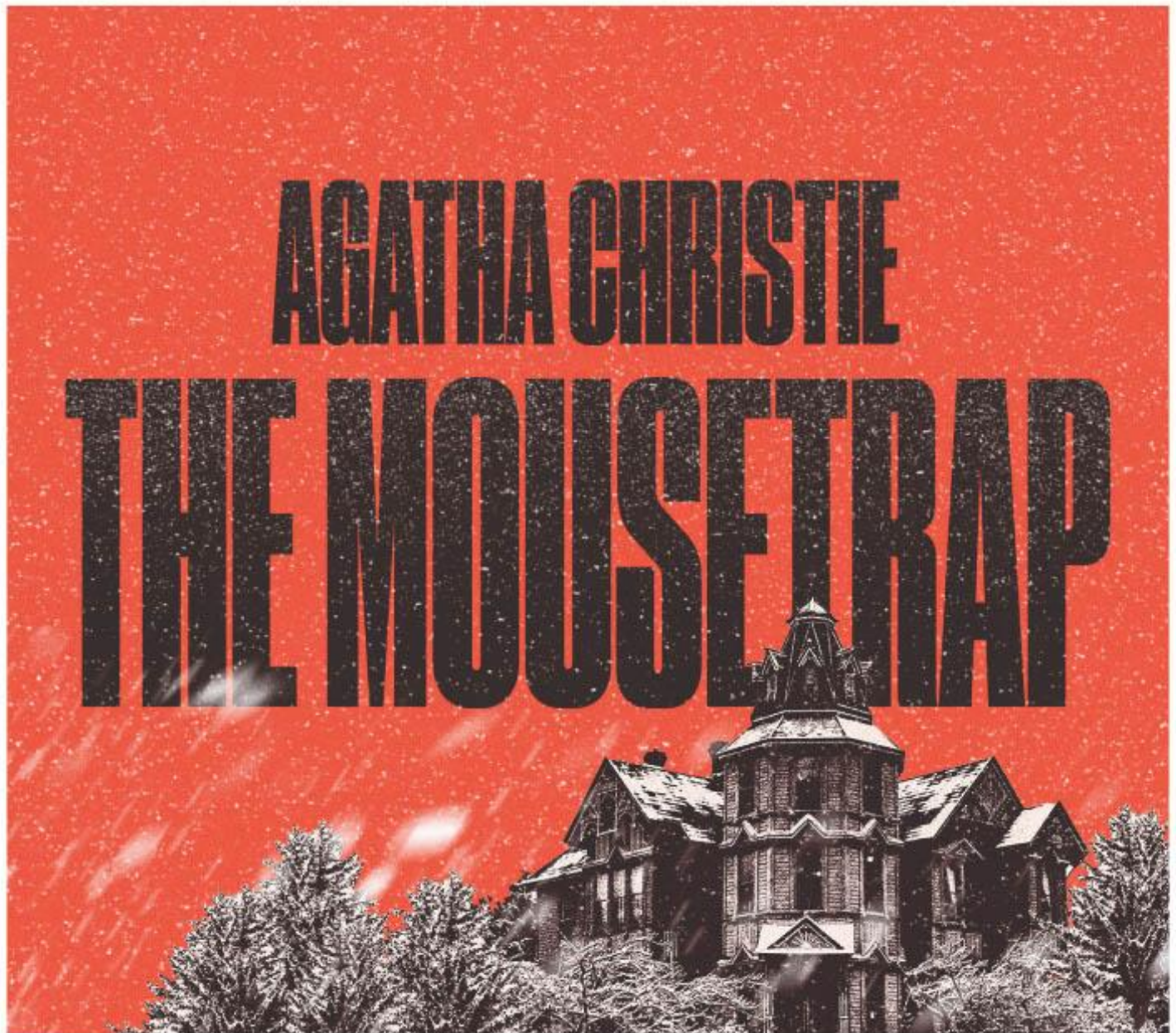


theatre:
CALGARY
Stafford Arima, Artistic Director

PLAY GUIDE



**SEPTEMBER 12 -
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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Welcome educators!

Theatre Calgary's 2023-2024 Play Guides are intended to support your students' experience at Theatre Calgary this season. We encourage you to use some or all of these materials to provide context for your students before, during, and after their visit to Theatre Calgary. While not mandatory for students to enjoy the production, opportunities to connect art to personal life can deepen understanding and appreciation.

With that in mind, each guide provides you and your students with a range of contextual material. You will find background information on the play and playwright; social, linguistic, and historical context; expectations for the theatre; activities for you to lead in the classroom; and reflection questions to guide discussions. You'll find activities that connect to current events, are interdisciplinary, can be tied into your curriculum, and can be facilitated for various lengths of time.

Pages marked with a ★ can be photocopied and distributed to students.

We hope that you and your students enjoy your experience at Theatre Calgary this year!

ABOUT THE PLAY

SUMMARY.

The Mousetrap begins on a dark and snowy evening. When the lights come up, we see Mollie and Giles Ralston nervously preparing for the grand opening of their guesthouse, Monkswell Manor. Four guests will be arriving: Christopher Wren, Mrs. Boyle, Major Metcalf, and Miss Casewell. They are strangers. Giles returns from running errands and drops his snow-covered coat, scarf, and hat over an armchair, hiding a mysterious brown paper bag. Mollie hears a news update over the radio describing a murder and a brief description of the clothing worn by a suspect who is wanted by police. The clothing: a dark coat, light scarf and hat.

Christopher Wren is the first to arrive. He is a quirky young man who claims to be an architect. His direct, unashamed, unapologetic behavior and less than pristine appearance are unsettling to those around him. Next to arrive is Mrs. Boyle. She is an older, imposing woman with a bad attitude and clearly set in her ways. When things are not done to her approval, she makes no attempt to hide her disdain. Nothing escapes her criticism. Major Metcalf, a retired Army Major, is Mrs. Boyle's fellow cab passenger. He is followed by Miss Casewell, a woman wearing a familiar coat and scarf. A final, and unexpected, guest arrives: the mysterious. Mr Paravicini.

The following afternoon, as the snow grows heavier, the guests speak to one another as they come and go from the drawing room. Mollie receives a phone call from the police informing her that an officer will soon be paying them a visit with important information. All begin to speculate the reasons for a law enforcement visit, especially in the snowstorm.

STORY WHOOSH

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

- The teacher facilitates the shared storytelling by bringing individuals and groups in and out of the action.
- As soon as characters, objects, places, or events in the story (i.e., servants, bad thoughts, ships, etc.) are mentioned, the first students step into the circle and make a shape or pose that represents what has been narrated.
- At any time the teacher can say "Whoosh!" and students quickly return to their 'places' in a circle.
- Continue the story around the group, so that different students get to play various characters and everyone gets a chance to try several roles, regardless of gender.

BRITISH-ISMS IN *THE MOUSETRAP*

Barmy: very foolish

Chilblains: an inflammation of the hands and feet caused by exposure to cold and moisture

Daily woman: a part-time maid

Dogsbody: someone who does manual labor

Hooked it early: to leave; to leave work early

Hunt the Thimble: a party game in which a thimble is hidden, and players must find it to win

Mugs at this game: not very successful

Regular tabbies' delight: a sexist term to describe women who gossip

Spiv: a man who is well-dressed in a way that attracts attention, who makes money dishonestly

When Sergeant Trotter appears, he is on skis, and it is discovered that the phone line is dead. He tells them that a note was found at the murder scene leading to Monkswell Manor. He is there to find some connection with the people at the guesthouse and the murder victim. Though his questioning fails to find any connections. They begin to suspect one another, especially once Trotter informs them that the phone line has been intentionally cut.

Mrs. Boyle, left alone in the drawing room, goes to the radio to adjust the program, when, suddenly, the lights are shut off, the radio volume is cranked loud, and we hear the sound of a struggle followed by the drop of the body to the ground. Mollie appears from the kitchen, turns on the lights, turns down the radio, and discovers Mrs. Boyle's strangled body. Mollie's screams bring everyone running to the room.

Trotter increases the urgency of his interrogations, trying to piece together where everyone was at the time of this murder, but he isn't making any progress as they all seem to have rational explanations for their whereabouts. Finally he gets the idea to reenact everyone's path from their assumed locations to the main room at the time they heard Mollie scream. He is convinced that switching everyone's track will be able to prove who has been lying. You'll have to wait to hear whether this strategy will work...

SUSPECT CHARACTER BREAKDOWN.



MOLLIE RALSTON

the young co-owner of
Monkswell Manor guest house



GILES RALSTON

Mollie's husband of one
year; the co-host of
Monkswell Manor

CHRISTOPHER WREN

a flighty, obviously neurotic young
man; a guest at Monkswell Manor

MRS. BOYLE

stern and generally unpleasant; a
guest at Monkswell Manor

MAJOR METCALF

a rigid, retired British military officer;
a guest at Monkswell Manor

MISS CASEWELL

a mysteriously aloof and "unladylike"
guest of Monkswell Manor

MR. PARAVICINI

an unexpected guest at
Monkswell Manor

DETECTIVE SERGEANT TROTTER

an investigator looking into a
connection to a local murder



Vanessa Leticia Jetté
MOLLIE RALSTON



Mike Tan
GILES RALSTON



Matthew Mooney
CHRISTOPHER WREN



Kit Benz
MISS CASEWELL



Natascha Girgis
MRS. BOYLE



Robert Klein
MAJOR METCALF



Christian Goutsis
MR. PARAVICINI



Tyrell Crews
SERGEANT TROTTER

HISTORICAL + SOCIAL CONTEXT.



5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT AGATHA CHRISTIE

- 1** Agatha Christie once disappeared for 10 days.
- 2** She was an avid surfer.
- 3** You can rent Agatha Christie's old home in Devonshire, England.
- 4** She has been published 130 times (including radio plays, poetry, novels, scripts, short stories, and autobiographies).
- 5** Christie has been outsold only by Shakespeare and the Bible.

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT AGATHA CHRISTIE'S THE MOUSETRAP

The Mousetrap was initially written as a radio play at the request of the BBC for Queen Mary.

It has been running on London's West End since November 25, 1952. It is the longest running play in the world.

Every single performance of *The Mousetrap* on the West End sets a new Guinness World Record.

Audiences are sworn to secrecy when it comes to... whodunnit...

WRITING A CLASSIC MURDER MYSTERY

The Detection Club was a collective of British mystery writers that included Agatha Christie, formed in 1930. The following rules were introduced by club member Ronald Knox.

- The criminal must be mentioned in the early part of the story
- All supernatural factors are ruled out
- No more than one secret room or passage
- No undiscovered poisons or complex scientific concepts may be used
- No accident must ever help the detective
- The detective must not himself commit the crime
- The detective must not light on any clues which are not instantly produced for the inspection of the reader.
- The sidekick of the detective must not conceal any thoughts which pass through his mind
- Twins, and doubles, generally, must not appear

* adapted from [Gotham Writers](#)

WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE THEATRE



An open mind.

Let the performance surprise you! Stay open to what can happen. Look for moments of theatrical magic (how did they change that costume so quickly?) and unexpected dialogue.

Assigned seats.

Every seat in the theatre offers a unique perspective on the action. Appreciate what you can see from your seat that someone else might not.

Live actors.

The performers on stage can see you, hear you, and feel your energy. And actors love student audiences! Laugh when something is funny! Gasp when you're surprised! Applaud when you're impressed! The actors thrive on audience reactions.

A break from reality.

Theatre-makers ask the audience to "suspend their disbelief." If someone on stage says the red ribbon is blood, then it is! If an actor takes flight, then imagine you can't see the strings. This is what the actors ask of the audience. Embrace the magic of theatre.

Questions.

Listen carefully to the story being told. If you have a question, keep your voice to a whisper so it doesn't disturb others. (See the call out on Q + As to help you form great questions for the team behind the show.) Let yourself be challenged by the content. What new ideas or perspectives are you hearing?

Disconnection.

Put your phone away and immerse yourself in the technology of the theatre. The sounds and lights from your device are distracting to the actors, fellow audience members, and you! Plus, the law says that photos and videos aren't allowed, anyway.

PREPARING Q'S FOR A Q + A

While you watch the show, consider how the creative team (see pg. 8) brings the story to life on stage for you.

Consider questions about the process:

- How did the lighting / set / costume / sound designer...
- What made the director choose to...
- How did the playwright decide to...

Ask questions about the story:

- Why did [character] make the decision to...
- Can you explain how...
- Why didn't _____ happen?

Learn more about each job:

- Why did you decide to become a...
- What do I need to do to become a...
- What has been your favorite...



THEATRE TEAM TALKBACK

Theatre is a 'team sport,' and it's not the actors alone who bring a production to life. After your show, you'll have a chance to ask questions of the creative team. Here are some of the folks you might expect to speak with:

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

The Director creates the vision for the production, how it will look on stage, and works closely with the actors, costume, set, and lighting designers to make sure everyone tells the same story.

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

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

The Stage Manager assists the director during rehearsals by taking detailed notes and making sure the actors and designers understand these ideas. They run the show during each performance by making sure the actors' entrances and exits and the lights and sound all run smoothly.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

IF YOU HAVE 15 MINUTES...

Name That Tune

Agatha Christie uses the familiar nursery rhyme, “Three Blind Mice” as a motif throughout *The Mousetrap*. This activity will challenge students to make connections between music and stories.

Focus Question. How can song lyrics help a writer communicate their ‘big ideas?’

Objective. Students will be able to align song lyrics with a story to communicate an author’s message.

Procedure.

- 1 Use [these slides](#) to introduce the definitions of Theme | Motif | Symbol.
- 2 Have students choose a nursery rhyme from the remaining slides and match it to another story with which they are familiar. (It doesn’t have to be a play or a novel, even. It can be a TV show, movie, even a video game.)
- 3 Pair students to share their nursery rhyme / story match and explain how bringing in this nursery rhyme helps reinforce the writer’s message (the theme).



Three blind mice, three blind mice
See how they run, see how they run
They all ran after the farmer's wife
She cut off their tails with a
carving knife
Did you ever see such a sight in your
life as three blind mice?

IF YOU HAVE 30 MINUTES...

The Art of Foley

The Mousetrap was originally written as a radio play, where it couldn't rely on actors' movements or elaborate set designs to communicate the story. Instead, the mood and story was enhanced using foley sound.

Focus Question. How do we use voices, bodies, and found objects to create the soundtrack of a story?

Objective. Students will be able to complement a narrative passage using found objects and the human body by creating sounds to enhance the story and mood of the piece.

Procedure.

- 1 Ask students to position themselves in such a way that they are able to listen to the story read aloud with no distractions (head down, eyes closed, laying down, etc.)
- 2 Read aloud the following passage from Sherlock Holmes's *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*. As they listen, they should be mindful of the following:
 - Where are the places the story is set?
 - What sounds are associated with those places?
 - What sound effects are written into the short story?
 - What might be added to help an audience visualize the story more clearly?

We were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. It was from Sherlock Holmes and ran in this way:

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from the west of England in connection with Boscombe Valley tragedy. Shall be glad if you will come with me. Air and scenery perfect. Leave Paddington by the 11:15."

"What do you say, dear?" said my wife, looking across at me. "Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a fairly long list at present."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the change would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' cases."

"I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go, I must pack at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller. My wants were few and simple, so that in less than the time stated I was in a cab with my valise, rattling away to Paddington Station. Sherlock Holmes was pacing up and down

the platform, his tall, gaunt figure made even gaunter and taller by his long grey travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.

“It is really very good of you to come, Watson,” said he. “It makes a considerable difference to me, having someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biased. If you will keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets.”

We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him. Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past Reading. Then he suddenly rolled them all into a gigantic ball and tossed them up onto the rack.

3 Ask students to turn & talk about what they imagined or heard as they listened.

4 Arrange students into groups of 3 or 4, and provide them with a [copy of the text](#) (projected, digitally, or in hard copy). Each group will work together to add foley sound to this excerpt of the story. They can use their voices, bodies, or objects found in the classroom to create the necessary sound effects.

This is a creative endeavor, and there is no wrong way to interpret this task. Students can make any choices that they feel help tell the story.

5 As groups present, ask the class to listen with their eyes closed or heads down to get the full effect. Reflect on which foley sounds most helped them visualize the scene.

EXTENSION: Use the complete story ([attached here](#)) by assigning each group a section of the story to add foley sounds to. Present the story in its entirety and discuss the impact of foley sounds on the storytelling.

IF YOU HAVE AN HOUR...

Set Design

The location for *The Mousetrap* contributes significantly to the storytelling, almost as if the set itself is a character in the mystery. This activity will challenge students to see their own spaces as characters in their lives, complete with the stories they tell.

Focus Question. How does place help shape a story?

Objective. Students will be able to tell the story of an important physical space in their lives through a visual medium.

Procedure.

- 1 Read aloud this excerpt from the introductory stage directions from Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap*:

*Scene - The Great Hall at Monkswell Manor. Late afternoon.
The house looks not so much a period piece but a house which has been lived in by generations of the same family with dwindling resources. There are tall windows up centre; a big arched opening up right leading to the entrance hall, the front door and the kitchen; and an arched opening left leading upstairs to the bedroom. Up left leading off the stairs is the door to the library; down left is the door to the drawing-room; and down right the door (opening onstage) to the dining-room right is an open fireplace and beneath the window up centre a window seat and a radiator.*

Discuss together: What do we know about the characters in the play based on this description of the set? How does this set the mood of the story?

- 2 Prompt students to choose a place of importance in their lives. This doesn't need to be a personal space like a home or bedroom but could be a public place like a park, school, or shopping mall. Encourage them to be as specific to a single location as possible (rather than a mall with multiple stores, choose one with particular significance).
- 3 Using *The Mousetrap*'s stage directions as a model, have students write their own stage directions describing their space. Consider prompting them to think of smells, sensations, sounds, textures, lighting, etc. of this place.
- 4 Share the following [image of the set](#) for Theatre Calgary's production of *The Mousetrap*. Discuss together: *How does it align with stage directions you read? What do the set designer's choices do to set the mood and help tell the story?*



Set Design, *The Mousetrap*, by Scott Reid

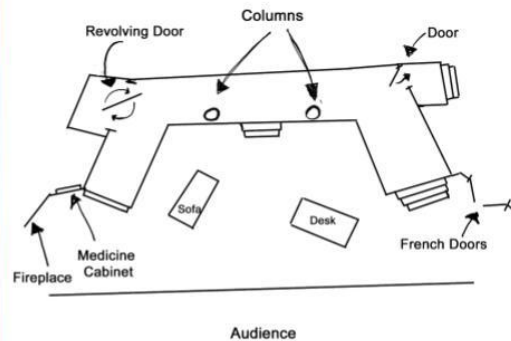
5

Introduce students to [two ways to draw their 'set:'](#) elevation (front-view drawing) or ground plan (bird's-eye-view drawing). They can use paper, collage, or digital programs to represent their set visually. It should align with the stage directions they wrote.

ELEVATION
(front-view drawing)



GROUND PLAN
(bird's-eye-view drawing)



6

Pair students together to share their stage directions and set designs.

MODIFICATION. After Step 3, have students trade stage directions and design sets based on one another's descriptions. This is a great opportunity to discuss artistic interpretation, how a designer or playwright 'lets go' of their ideas, and allows students to practice expressing themselves with clarity.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

A theatrical experience is not complete without reflection. What is the audience talking about when they leave the theatre? Here are some questions to pose to your students following their experience with *The Mousetrap* at Theatre Calgary.

- 1 How does the storytelling in *The Mousetrap* compare to other murder mystery novels you've read or television or movie mysteries you've seen?
- 2 What is the significance of the song, "Three Blind Mice?" Why did Ms. Christie choose this tune, and what other songs do you know that might suit this story?
- 3 *The Mousetrap*, and many other of Christie's novels, are considered "timeless." What makes this story one that is universal and transcends decades?
- 4 How do issues of social class play out in this story? How does the setting contribute to this dynamic?
- 5 Mystery is the most popular literary genre. Why do you suppose people are so fascinated by detective mysteries in all formats?

THEATRE CALGARY PLAY GUIDES DEVELOPED BY

Aliza Sarian

www.alizasarian.com



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