a variety of habits that are said to guarantee a good performance. Some theatrical superstitions are carried over from everyday life (for example, it’s still bad luck to walk under a ladder), but many are particular to the world of the theatre. Here are a few of the most famous examples and some possible explanations for each. If you see blank spaces where the explanation should be, try to create a few possibilities, then do some research to find out what’s really behind these superstitions.

It’s bad luck to whistle inside a theatre, especially backstage. Superstition dictates that whistling can lead to the injury (or even the death) of someone working on the show. Google it to find out why.

Did you know?

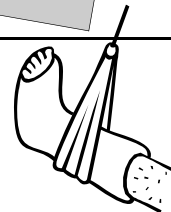
It’s bad luck to speak the final line of a play in rehearsal before opening night because no play can ever be complete without an audience.

Usually, it is bad luck to encounter a black cat, but in the theatre, black cats are considered good luck, as long as they don’t run across the stage during a performance. Any actor who kicks a cat is sure to have bad luck, onstage and off. The origin of this superstition is unknown.



Break a Leg!

This is the traditional way to wish an actor good luck before an audition or performance.



So why don’t we just say good luck?

1. Lots of superstitions are based on a belief in mischievous spirits, which might harm someone on whom good luck had been wished. Some people think that “break a leg” came from an attempt to trick these spirits into looking for trouble someplace else.
2. Some say “break a leg” is a pun expressing the wish that an actor be put in a cast.
3. In Shakespeare’s time “break” could also mean “bend”, so “break a leg” could mean that the speaker hopes the performance will be so good, the actor will have to bend or bow several times during the curtain call.

KNOCK ON WOOD!!!

1. Long ago people believed that the devil lived inside wood; the knocking sound kept him from hearing what you said.
2. There is an old Irish belief that one should knock on wood to thank the Leprechauns for his or her good fortune.

In most theatres, one light is always lit on stage even if there is no one in the building. This light is called the "ghost light". Why do you think theatres do this?

Even though they keep a light on all the time, theatres are always said to be "dark" and never "closed" on days without a performance. Why do you think that is?

Think about some situations when you might want to knock on wood. Which explanation do you think makes the most sense, considering the contexts in which this superstition is invoked? Can you find this expression in the play?

THE SCOTTISH PLAY

According to superstition, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is a notoriously unlucky play; so unlucky that most theater artists avoid even mentioning its name. Disasters that have befallen cast, crew, and audience members during various productions have led to the belief that "The Scottish Play" is cursed. If you don't believe in ghost stories, there's also this practical explanation: Theater companies who were in financial trouble might end their season with Shakespeare's blockbuster play to bring in more money. Thus a production of "The Scottish Play" could indicate that the theatre had already encountered some bad luck and might be in danger of closing. If someone accidentally says the "M" word inside a theatre, there are two possible remedies: he or she must either say "Angels and ministers of grace defend us" immediately or go outside, turn counterclockwise three times, and spit on the ground before asking politely to be allowed back inside.

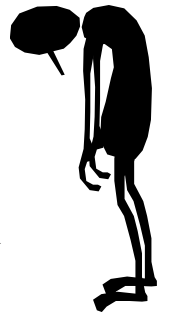
STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What do you think would be the best part of being an actor? What would be most difficult?
2. Think of all of the people who are involved in making a play happen. Which job do you think you might like best? Why? Which job would you have no interest in doing? Why?
3. Based on the flowchart in this section, how far in advance would you begin planning a production if you were a director? Have you ever been involved in a play before? If so, how much time was involved in that process?
4. After reading about theatrical superstitions, try to create your own superstition.

*Exploring
the
Social Issues*



“You can’t control what someone thinks of you.”



—Robert, *A Life in the Theatre*, scene 14

Or can you?

ACTIVITY

In Scene 14, Robert tells John that he cannot control other people’s perceptions of him. However, Robert certainly spends a lot of time trying to make people see him in a certain way. He worries about his weight and his clothes because he wants his appearance to impress others. And he talks so much because he wants John to think of him as an mentor, a successful actor, and a nice guy. Do you think that you can control what other people think of you? Think of some ways that you try to control other people’s impressions of you, then fill in the chart below.

Think About It

In Scene 5 Robert says, “Isn’t it strange . . . That people will spend time and money on their face and body . . . On smells, textures, and appearances . . . And yet are content to sound like shopgirls and sheep-herders. . . . To me, an ugly sound is an extension of an ugly soul.” Robert judges a person’s character based on the way that person speaks. Do you think anyone judges you on the way you talk? Do you form opinions about other people based on the way that they speak?

	How do you want this person to think of you?	Do you think he or she sees you this way now? If not, how do they see you?	What steps could you take to change his or her perception of you?
Parent			
Sibling			
Teacher			
Friends			
Your crush			
Older kids			
Person conducting job or college interview			

Mentorship

in Hip-Hop

Andre Young (better known as Dr. Dre) was born in LA in 1965. In the late 1980s he formed the group NWA with Ice Cube and Eazy-E. The controversial lyrical content of NWA's music attracted a lot of attention and public scrutiny. In 1992, he left the group and recorded his first solo album *The Chronic*, pioneering the gangsta rap genre and introducing the world to Snoop Dogg simultaneously. He began producing records for other artists and helped to launch the careers of many popular rappers, most notably Eminem in 1999. His label is called Aftermath. "I'm a very good motivator," he says of his success working with younger artists "I direct well."

Marshall Mathers (better known as Eminem) was born in Kansas City in 1972. He grew up near Detroit and began rapping as a teenager. He participated in freestyle battles, independently produced two albums, and struggled to find someone who would listen to a white rapper until he finally caught Dr Dre's attention in the late 1990s. In 1999 Dr. Dre produced Eminem's first studio album, The Slim Shady LP, the lyrical content of which sparked a huge controversy. Eminem now produces his own music in addition to the work he does behind the scenes for up-and-coming musicians, including 50 Cent. Eminem's label is Shady Records. Regarding his protégé 50 Cent, Eminem explains, "50 is to me what I was to Dre . . ."

Curtis Jackson (better known as 50 Cent) was born in Queens, NY in 1975. He was raised by his grandparents and began rapping as a teenager. He circulated a few mixtapes, and one of his songs became an underground hit. In 2000 he was shot 9 times; his music and his survival story caught Eminem's attention. In 2003 Shady Records and Aftermath released 50's debut album *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, which sold over ten million copies. His follow-up album, *The Massacre*, was released in 2005. Like his mentors Eminem and Dr. Dre, 50 has taken an interest in helping young artists get started, especially the other rappers in his G-Unit. "The only thing I'm scared of is not living up to the expectations of Dr. Dre and Eminem."

THINK ABOUT IT

In addition to being rappers, producers, actors, and fashion designers, many hip hop stars (like Dr. Dre) act as mentors for younger artists. Robert does much the same thing for John in *A Life in the Theatre*. Webster's defines **mentor** as a *trusted counselor or guide*. What is there to gain from such a relationship? How is it beneficial to the younger artists (or athletes or entrepreneurs)? In what ways might it be beneficial to the mentor? Is there anyone in your life who serves as your mentor? Is there anyone for whom you act as mentor?

Ageist Stereotypes:

“The flaws of youth are the perquisite of the young.”

—Robert, *A Life in the Theatre*, scene 23

List some stereotypes you think people apply to teenagers.

TALK ABOUT IT

Class discussion: In Scene 23, Robert speaks about “the flaws of youth.” Do you think there are any character flaws inherent in being young? Do you think that adults assume you will have specific flaws because you are young? Discuss with your classmates the stereotypes that you think people apply to teenagers. Are any of them accurate? Also try to think about assumptions you make about older people. Do you think you hold any prejudices about adults? What about the elderly? Are those stereotypes fair?

On your own: It might be hard to imagine, but everyone alive was a kid once. Do you know what your teachers, parents or other family members were like when they were your age? What kind of music did they listen to? What were their most embarrassing moments? What did they want to do when they finished high school? Have a conversation with an adult about what he or she was like as a kid. Try talking to them about the kind of adult you would like to be.

List some stereotypes you apply to older people.

Scarlett
Johansson

Born: 1984
Film debut:
North (1994)

Meryl
Streep

Born: 1949
Film debut:
Julia (1977)

Maggie
Smith

Born: 1934
Film debut: *No-
where to Go*
(1958)

ACTIVITY

Scarlett Johansson, Meryl Streep, and Maggie Smith have spent most of their lives acting, and each has played a variety of roles. Ms. Johansson started her career playing a little girl and is now often cast as a romantic lead. Do some research to find out what Meryl Streep and Maggie Smith are working on currently. How likely is it that either one of them will be cast as a romantic lead? Make a list of the types of characters that you think each actress could play. Do you think aging limits an actor’s choices of material? Think of a few actors who are older than 50. What kind of work are they doing now? Can you think of anyone in that age range who is still playing the same kind of roles in which he or she debuted?

STUDY GUIDE QUESTIONS

1. What is a mentor?

2. Define the word perception.

3. How do you think age affects the way a person is perceived?

4. Are there professions other than acting in which one's age changes the type of work he or she is able to do?

TEXT QUESTIONS

1. How many characters are there in the play?
2. Where does this play take place?
3. Mamet explains that the scenes can be divided into two types of scenes. What are these two types?
4. Where was this play first produced?
5. What is interesting about the set design described here?
6. What effect did it help create?

Scene 1:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. According to Robert, what scene was brilliant tonight?
3. How does John define the house?
4. Which scene did John enjoy?
5. What do parentheses indicate in this play?
6. Which third character is mentioned in this scene?
7. What can't Robert stand about this other character?
8. What can he live with?
9. How does Robert really feel about this other character?
10. What does she capitalize on?
11. Which scene was "fun" and "heaven"?
12. What are John's plans for the rest of the evening?
13. What are Robert's plans for the rest of the evening?
14. What does John have on his face?
15. What is the last moment that happens in this scene?
16. Define John and Robert's relationship based on this scene.
17. How is the style of writing in this play different from any other play you've read? How is it similar?

Scene 2:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What "object" is the center of this conversation?
3. What is the point of this scene?

Scene 3:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is the play being performed about?
3. Describe the dynamic between the two characters that John and Robert are playing on stage. Does it remind you of another relationship that exists in the play? If so, which one?

Scene 4:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What type of play did John and Robert just finish?
3. What is the point of conflict in this scene?
4. What are Robert and John actually doing while they are having their conversation?
5. Why does Robert make John knock on wood at the end of the scene?

TEXT QUESTIONS

Scene 5:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is Robert talking about at the very top of this scene?
3. According to Robert, what is “as important as physical beauty”?
4. According to Robert, what is “an extension of an ugly soul”?
5. Define John’s responses to Robert’s comments.
6. What does Robert compare “style” to?
7. What is the wondrous thing about theater according to Robert?
8. What is John concerned about while Robert is talking about all of this?

Scene 6:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. Based on John’s words, can you figure out who he is talking to?
3. What is an “outside life”?
4. Has the relationship between Robert and John changed since the last scene?

Scene 7:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What time of the day is it?
3. What is the point of this scene?

Scene 8:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What does the makeup table symbolize?
3. What was one of the first things that impressed Robert about John?
4. What favor does Robert ask John?
5. What does Robert mean by “do less”?
6. What is broken?
7. Who does John suggest getting for Robert?
8. What does John drop on the floor?

Scene 9:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What character does Robert play?
3. What does Robert offer John once he’s entered the room?
4. What is John’s character’s name?
5. Who is the father of Gillian’s baby?
6. What is the more civilized option that Robert suggests?

Scene 10:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. Who are “the leeches”?
3. Based on the dialogue, what can we conclude happened that made Robert so upset?

Scene 11:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. Based on the dialogue, define the type of play that Robert and John are performing in.
3. Define the dynamic between the two characters in the play.

TEXT QUESTIONS

Scene 12:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is Robert annoyed about?
3. What is John's response?

Scene 13:

1. What is the context of this scene?
2. What is Robert not going to do?
3. What does Robert keep doing as they read the script?
4. How does Robert's character refer to John's character in this script?

Scene 14:

1. What are Robert and John doing at the top of this scene?
2. What did John have that afternoon?
3. What are the two classes of phenomena that Robert talks about?
4. What is John focused on while Robert talks about these two classes of phenomena?

Scene 15:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. According to Robert, what would doing this play in rehearsal clothes do?

Scene 16:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What do the "people scream"?
3. Where is John during this scene?

Scene 17:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is John's response to Robert's monologue about the makeup table?
3. Are John's responses different here than earlier on in the play? If so, how?
4. According to Robert, what did John breach?
5. According to Robert, what can you do by "keeping your mouth shut"?
6. What is Robert's main message to John in this scene?
7. What is John's response to this?

Scene 18:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. Have we heard/seen this play before? If so, when?
3. According to John's character, why are they dying today?

Scene 19:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is the main problem going on in this scene?
3. When John tells Robert to "shut up", what is he trying to hear?
4. What does John end up doing?

Scene 20:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What do John and Robert talk about in this scene?

TEXT QUESTIONS

Scene 21:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is John doing?
3. What news does he get on the phone?
4. What does Robert want?

Scene 22:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. Who is Robert talking about?
3. Why is Robert upset?
4. What does Robert think of John's reviews?
5. How is John responding to Robert in this scene?

Scene 23:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is John doing?
3. How long has Robert been watching John?
4. According to Robert, what are the "perquisite of the young"?
5. What is hurtful?
6. What is Robert's opinion of life and theater?
7. Does Robert really leave when he says he is going to leave?
8. How does John make Robert feel?
9. What does John want Robert to stop doing?

Scene 24:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What are John and Robert wearing?
3. What kind of play is this?
4. What is the dynamic between the two characters in the play?
5. What is going on with Robert in this scene?
6. What does John end up doing?
7. What happens at the very end of the scene?

Scene 25:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What is wrong with Robert?
3. Where does John want to take Robert?
4. Is Robert's explanation of the cut true?
5. What does Robert keep saying that he is?

Scene 26:

1. Where does this scene take place?
2. What did Robert's father always want for him?
3. Is this scene similar to another scene in the play? If so, which one(s)? How is it similar?
4. What does John need to borrow from Robert?
5. What does Robert do once John has left?
6. Has John really left?
7. How is this section similar to a previous section in the play? How is it different?
8. Is Robert allowed to finish his speech?
9. What are the last words of the play?