

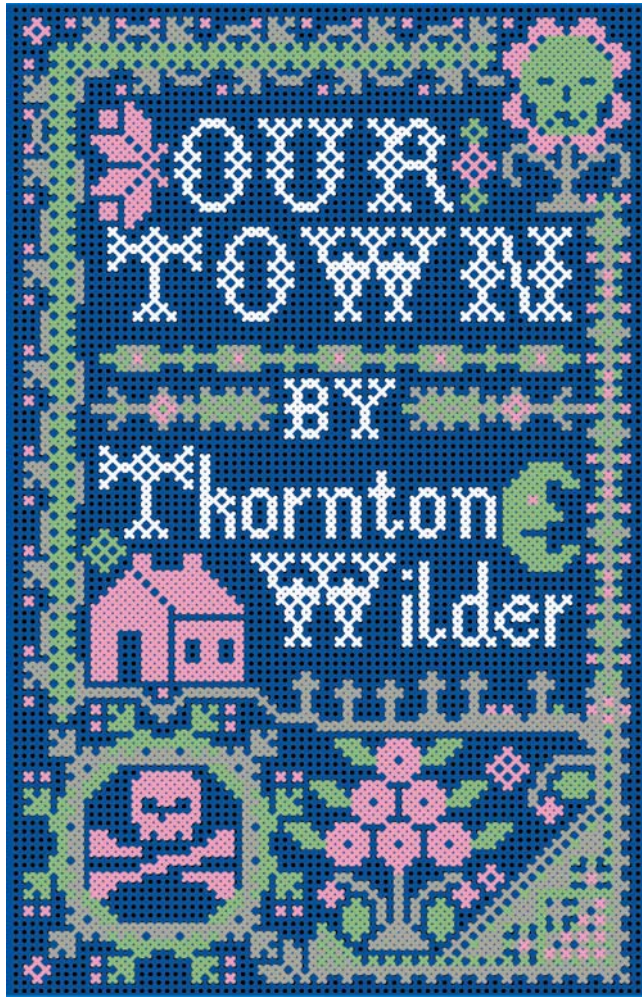


# Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company and Artists Repertory Theatre present

## OUR TOWN

By Thornton Wilder



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### PRE-PRODUCTION EXERCISES

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Education Resource compiled by Education manager **Naomi Edwards**, Education Coordinator **Toni Murphy**, Editor **Toni Murphy** Contributors **Michael Mitchell** and **Elizabeth Surbey**

#### KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

#### OUR TOWN

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2010

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### ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about)

### ABOUT STCED

[www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about](http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about)

### CREATIVE TEAM

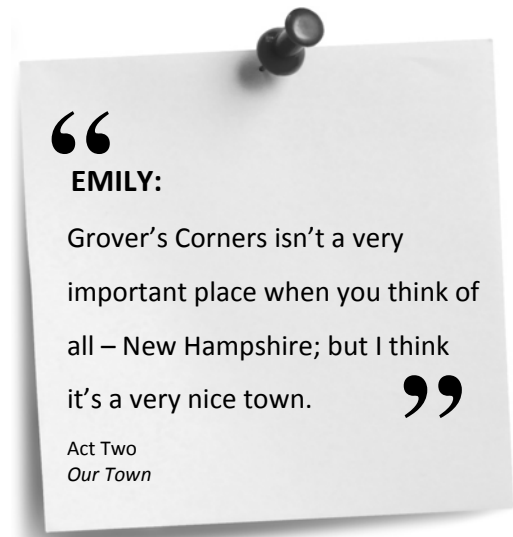
**Director** – Iain Sinclair

**Set Designer** – Pip Runciman

**Costume Designer** – Jennifer Irwin

**Lighting Designer** –

**Composer and Sound Designer** – Paul Charlier



### CAST

Nicholas Bakopoulos-

Anita Hegh

Christopher Stollery

Cooke

Russell Kiefel

Josh Quong Tart

Ashleigh Cummings

Michael Kilbane

Steve Toulmin

Maeve Dermody

Chris Pitman

Frank Whitten

Darren Gilshenan

Susan Prior

Robin Goldsworthy

Toni Scanlan

### THEMES

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The stages of life, the transience of human life, love and marriage, family, community, growing up, time, cycles, the appreciation of everyday pleasures and theatre

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**ACT ONE – The Daily Life**

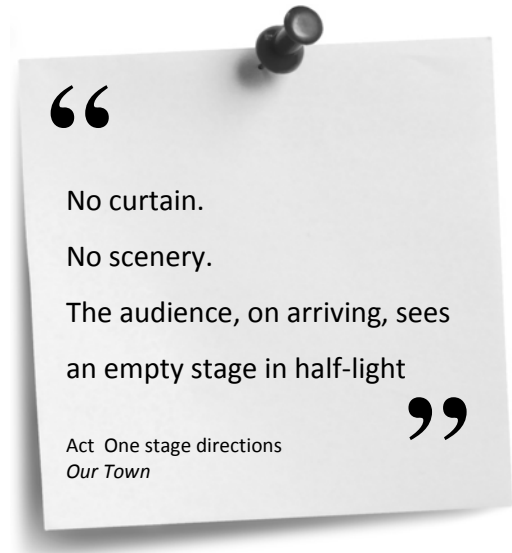
The audience arrives as the Stage Manager sets up the stage. The Stage Manager welcomes the audience to the fictional town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, early on a May morning in 1901. He introduces the play and is our narrator throughout.

The Stage Manager's guides the audience through a typical day in the life Grover's Corners in 1901. We meet the milkman, Howie Newsome and the paperboy, Joe Crowell making their delivery rounds and Dr. Gibbs returning from delivering a set of twins. We see Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb preparing their children, George and Rebecca Gibbs and Wally and Emily Webb, for school. Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb then meet in their gardens to gossip.

The Stage Manager interrupts the action to give more information about the town. He calls Professor Willard and then Mr. Webb (an editor) out onto the stage to tell the audience some more basic facts about Grover's Corners. Editor Webb then takes questions from "audience members" who are actually characters in the play seated in the audience.

The scene goes back to the town in the early afternoon when the children are coming home from school. George and Emily talk about school and we see the first inkling of their romantic affection for one another. The Stage Manager discusses a time capsule that will be placed in the foundation of a new bank building in town. He tells us that he wishes to put a copy of *Our Town* into this time capsule.

Now evening, a choir led by choirmaster Simon Stimson begins to sing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" as George and Emily talk to each other about homework through their open windows. Mrs. Webb, Mrs. Gibbs, and their gossipy friend Mrs. Soames return home from choir practice and chat about the choirmaster's alcoholism. George and his sister Rebecca sit at a window and Rebecca ponders the position of Grover's Corners within the vastness of the universe, which she believes is contained within "the Mind of God." Night has fallen on Grover's Corners, and the first act comes to an end.



## ACT TWO – Love and Marriage

Act II takes place three years later in 1904 on the George and Emily’s wedding day. George tries to visit his fiancée, but he is shooed away by Mr. and Mrs. Webb, who insist that it is bad luck for the groom to see the bride-to-be on the wedding day anytime before the ceremony. George is left alone with Mr. Webb and his future father-in-law discusses marriage and gives George advice on how to be a good husband.

The Stage Manager takes us back a year in a flashback to “how all this began”. George and Emily are on their way home from school at the end of their junior year. Emily tells George that his popularity has made him “conceited and stuck-up.” George, though hurt, thanks Emily for her honesty, but Emily becomes mortified by her own words and asks George to forget them. The two stop for ice-cream sodas and, over the course of their drink, admit their mutual affection. George decides to scrap his plan of attending agriculture school in favor of staying in Grover’s Corners with Emily.

We return to the day of the wedding. Both the bride and groom are nervous and have second thoughts, but their parents calm them down and the ceremony goes ahead as planned. The Stage Manager announces that it is time for intermission.

## ACT THREE – Death and Eternity

Act III takes place nine years later, in a cemetery on a hilltop overlooking the town. We discover Emily has died in childbirth and is about to be buried. The dead souls who already inhabit the cemetery (Mrs. Gibbs, Mrs. Soames, Wally Webb, and Simon Stimson) speak with a detached commentary on the action. Emily joins the dead, and they tell her she must forget her past life but she decides to go back and relive part of it.

With the aid of the Stage Manager, Emily steps into the past, revisiting the morning of her twelfth birthday. The day proceeds as usual, however as Emily participates, she also watches the scene as an observer. Emily now has a nostalgic appreciation for the value of everyday life that her parents and the other living characters do not share. She becomes agonized by the beauty and transience of everyday life and returns to the cemetery. As Emily settles in among the dead souls, George lays prostrate by her tomb. “They don’t understand,” she says of the living. The stars come out over Grover’s Corners, and the play ends.

“

### STAGE MANAGER

This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying.

Act One  
*Our Town*

”





**AIM:** To explore storytelling and the role of the Narrator.

“

**STAGE MANAGER**

The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is 7 May 1901.  
The time is just before dawn.

”

Act One  
*Our Town*

**THE ROLE OF THE NARRATOR**

There are many traditions of Narrator throughout theatre history and indeed in many plays. Thornton Wilder’s **Our Town** is a classic. The narrator – known as Stage Manager – has various roles that a director may choose to highlight in a production.



**Narrate** a simple story you know very well. Perhaps a favourite fairytale or other childhood story. Stories that have been told in many different versions are great.

**Separate** the story into its major stages. What happens?

**Identify** what the story is a metaphor for. Has it been used as a lesson for life and how to live it?

**Then**

**Choose** a group of approx 5 and 1 story for the group to retell

**Consider – Who is the Narrator and what is their role?**

**Perform** your story in groups experimenting with Narrator as:

1. An outsider stepping in to tell the story, engaging broadly with the environment of the play and its characters. This narrator can stop the action or direct it.
2. A known character from within the play who breaks the fourth wall to address the audience directly
3. A chorus like narrator who makes commentary on the play’s action and journey
4. A Stage Manager with the responsibility of a stage manager in theatre-making. You may need to research this.



**OUR TOWN**

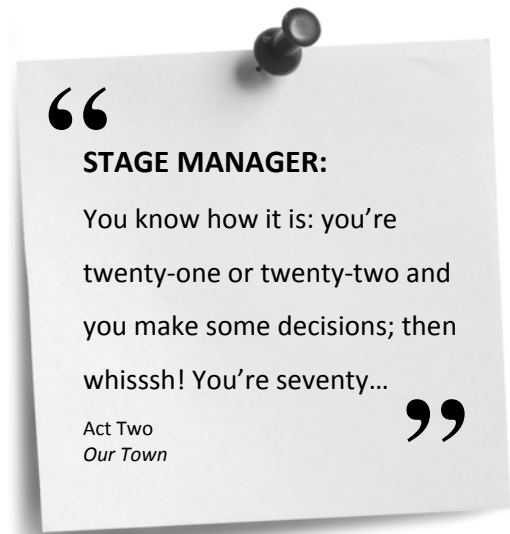




## PHYSICAL STORYTELLING

**Perform** your group's chosen story again, this time investigating one of the following physical forms. You'll need to identify the key features of the form.

1. Mime
2. Literal
3. Movement
4. Farce/Slapstick
5. With time jumps – forwards and backwards
6. Any others you can manipulate



## LIFE STORY



**Develop** in groups, a series of tableaux that depict the whole life of a character.

**Experiment** with theatrically making these “life tableaux” move between the frozen image to develop a complete moving ‘series’ that tells a whole story.

**Explore** adding a narrator to your life story

**Perform** your final story for the class



**AIM:** To explore the ideas behind the direction and staging of the play.



**RADIO PLAY**

From Iain Sinclair, director of **OUR TOWN**.

*When I was at drama school my radio drama lecturer once said that the best thing about radio plays was the scenery! What he meant of course was that our imaginations do a much better job than any kind of description.*



**Write** a prologue to a radio play about your school. Include a vivid description of the detail of the setting, to make the environment come alive in the audience’s imagination.

**Research** Grover’s Corners in 1901. Write a prologue to a radio play version of **OUR TOWN** that sets the scene. Use all the senses to create an image in the audience’s mind.

**Perform** these prologues to the rest of the class, asking them to close their eyes while they listen.



**TO PROP OR NOT TO PROP**

**Rehearse** your group’s chosen story (from the storytelling exercises) using all the props and furniture that your scene needs. Spend time exploring how you use the prop, remembering your physicality. Remove the props and furniture and perform the scene as though they were there.

**Consider** – An actor’s job is to make us believe that the prop is there. What are the challenges that an actor must overcome? How do they make us ‘suspend our disbelief?’ When do we stop ‘seeing’ the prop that isn’t there?

Which is more interesting for the audience? Why?

**Watch** The Umbilical Brothers for an excellent example of performing without props.

The Umbilical Brothers - Guitar

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBndMu7QkGg&feature=related>

The Umbilical Brothers - Samurai

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4tLd9-viKw&feature=related>

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