

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA  
A READERS THEATRE PRODUCTION  
OF  
OUR TOWN

by  
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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to establish a procedural model for a Readers Theatre approach to the teaching of a selected literary work and to test the approach through classroom application and evaluation. The study examined the nature and aims of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre through a review of the literature on the subject. An analysis of the selected literary work, Our Town, by Thornton Wilder, preceded the preparation of a detailed, annotated director's script showing stage arrangement, rehearsal schedule, line cuts to the original, movements on stage, and directoral suggestions.

Two representative grade XII classes at the English 305 level participated in the project. Each class prepared a Readers Theatre production of the play and presented it to an audience of approximately 150 of their peers.

Evaluation of the process and the performances included written responses to a questionnaire by students involved in the presentation, together with a tape recorded interview with a representative sample consisting of six of the participants. A critique of the performances was prepared by the graduate committee, and an assessment of

the process and the productions was made by the investigator.

Student response to the approach proved highly favorable. Many students suggested that experience in oral interpretation had helped them to gain confidence in public speaking, to improve voice production, and to work more cooperatively with all members of the class. They felt that the approach should be introduced at an earlier level than grade XII.

The study indicated that training in the fundamentals of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre should be separated from the regular rehearsal schedule and that sufficient time should be allowed in the rehearsal schedule for the analysis-synthesis process and for the development of confidence and poise in playing the assigned roles.

The evidence of the study suggested that the performance acted as strong motivation for student involvement with the literature. Although a number of weaknesses appeared in the performances in areas such as focus and tempo, the students were able to capture the essential spirit of the play and convey this spirit to the audience.

The results of this study suggest that the Readers Theatre approach holds much promise for classroom use and that teachers--particularly teachers of English--

would gain in effectiveness by acquainting themselves  
with the procedures involved.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

#### BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Readers Theatre has been defined as "a form of oral interpretation in which all types of literature may be projected by means of characterized readings enhanced by theatrical effects."<sup>1</sup> The format of a Readers Theatre presentation may be quite varied, depending upon such factors as the creative abilities of the individuals and groups involved, the nature of the material to be presented, the amount of time available for preparation and presentation, and the general understanding and appreciation of the literature to be interpreted.

Readers Theatre demands student participation in the selection and creation of a suitable script which can be presented in a more simple context than a formal theatrical production. The script developed may be a cutting of the original play to a suitable length for a Readers Theatre presentation or, as an alternative or supplementary exercise, a varied selection of literary extracts based upon a theme emerging from the play.

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<sup>1</sup>Leslie Irene Coger, and Melvin R. White, Readers Theatre Handbook: A Dramatic Approach to Literature (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1967), p. 8.

The relative simplicity of the Readers Theatre approach makes it a versatile and, potentially, highly effective method for the teaching of English. Readers Theatre presentations have usually proven successful and popular when performed, the performance providing the motivation for a more detailed study of the literature.<sup>2</sup> In the preparation of some scripts, students may have to go beyond literature to include magazines, newspapers, scientific reports, historical documents, and other pertinent material. The Readers Theatre approach may thus be effective for teachers as a means of facilitating inter-disciplinary studies.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to establish a procedural model for a Readers Theatre approach to the teaching of a selected literary work and to test this approach through classroom application and evaluation. The study will examine the nature and aims of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre through a review of the literature on the subject. Procedures based on this review will be outlined and applied to the preparation and presentation of the play Our Town by two representative grade twelve

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<sup>2</sup>Note, for example, the success of the professional production of Jacques Brel is Alive and Well and Living in Paris which played at the M. T. C. Warehouse Theatre in February and March, 1973. This production was similar in format to Readers Theatre.

classes at the English 305 level. An assessment of the effectiveness of the procedures and the presentations will be included in the evaluation of this approach.

#### DEFINITION OF TERMS

1. Oral Interpretation--refers to the interpretation and presentation of literature orally to an audience.
2. Choral Reading--refers to the reading of a piece of literature simultaneously by a group. In choral reading, the group attempts to develop a dramatic reading with appropriate interpretation of the material.
3. Concert Theatre--refers to group oral interpretation or individual readings arranged into a formal program.<sup>3</sup> In this sense the term is synonymous with the definition of Readers Theatre as used in this study.
4. Chamber Theatre--refers to a dramatic and interpretative oral reading of fiction and non-fiction.<sup>4</sup>
5. Readers Theatre--refers to a dramatic and interpretative oral reading of playscripts.<sup>5</sup> Through the use of lecterns, stools, movement, and other appropriate actions, properties, and sets, an experimental approach is possible. A narrator is frequently used to tie the material together.

A distinction between Choral Reading, Concert

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<sup>3</sup>Clayton E. Liggett, Concert Theatre, The Theatre Student Series (New York: Richards Rosen Press, Inc., 1970), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Theatre, Chamber Theatre, and Readers Theatre is unnecessary for an understanding of Readers Theatre. In a Readers Theatre production it is quite possible to use any of the forms of group interpretation mentioned above. This study employs the more comprehensive definition of the term 'Readers Theatre' which includes all types of group and individual oral interpretation arranged for reading and presentation to an audience.

6. Creative Dramatics--refers to communication of ideas through body and voice, usually in an improvisational way.

7. French Scenes--refer to logical divisions of the play into somewhat self-contained scenes. Each French scene involves two or more characters in an uninterrupted relationship in the play. If anyone enters or leaves or changes the relationship a new French scene begins.

8. Bridge--refers to a segment of the play in which a narrator or individual character speaks directly to the audience without establishing a relationship with any other character. The bridge may provide an introduction to or link between French scenes.

9. Beat of the Play--refers to the reaction of the character each time he receives a new stimulus. The action and movements of the play are planned according to the stimulus-response situations.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>See Appendix D for a further illustration of beat in a play.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Two representative classes of grade twelve students at the 305 level were selected for this project. Each class was to prepare a Readers Theatre presentation of the play Our Town by Thornton Wilder. A total of 21 periods of instruction was spent with each class in preparing for the production. During this time, the following activities were included: preliminary reading of the play, cutting and preparing of the script, casting the play, and rehearsing to emphasize, at different times, blocking, reading skill, projection, pacing, and interpretation.<sup>7</sup> At the end of the instructional period, each class performed the play before an audience of approximately 150 of their peers.

Data collected in the evaluation of this approach consisted of written responses to a questionnaire by students involved in the presentations, and a tape-recorded interview with a representative sample consisting of six of the participants to attempt to determine the effectiveness of the approach from the students' point of view. The second part of the evaluation consisted of the graduate committee's critique of the performance and the investigator's assessment of the process and the production. Conclusions and implications have been formulated from

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<sup>7</sup>An outline of the instructional program is included in Chapter IV.

these evaluative comments.

#### DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Although the Readers Theatre technique lends itself to the study of many types of literature, this project was limited to drama.
2. Two grade twelve classes at the English 305 level were involved in the study. Class size in each case was 21 students, which meant it was possible to involve all students in the single production. This could be a limitation on the ability to generalize the findings to other classes and grade levels.
3. Because students' interpretative skills were observed through performance, no formal written test on the content of the play was included.

#### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

1. There was of necessity a subjective element to the evaluation of the project. This limitation was alleviated by evaluating the project on three different levels--students, teacher, and committee.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Much highly motivated learning takes place when a school embarks upon a theatrical production. Apart from painting, sewing, art work, design, carpentry, music,

and acting, students develop in a number of worthwhile areas such as leadership, group dynamics, and personal growth. The Readers Theatre approach appears to be one method of transferring some of the desirable benefits of theatre and oral interpretation to the regular English classroom experience. A dramatic approach to the study of a play is in full accordance with the program of studies for English 305, which states:

It must always be remembered that drama is only in part a literary art. While a play often possesses many of the characteristics of the novel or the poem, unlike them, it is ... written primarily ... to be performed by actors on a stage before an audience. In the teaching of drama this fact must always be paramount in the teacher's mind. Only when the play is acted does it come to life. Methods of presenting drama may differ, but any technique that will aid the student to see the play as a play should be utilized.<sup>8</sup>

Readers Theatre has a number of advantages over formal theatre for the teacher. Formal theatre is limited to the number of parts available in a particular play; Readers Theatre knows no such limitation, since the script may be adapted or divided to include all members of the class. Formal theatre is bound, to some extent, by stage conventions such as sets, properties, memorized lines, costumes, and make-up. Readers Theatre emphasizes oral interpretation, and does not feel bound by such theatrical conventions. A school with limited resources for formal

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<sup>8</sup>English 101, 201, 301, and 305 (Manitoba: Dept. of Education, Curriculum Branch, 1972), p. 12.

theatre could discover through Readers Theatre a realistic method of bringing the play to life. In the study of literature, the Readers Theatre approach may help students to understand the importance of literary analysis, since successful oral interpretation requires a clear understanding of the play.

Since this study will provide a model for the introduction of a Readers Theatre approach to the teaching of high school English, it should be of value to teachers of English and to those concerned with curriculum design and development in providing an interesting supplement to the various methods used in teaching English.

#### PLAN OF THE STUDY

This report is divided into six chapters. The second chapter discusses the advantages of a dramatic approach to literature, and presents theory and practical considerations in the organization and presentation of Readers Theatre. The third chapter features an analysis of the selected play Our Town. Chapter IV consists of a detailed annotated copy of the director's script as developed for presentation. Chapter V presents the evaluation of the process and the production. The final chapter records conclusions and implications arising from the project and the evaluation.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins with a review of some of the benefits claimed for the dramatic approach to the study of literature. Readers Theatre appears to be one method of successfully implementing a dramatic approach in the classroom and introducing many of the benefits of drama and theatre to the students.

In keeping with the purpose of this study, which is to establish a procedural model for a Readers Theatre production, this chapter concentrates on the organization, preparation, and presentation of Readers Theatre. Included are views and suggestions by writers who have worked extensively with this approach.

### THE DRAMATIC APPROACH TO LITERATURE

The dramatic, creative, or experiential approach to literature appears to hold significant benefits for the student. One is a high degree of willing involvement in the projects planned. A further benefit relates to personal growth as students learn to cooperate with each other in achieving a goal.

This active student involvement should, in turn, lead to interest and appreciation. A number of writers

(J. Haggerty,<sup>9</sup> Dr. Gino Matteo,<sup>10</sup> D. W. Chambers,<sup>11</sup> and E. Conrad and M. Van Dyke<sup>12</sup>) who have worked with various types of dramatic activity in the classroom have found that students become keenly involved in participating in the creative aspects of literature. One example of such involvement is given by Dr. Matteo, who found that a mixed-media approach to the teaching of Shakespearean drama at the senior and college level stimulated student interest and involvement in the literature. By mixed-media approach the author means the use of television and cinematic film, both professional and student made, to complement the print medium. Through this approach students were given the chance to contribute to the learning process. They became involved both as producers and directors rather than as mere critics. They became engaged in the process of performing the soliloquy, not merely explaining it. In a similar way, students participating in a Readers Theatre production should become

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<sup>9</sup>Joan Haggerty, Please Miss, Can I Play God? (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 60.

<sup>10</sup>Dr. Gino Matteo, "Shakespeare and Schizophrenia: A Mixed-Media Approach," Utilization (Toronto: Utilization and Information Branch, Ontario Educational Communication Authority, June, 1971).

<sup>11</sup>Dewey W. Chambers, Storytelling and Creative Drama (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1970), pp. 82-87.

<sup>12</sup>Edna Conrad, and Mary Van Dyke, History on the Stage (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), pp. 97-101.

actively involved in the script they are trying to develop or in the role they are trying to create.

The dramatic approach offers students the opportunity to work together in a group towards a common objective, the interpretation of literature through performance. In this way, the approach should assist in the personal growth of the students. Conrad and Van Dyke felt that students had benefitted in terms of personal growth through the experience of dramatizing an historical event.<sup>13</sup> They observed that students in working toward the goal of performance learned the necessity for give and take. They learned to listen to the ideas of others, since frequently useful ideas arose from unexpected sources. They discovered that there is more than one way of learning--that what seemed unorthodox could be illuminating. They learned to accept responsibility and to work hard to bring about the success of the presentation. They learned to order their thoughts for the development of the best possible script. In addition, the authors felt that through the dramatic activities the students gained in a number of areas related to English composition such as form and punctuation in dramatic writing, direct and indirect quotation, style and language usage of a particular historical period, vocabulary development and precise use of words, receiving and giving directions, providing adequate content

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

for audience consumption, and improving grammar and style of writing. Chambers, too, felt that through creative dramatics students developed the skill to plan an idea step-by-step from the abstract concept to the concrete presentation.<sup>14</sup>

The dramatic approach encourages a detailed interpretation and analysis of literature. It is incumbent on the actor, for example, to develop gradually over the rehearsal period a comprehensive understanding of the play and the character he is to portray. In a similar manner, a student involved in a dramatic activity in the classroom is encouraged to become aware of interpretation and literary analysis since he must actively apply such interpretation and analysis to the performance of the literature.

#### ORAL INTERPRETATION THROUGH READERS THEATRE

Oral interpretation helps to develop a close identification with literature. Both reader and listener are integral parts of the interpretative process. The reader must analyze the literature carefully to develop his interpretation. He must then rely on his voice and physical presence to convey the interpretation to the listener. The listener (or audience), particularly if he has been trained in the art and skill of listening, should provide both motivation and verification for the

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<sup>14</sup>Chambers, Storytelling, pp. 82-87.

interpreter. G. Johnson explains the educational process involved:

The rendering of literature interpretatively for an audience involves two phases of education, namely: the receiving of impressions, understanding, gaining knowledge, appreciation; and secondly, a unified, spontaneous, facile response of body and voice, with the audience contacts always in mind.<sup>15</sup>

This process is an integral part of the Readers Theatre approach. The performance, as suggested by the quotation, acts as motivation for the analysis and synthesis which leads to interpretation.

A further benefit of oral interpretation is that it leads to an understanding of the author's tone and point of view. W. M. Parrish explains that

The heavy modern emphasis on rapidity in reading encourages superficiality and weakens comprehension. Oral reading will slow the reader down and make him understand what he reads.<sup>16</sup>

Whether or not this is so, the oral interpreter, if he is to be a successful intermediary between the author and the audience, must strive for the understanding and identification with the author's work which the interpretation demands. His performance is the test of his understanding.

There are a variety of rewards for the student who is trained and experienced in oral interpretation.

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<sup>15</sup>Gertrude E. Johnson, Modern Literature for Oral Interpretation (N.Y.: The Century Company, 1930), p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Wayland Maxfield Parrish, Reading Aloud (4th ed.; N.Y.: The Ronald Press Company, 1966), p. 7.

In the realm of public speaking, for example, experience in oral interpretation should help to provide valuable skill in the use of voice: projection, articulation, force, pitch, and rate. The oral interpreter must learn, as well, to think while he is speaking. Numerous opportunities may present themselves in the future for students to use the skills of oral interpretation. Among the obvious professional and vocational areas demanding such skill would be education, theology, politics, theatre, radio and television, law, and commerce. It would be equally possible to list various occasions when one might be called upon to deliver a speech. Some skill in oral interpretation on such occasions might help to raise the general level of public speaking. Participation in Readers Theatre should help the student to gain the necessary confidence for success in public speaking.

H. F. Olson has commented on the fundamental nature of speech. She feels that speech, as communication, should be an important part of the educational process. "Perhaps a fair test of our ingenuity as teachers," she observes, "is the amount of challenging, guided experience in speaking that we can manage for each student."<sup>17</sup> She further notes that "growth in speech is a longtime process, because growth in speech comes only with growth in the

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<sup>17</sup>Helen F. Olson, "Speech For All," Speech in the English Classroom: A Portfolio (Champaign, Ill.: N.C.T.E., Secondary School Section Committee, 1961), p. 1.

entire personality."<sup>18</sup>

Oral interpretation may involve a variety of formats. Individual interpretation of poetry, for example, may be a useful way of starting oral interpretation. For classroom purposes, however, the various forms of group interpretation seem more functional. Group or multiple readings may range from informal readings of literature in a group to more fully prepared Readers Theatre presentations.

Coger and White, in Readers Theatre Handbook, describe Readers Theatre as one approach which effectively brings about student involvement in a creative process. They explain the appeal of Readers Theatre in the following way:

When literature becomes an enjoyable, personalized experience, it takes on a significance, a new excitement. The study of the written page becomes fun when it prepares the reader for sharing literary material with an audience.<sup>19</sup>

One of the benefits of Readers Theatre participation, according to the authors, is that students "are motivated to develop rich, flexible voices and to free themselves from muscular tension so that they can respond vocally and physically to the content of the literary material."<sup>20</sup> The many helpful ideas included in the Readers Theatre

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>Coger and White, Handbook, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

Handbook suggest that Readers Theatre is both a practical and effective means of introducing variety and interest into the classroom activities.

Other writers have recognized the potential of Readers Theatre. W. A. Bacon, in his article "The Act of Literature and the Act of Interpretation" says, "The interpreter performs--and let me urge you to think of this as a good, healthy, creditable activity, not to be confused with exhibitionism or self service."<sup>21</sup> His article strongly endorses the use of oral interpretation in the study of poetry, to bring the reader to experience the poetry more closely.

Elizabeth Worrell advocates the use of the short story as a starting point for the teacher interested in experimenting with Readers Theatre. The short story is compact and flexible, and thus admirably suitable for Readers Theatre presentation. She recognizes the need for blending literary analysis and oral interpretation since the latter is dependent on a clear comprehension of the literary work. She suggests the significance of Readers Theatre in the following statement:

Readers Theatre is not just oral storytelling, nor is it a group of people sitting in a circle--or a straight line--mumbling parts from a play. Rather,

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<sup>21</sup>W. A. Bacon, "The Act of Literature and the Act of Interpretation," Oral Interpretation and the Teaching of English, edited by T. Fernandez (Champaign, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1969), p. 4.

through discerning selection of what is to be read, recognition of the literary elements involved, sensitive arrangement of parts for the readers, and interaction of these readers, Readers Theatre can and should become a literary journey, hazardous it is true, but stimulating and infectiously exciting.<sup>22</sup>

The flexibility of the Readers Theatre approach in teaching should not be overlooked. The approach lends itself to the study of a wide variety of material--fiction, non-fiction, and student writing. A short thematic presentation could be developed by a group utilizing a variety of written material. Our Town, for example, suggests such topics or themes as life in a small town, growing up, problems and aspirations of youth, the marriage proposal, growing old, death, a look back from death, nostalgia, the cycle of life, and the need to live life to the fullest.<sup>23</sup> Each of these themes or topics could be developed into a script by an imaginative group. There are endless possibilities for various scripts. A side-benefit of such an activity would be the heightened use of the library or resource center that such work might promote. Students would be encouraged to read extensively but selectively in their search for material. Selection and adaptation of the material is both an analytic and

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<sup>22</sup>Elizabeth Worrell, "Readers Theatre and the Short Story," Oral Interpretation and the Teaching of English, ed. by T. Fernandez (Champaign, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1969), p. 46.

<sup>23</sup>Suggested material for a Readers Theatre presentation on the theme-topic "The Proposal" is listed in Appendix E.

compositional skill. The addition of suitable narration and the condensing of material or conversion to dialogue would provide for motivated writing.

Video-taping is another related activity which requires some creative skill. Students involved in producing a video-tape would need to attend rehearsals to plan their film script. Artistic and effective use of long-shots, zoom shots, and close-ups would be an indication of how closely students involved in this activity had regarded the script.

A further related activity could be the design and operation of lighting for the production if the school has stage lighting equipment. Students interested in the technical aspects of theatre would benefit from such an activity.

A number of other jobs or activities could be assigned to help ensure participation by all students in the class. A stage manager and stage hands might be appointed to control the stage setting and scene changes; a sound effects person might be appointed if sound effects are called for by the script; a production manager could help in the organization of all aspects of the production; a script assistant or secretary might be appointed to prepare the script once it has been decided upon.

An appropriate assignment of tasks should ease the work of the director and provide for full involvement

by the students. The sense of involvement which students feel in a Readers Theatre presentation makes it a meaningful experience for them.

## ORGANIZATION AND PRESENTATION OF READERS THEATRE

### Procedures

Selection.--The choice of material for presentation should take into account the qualities of good literature: universality, individuality, and appeal to the emotions.<sup>24</sup> Good literature is further distinguished by originality, substance, and appeal to the reader's imagination. In choosing material, however, some consideration may be given to the problems of staging. A play which involves elaborate visual effects and extreme action should be avoided. Material chosen should have strong appeal to both reader and audience. The reader's commitment to the literature should be reflected in his performance and in the audience response. Coger and White suggest five criteria to guide one in selecting materials for Readers Theatre. They state:

The literature should, above all, provide provocative ideas and interesting characters in intriguing action; it should contain rich language with evocative overtones; and it should be capable of being cut to a reasonable time limit and still preserve its essential entity, a wholeness of experience. Ideally, literature chosen for this medium will provide the audience with

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<sup>24</sup>Charlotte I Lee, Oral Interpretation (4th ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), p. 8.

an enduring experience.<sup>25</sup>

Preliminary Readings.--After choosing the appropriate material for interpretation, the director and the reader must analyze the material carefully. The director needs to know the material thoroughly. The reader, too, needs a thorough understanding of the material, but some of this understanding may come through rehearsal and gradual development in his assigned role. The process of analysis, then, is an on-going one for the interpreter. The preliminary readings should be for enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation.<sup>26</sup> During these readings, the director may begin to assign roles for different readers. This procedure should lead to further enjoyment as the readers begin to prepare for the production.

To assist in understanding the selection, a careful study of the meanings of words which prove difficult may be necessary. Similarly, difficult imagery, symbolism, and allusions may require explanation. The interpreter should be aware of the climaxes, both major and minor, which occur in the plot. The identification of climaxes is an important preliminary to working on a cutting of the script. Attention should be given to the points which must receive emphasis and to those which are subordinate.

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<sup>25</sup>Coger and White, Handbook, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Otis J. Aggertt, and Elbert R. Bowen, Communicative Reading (3rd ed.; N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1972), p. 89.

The reader should become sensitive to the varying moods of the literature and to the style of the author--his artistry with words.

The importance of careful analysis to oral interpretation is suggested by W. Grimes and A. Mattingly in their summarizing statement:

In his initial preparation the interpreter is the silent reader, responding aesthetically to the literary object created by the writer. Thorough preparation at this stage strengthens his possibilities of success when he is the reader-become-interpreter. The deeper his own understanding and the richer his own appreciation of the literary object, the more certain he will be of evoking an appropriate aesthetic response from his listeners. Indeed, he cannot put his audience into "possession" of the literature unless he himself has assimilated it.<sup>27</sup>

Script Preparation.--The director, whether teacher or student, will need to be satisfied that the script selected is suitable for the intended readers and for the audience. One of his tasks would be a cutting of the script, together with an arrangement of the material if a variety of sources were used. The cutting should be purposeful and carefully done. Arrangement of scripts becomes necessary when preparing a thematic Readers Theatre presentation. This arrangement may be treated as a creative task to be performed by the whole group. Occasionally there may be a need to add dialogue and/or narration to

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<sup>27</sup>Wilma H. Grimes, and Alethea S. Mattingly, Interpretation: Writer, Reader, Audience (San Francisco: Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1961), p. 65.

the script, or to convert narrative to dialogue. In either case, the changes must be consistent with the character and style of the original. Improvisation may sometimes be used to arrive at natural dialogue.<sup>28</sup>

Casting.--One problem the director or group must face is casting. The flexibility of the Readers Theatre approach should enable each student to have a role in the presentation. With a large class it may be necessary to prepare two or three presentations simultaneously, to add dialogue and characters, to divide narration, or to combine these approaches in some way. Casting, simply speaking, involves decision making--someone deciding who will do what. Clearly, however, effective casting is necessary for an effective presentation. Students are often very good judges of who might best play a particular role. Another approach is to listen to students reading the script. Parts would be rotated frequently in this try-out system and notes made on such things as vocal quality, range, and physical or personality attributes suitable to the role. This does not imply type casting, but rather an appropriate allocation of roles. Improvisations, pantomimes, and theatre games are useful as part of the casting procedure. Very often unexpected aptitudes will emerge through such activities. These activities

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<sup>28</sup>Conrad, History on Stage, pp. 35-36.

are helpful, as well, in breaking down some of the inhibitions which may work against successful interpretation.

Staging.--The setting for a Readers Theatre production is usually suggestive rather than explicit. Both the reader and the audience should be aware of the setting in their minds.<sup>29</sup> K. Robinson suggests that it is better to hang the background curtains near centre stage to avoid a large expanse of stage behind the readers. He suggests keeping the readers well down stage so that their voices will carry.<sup>30</sup> Entrances and exits may be suggested in a number of ways. One possibility is to have the reader stand for entrances and sit for exits. Another possibility is to have the character look down or away after he has completed his scene.<sup>31</sup> Since readers who are not in the scene are generally still in sight of the audience, it is imperative that they do not distract from those who are currently reading. To reduce distractions, Robinson suggests that readers clip pages together between their scenes to avoid the distracting turning of pages.<sup>32</sup>

Other technical considerations include costumes, properties, lighting, and make-up. In essence, the same

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<sup>29</sup>Robinson, Karl F., and Lee, Charlotte I., Speech In Action (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1965), p. 305.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 475.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 474.

considerations apply to these technical matters as to sets and staging. Readers Theatre involves suggestion and imagination. Some costuming may be desirable, but it need not involve the detailed work which would go into the preparation of period costumes. It is generally helpful to have some consensus among the cast on the type of clothing to be worn. A Readers Theatre presentation on "The Supernatural," for example, may suggest wearing black as a basic color. One on the theme of "Pollution," however, may suggest the wearing of jeans, old clothes, or various patchwork rags. In order to suggest age, a student may wish to wear a suit with shirt and tie rather than his usual school attire. To a considerable extent, the nature of the clothes or costumes worn will be dictated by the script. In the examples given, the costumes involve no work in preparation; they simply help to convey the type of character and situation in the scene.

Properties, similarly, should help to suggest the scene. Some basic furniture, such as chairs and tables, may be helpful for suggesting a kitchen or dining room scene. It is not necessary, however, to go into the theatrical detail of providing dishes to eat from and food to eat. Indeed, since the interpreter already has a script in his hand, further hand properties could prove too awkward for successful use.

Stage lighting is always useful to help create the atmosphere of the scene and to underscore highlights of the script. Stage lighting is also a luxury not to be found in all schools. A lack of special lighting equipment should in no way prevent successful Readers Theatre. Readers Theatre can readily be presented in the more intimate atmosphere of a regular classroom.

Make-up need not be used for most Readers Theatre presentations. A formal Readers Theatre presentation beneath stage lights may profit from the use of make-up, but for most classroom productions, make-up is an unnecessary detail.

#### Function of the Director

Before examining the preparations undertaken by the interpreter, a further word on the role of the director is appropriate. It was suggested earlier that the director may be either a student or a teacher. It would seem that after some initial training in oral interpretation and Readers Theatre students should be able to assume the role of director. This would free the teacher for overall supervision and assistance, a role which would be especially important if more than one presentation were taking place. Students could then take charge of finding the material and preparing the script. Apart from analyzing and preparing the script, the director must supervise its interpretation. This would include a careful assessment of the

tone and mood of the entire presentation. The director would assist the readers by pointing out faulty line reading, correcting errors in pronunciation, advising on the interpretation of the lines and the projection of the voices, and by paying close attention to the pacing of the lines. The director must block the play and arrange the actors in order to create pictorial arrangements of the cast and to develop motivated moves.<sup>33</sup> Sometimes the director must stimulate flagging interest on the part of the cast. Conrad suggests that this might be done by adding something to the rehearsals, such as lights, costumes, uninterrupted run-throughs, and so on.<sup>34</sup> Generally, however, the director should work for an inner discipline on the part of the participants--a discipline which is promoted by the prospect of an actual performance.<sup>35</sup>

#### THE TASK OF THE INTERPRETER-READER

One of the chief aims of the oral interpreter is to secure an empathic response from the audience. Such a response may be achieved only by a reader who thoroughly comprehends the literature and becomes involved with it as demonstrated through his voice and body working together.

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<sup>33</sup>Coger and White, Handbook, pp. 40-59.

<sup>34</sup>Conrad, History, p. 73.

<sup>35</sup>Haggerty, Please Miss, p. 29.

Communication with the audience through body

The physical appearance or impression created by the interpreter, his facial expressions, his physical response to the literature, and his poise and bearing on stage, do much to enhance or detract from his performance. The importance of the physical aspect of interpretation is stressed by Johnson:

For any form of speech we need to be utterly convinced of the fundamental necessity of bodily response and activity; . . . we need to be converted to a willingness and readiness to try during all our speech training to give a complete, a total physical response comparable with, and equal to, the emotional intent and content of every bit of material with which we deal.<sup>36</sup>

One area which requires attention is posture. Robinson suggests that good posture "reveals a favorable mental attitude."<sup>37</sup> This is especially apparent from the point of view of the audience. He further suggests that students develop the habit of good posture so that it becomes automatic. An important side benefit of correct posture is an improvement in breathing and voice control.

Related to good posture is muscle tone. Muscle tone "refers to the degree of tension or relaxation present in the entire body."<sup>38</sup> To some extent, as Lee explains, muscle tone depends on muscle memory. Muscle memory

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<sup>36</sup>Johnson, Literature, p. 28.

<sup>37</sup>Robinson, Speech, pp. 140ff.

<sup>38</sup>Lee, Interpretation, p. 188.

results from the muscles getting accustomed to an overt action such as a specific move. Posture, muscle tone, and gesture should stem naturally from the interpretation of the literature. Their effect is to convey to the audience the response the interpreter feels. Aggertt refers to a "total body response"<sup>39</sup> which includes posture, gestures, and muscle tone appropriate to the speaker and situation.

Gestures, according to Robinson, are helpful in achieving relaxed confidence on the part of the reader. Gestures may also be useful in communication and holding the attention of the audience.<sup>40</sup> He refers to two types of gesture: (1) head and facial gestures and expression, such as smiling, frowning, or nodding of the head to depict certain emotions; and, (2) gestures related to the expressiveness of the hands, arms, shoulders, and general stance and deportment. The author enumerates seven principles of effective gesture. These principles state that gestures should be natural and appropriate, and originate within the individual. The gesture should be executed with ease and coordination. It should involve the whole body, otherwise it may more closely resemble a twitch. It should be suitably timed, and should be strong, definite,

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<sup>39</sup>Aggertt, Reading, p. 188.

<sup>40</sup>Robinson, Speech, p. 143.

and precise.<sup>41</sup>

By observation and encouragement, the director or teacher should be able to assist the readers with posture, muscle tone, gesture, and mime. A more specific task for the director, however, is to block or plan the movements of the readers on the stage. Movements are necessary and helpful for a number of reasons. Appropriate movements may help to suggest a change of locale or cast. Movements, too, may be effectively used to suggest relationships between characters or to give emphasis to key speeches. The director should plan the movements for Readers Theatre according to the beats of the play with the same sort of consideration as he would give to a formal theatrical presentation. The beats should be identified, and the movements related to these beats. At the same time, the director must remember that the format of the Readers Theatre presentation is different from formal theatre and that the moves may need to be modified with this in mind. The readers should be instructed to move with a purpose. The purpose will frequently be apparent from the script, but the motive for movement must be clear to the reader. Pacing, shuffling, poor posture, and awkward or clumsy moves generally suggest a lack of planning on the part of the director, or a lack of purpose on the part of the reader--a situation which invariably detracts from the

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

performance.

Communication with the audience through voice

An important aim of oral interpretation is to foster effective use of the voice. The teacher of English can help students to develop vocal effectiveness through practice in speaking and interpretation. The discussion which follows will focus on some of the areas of speech which are of concern in the teaching of oral interpretation and presentation.

The importance of breath control should be noted. Students could be advised that in public speaking control of the breath from the diaphragm, in the same way a singer controls his breathing, is important for proper voice production. As mentioned, a side benefit of good posture is that it contributes to breath control. Certain breathing exercises are suggested in books on speech and drama for the teacher or student who may wish to pursue this.

Related to breath control in audible communication is force, or loudness, and projection. The oral interpreter must always be aware of his audience and of the axiom that if the audience cannot hear the words it will reject the performance. The interpreter, however, should recognize that loudness, in itself, is not enough.<sup>42</sup> Other voice techniques are important to satisfactory projection.

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<sup>42</sup>Lee, Oral Interpretation, pp. 95ff.

Students should be encouraged to become aware of their voices. A tape recorder may be helpful for those who are hoping to improve vocal quality and expression. The urgency of training in speech is indicated by Robinson, who reports that "Studies of speech of high school students indicate that only half of them have pleasant voices; a third speak distinctly and can be easily understood."<sup>43</sup> Further observation of the general population would likely reveal that careless speech habits are widespread.

Students could be further advised of the effectiveness of the articulators in speech production. Words formed toward the front of the mouth tend to be more clear than words which are muffled by nasality or careless enunciation. Often practice is necessary to ensure clear articulation of words. The teacher is frequently in a good position to spot weaknesses in this respect.

Students should be encouraged to vary the pitch and inflection of their speaking voices. Aggertt notes that few people employ the full vocal range.<sup>44</sup> The result is often a monotonous speech pattern with a pitch differential of only one or two notes.<sup>45</sup> A good speaking range, he suggests, should include up to two octaves. Effective use of such a range is intended to assist communication

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<sup>43</sup>Robinson, Speech in Action, p. 109.

<sup>44</sup>Aggertt, Communicative Reading, p. 294

<sup>45</sup>Robinson, Speech in Action, pp. 114ff.

and interpretation, not to be artificial or distracting.<sup>46</sup>

Awareness of the effect of pace is important for oral interpretation. The rate of speaking should vary according to the personality of the reader (and of the character to be impersonated) and according to the emotional content of the material.<sup>47</sup> A change of mood within the material to be interpreted may result in a change of pace on the part of the reader. Again, the change of rate comes as a natural consequence of the content of the material. A sense of urgency, for example, is usually conveyed by a rapid pace in the reading. Conversely, lassitude or torpor could best be suggested by a slow or plodding pace.

An essential contributor to rate is the use of the pause. The successful speaker will work for effective pauses within the text of his material. Students may be advised that pauses do not necessarily occur according to the neat dictates of punctuation; they are an essential part of deliberation.<sup>48</sup> Just as movement may be employed to stress key thoughts and ideas, similarly, pauses may emphasize a word, phrase or key idea which the interpreter wishes to present. The pause, then, should be deliberate and purposeful, and not merely a hesitation.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Aggertt, Communicative Reading, p. 294.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 223-224.

<sup>48</sup>Parrish, Reading Aloud, p. 36.

<sup>49</sup>Aggertt, Communicative Reading, p. 233.

Emphasis is a necessary part of interpretation. In addition to pauses and movements for emphasis, the interpreter may wish to stress key words through additional force. The interpreter should take care to stress appropriate words, such as words which carry the essence of the meaning in a sentence, words which introduce new material or ideas, words which indicate a comparison or contrast of ideas, and words which suggest a climax.<sup>50</sup>

Communication with the audience through focus

It has been stated earlier that oral interpretation involves a reader and a listener or audience. One of the techniques important for the participant in Readers Theatre is audience focus. There are two basic types of focus: on-stage and off-stage. The former is more readily associated with formal theatre, where actors play to one another and, in a sense ignore the presence of the audience. The latter is a more integral part of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre. Off-stage focus means that the reader directs his words out towards the audience rather than to his fellow reader. This is in keeping with the concept of the reader as an intermediary between the author and the audience. The reader should visualize the scene above the heads of the audience, and should address his words as if the scene were out there. At the same time

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<sup>50</sup>Parrish, Reading Aloud, p. 32.

the readers must remember the relationships which they are attempting to establish between the characters represented in the scene. The narrator, however, focuses his words directly to the audience, taking the audience into his confidence.

The concept of focus may be clarified by referring to three diagrams devised by Coger and White:<sup>51</sup>

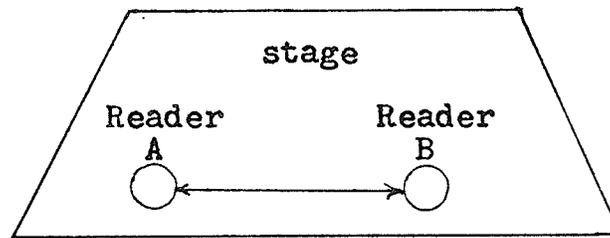


Fig. 1.--On-stage focus

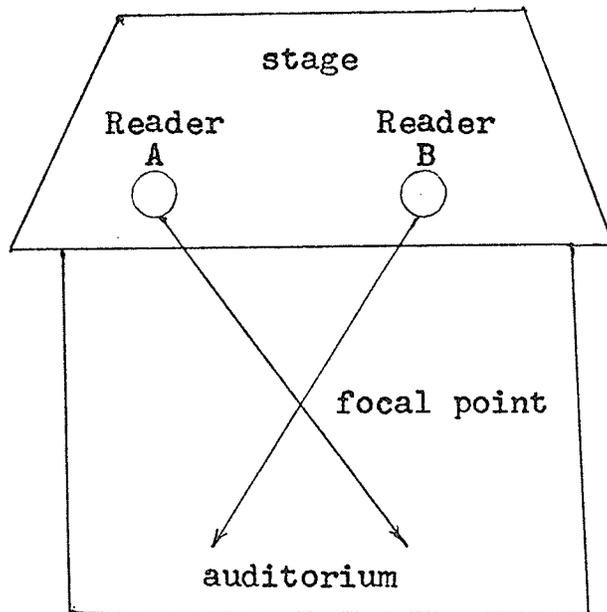


Fig. 2.--Off-stage focus; two Readers

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<sup>51</sup>Coger and White, Handbook, pp. 46-49.

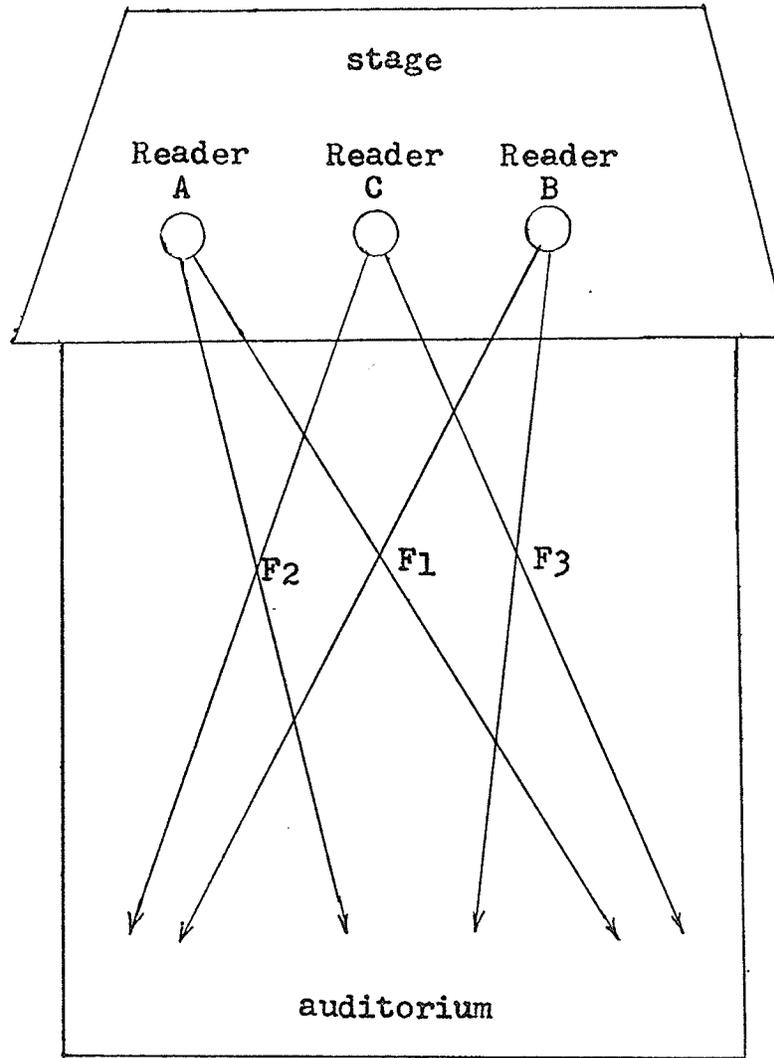


Fig. 3.--Off-stage focus; three readers. The focal point when A and B look at each other is F1; for A and C, F2; and for C and B, F3.

The action, then, as envisaged by the speakers, takes place at the focal points just above the heads of the audience. The focal point for each reader changes according to the imagined location of the person he is addressing. The movement of head and eyes is much less pronounced, however, than in on-stage focus.

One advantage of off-stage focus is that the audience is able to observe the animation of the characters as revealed in the facial expressions and muscle tone. The audience is invited to utilize its own imagination in visualizing the scene. F. Harper provides a summary of the importance of focus in the following words:

When you teach your students to use focus, you give them a way to harness their energy. They know that in addition to trying to visualize the scene, they have to direct the images to another character, to an imagined face on the back wall, to an audience. There is little energy left for self-consciousness and nervousness if they are really doing that. The goal is communication.<sup>52</sup>

Another possibility for Readers Theatre is to use both off-stage and on-stage focus. This must be done with care. An intimate scene involving two characters may profit from the use of on-stage focus. Where more than two readers are involved, however, off-stage focus seems preferable. In either case the focus should be clear and consistent.

Focus is a difficult concept which demands considerable practice. The reader must become thoroughly familiar with his script. Memorization of the lines, with the script held symbolically, would be one way of simplifying the problem of focus.<sup>53</sup> Memorization, however,

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<sup>52</sup>Floren Harper, "A Readers Theatre in Your Classroom," Connecticut English Journal, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring, 1970), p. 19.

<sup>53</sup>Aggertt, Communicative Reading, p. 485.

is not necessary, provided the interpreter is well prepared. Johnson, for example, argues that: "Educationally, the expressive interpretation of the printed page from that page seems infinitely broader in scope than memorized presentation can be."<sup>54</sup> Memorization should not be insisted upon, particularly if it sets up an obstacle to student participation in Readers Theatre.

### Performance

By the time the performance date arrives, the reader should have come to terms with the character(s) he is to portray, with the style, movement, mood of the work to be interpreted, and with the demands on his voice and physical presence which the role entails.

In the presentation of characters, the interpreter attempts to convey the characters' thoughts and emotions. He must try to experience these emotions while maintaining the control which the role of interpreter demands.<sup>55</sup> The reader attempts to show the character to the audience in such a way that the audience can fill in the details in its imagination. The reader does not attempt to be the character, but rather to suggest the character.<sup>56</sup>

The reading should be animated and dynamic as

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<sup>54</sup>Johnson, Modern Literature, p. 19.

<sup>55</sup>Lee, Oral Interpretation, p. 323.

<sup>56</sup>Parrish, Reading Aloud, p. 360.

opposed to insipid and dull, a condition which often prevails with the untrained reader. Aggertt has stated:

Within the bounds of literary demand, audience expectation, good taste, and performer capacity, one should read with all the animation necessary for effective communication while being careful to use the restraint essential to encourage listeners to participate creatively in the performance.<sup>57</sup>

The most prevalent flaw in performance is colorless or weak expression. Parrish suggests a number of steps which might assist the student to brighten his expression. He urges the reader to attempt to experience the moods of the original work; he should not try to suppress emotions. Next, Parrish suggests that the pace be suitable to the audience and that the reader be alert to the audience reaction; that is, that the reader try to establish communication. Finally, the reader is urged to be aware of appropriate body tension and sense of aliveness.<sup>58</sup>

#### EVALUATION OF THE PERFORMANCE

The instructor would be responsible for deciding whether or not he wished to evaluate the performers. He may wish to evaluate in an anecdotal fashion with an adjudication for each performer, or he may attempt a more detailed evaluation based on a chart or checklist.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Aggertt, Communicative Reading, p. 35.

<sup>58</sup>Parrish, Reading Aloud, pp. 67-69.

<sup>59</sup>An example of one form of checklist for evaluating oral performance is included in Appendix F.

The function of the evaluation, however, should be to assist the interpreter to improve his public speaking and oral interpretation.

Evaluation will of necessity be flexible, depending upon the material presented and the degree of emphasis placed on organization, preparation, speaking technique, and presentation. Johnson explains that the essentials of good reading and declamation depend upon the reader's grasp of the subject matter (thought, content, emotions) and the effectiveness of his expression (proper attitude to audience and proficiency in the bodily agents of expression). She suggests that the following points be evaluated: under visual impression--personal appearance, physical attitude and bearing, facial expression, and other bodily movements; under auditory impression--volume of voice, enunciation and pronunciation, rate of utterance, pitch and inflection, and quality of voice.<sup>60</sup> Parrish, in judging speech, would look for clarity, animation, naturalness, and conversational quality.<sup>61</sup>

#### SUMMARY OF CHAPTER II

The writers reviewed at the beginning of Chapter II have stated that a dramatic approach to teaching may be

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<sup>60</sup>Johnson, Modern Literature, pp. 43-44.

<sup>61</sup>parrish, Reading Aloud, p. 16.

successfully used to achieve many of the goals of instruction in literature and communication. Readers Theatre represents one form of dramatic activity which appears to be eminently suitable as part of the instruction in English at the secondary level or earlier. The procedures discussed in the chapter should readily fit into a constructive program in speech, communication, and literature. The versatility of the Readers Theatre approach should allow for a variety of possible group arrangements and related activities.

## CHAPTER III

### ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY

#### PLOT

Our Town is a play which reflects upon the cycle of life. The action of the play centers upon the routine daily events of a small town in rural America just after the turn of the century. The drama stems from the milestones of life sympathetically recorded by Wilder--growing up, love and marriage, and death. The plot outline which follows gives a brief statement of the events which take place in each section of the play. Sections are marked according to the French scenes involved. Division into French scenes is helpful in planning rehearsals and cutting the script.

#### Act One--"Daily Life"

##### French Scenes:

- 1, 2.--Introduction to town and some of the inhabitants by stage manager. Dr. Gibbs returning home after delivery of twins to family in Polish part of town.
- 3-6.--Preparation of breakfast at Gibbs house and Webb house. Children leave for school. Neighborly chat between Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb.

7-9.--Further information about town by Professor Willard and Editor Webb.

10-13.--George speaks to Emily on way home from school. Signal arranged. Emily concerned about her attractiveness.

14.--Emily assists George with his homework.

15-17.--George reprimanded by father. Ladies gossip on way home from choir practice. Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs discuss possibility of a holiday.

18-21.--George and sister intrigued by beauty of the night. Constable speaks to Editor Webb. Emily restless.

#### Act Two--"Love and Marriage"

Time: three years later

22, 23.--Parallel scene to first scene of Act One. Stage Manager, Howie Newsome, and Si Crowell discussing impending marriage of George and Emily.

24-29.--Breakfast. George decides to visit Webb's on wedding day. Serious talk with Mr. Webb. George not allowed to see his bride until ceremony.

30-35.--Flashback to George and Emily proposal scene.

36-39.--Description of wedding preparations by Stage Manager. George experiences panic immediately prior to ceremony. Emily experiences doubts concerning wedding. Doubts pass and wedding takes place.

#### Act Three--Death and the continuance of life

Time: nine years later

40, 41.--Description of cemetery and its inhabitants by Stage Manager. Joe Stoddard and Sam Craig discuss the recent death of Emily following birth of second child.

42-44.--Emily greets the dead as she arrives at graveyard. She questions the nature of death. Decides she would like to return to life for one happy day.

45-47.--Flashback to her twelfth birthday. Sees youthful and happy parents, but recognizes that they will age rapidly and experience deaths of both their children. Knowledge of future forces her to realize that one can not look back or attempt to recapture the days of one's youth.

48-50.--With discovery of importance of the ordinary events in life, Emily returns to her grave and is welcomed by the other dead. George returns to graveyard and falls on her grave.

In cutting the script, it seems apparent that the following might be omitted or abbreviated without distorting the meaning of the play: the newspaper delivery scenes at the beginning of Acts I and II, or, alternatively, the milk delivery scenes; the background information scene with Professor Willard and Editor Webb; some of the narration by the Stage Manager; and some of the dialogue between Joe Stoddard and Sam Craig in Act III. Additional line cuts would help to tighten the script for a Readers

Theatre production of reasonable length.

#### BACKGROUND AND THEME(S)

The premature death of Emily suggests the unexpected and fate-directed events which are part of the human experience. According to Thornton Wilder:

Our Town is not offered as a picture of life in a New Hampshire village; or as a speculation about the conditions of life after death . . . . It is an attempt to find a value above all price for the smallest events in our daily life.<sup>62</sup>

If, as in the case of Emily, life can be so fleeting, it is important to emphasize the value of every moment in which one lives.

Our Town depicts the ordinary events which happen in the lives of everyone. As R. Burbank has noted:

The little New Hampshire town of Grovers Corners is Wilder's microcosm. His hero is human life itself; the universal forces acting upon it are Time, Nature, and Death; the forces acting from within it are Instinct, Love, Despair, and Apathy. Its scenes of daily life, love, marriage, and burial of the dead are the cyclical life rituals of men in all times and places.<sup>63</sup>

Yet despite the fact that these ordinary events recur innumerable in life, Wilder notes that for each individual, if he would only realize it, the events are fresh and new:

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<sup>62</sup>Thornton Wilder, Three Plays: Our Town, The Skin of Our Teeth, the Matchmaker, with a Preface (New York: Harper Row Publishers, 1957), p. xii.

<sup>63</sup>Rex Burbank, Thornton Wilder, (New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1961), p. 95.

Every action which has ever taken place--every thought, every emotion--has taken place only once, at one moment in time and place. "I love you," "I rejoice," "I suffer," have been said and felt many billions of times, and never twice the same. Every person who has ever lived has lived an unbroken succession of unique occasions. Yet the more one is aware of this individuality in experience (innumerable! innumerable!) the more one becomes attentive to what these disparate moments have in common, to repetitive patterns.<sup>64</sup>

M. Goldstein summarizes the main point of the play as:

The belief that the cause of man's unhappiness is not his failure to achieve or sustain greatness, but his failure to delight in the beauty of ordinary existence.<sup>65</sup>

The task of the oral interpreter is to show how the ordinary events presented in the play achieve their poignancy. This subject cannot be entirely separated from the style and innovative quality of the play, to be discussed later. The theme, however, is clearly stated by Emily near the end of the play. She sees life from an entirely different perspective after death and is able to communicate this perspective to the audience. Burbank explains the nature of this new vision:

Emily can appreciate the value of life because she has lost it. From the vantage point of eternity she sees that it is largely wasted and that its tragedy lies in the failure of human beings to feel--as she does as she observes the scene of her twelfth birthday--the full intensity of each moment good or bad, through the agency of consciousness, love. Her agonized realization of this sends her back to the Dead, where the moment and the human passions have no

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<sup>64</sup>Wilder, Three Plays, p. x.

<sup>65</sup>Malcolm Goldstein, The Art of Thornton Wilder (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 105.

existence and are therefore, not painful to contemplate.<sup>66</sup>

Death is seen as the final step in the ritual of life-- a step which in a sense gives meaning to life. It is through death or the contemplation of death that we are reminded of the value of every moment of life.<sup>67</sup> D.

Haberman expresses this view in the statement:

The meaning of life is revealed in living--hot bath as well as great festivals--and that living must be done with an awareness that it can cease at any time. Life must not be lived as though it were a mere passage to something better. It cannot be embraced with reservation. The sorrow is that it has no permanence.<sup>68</sup>

Other themes or sub-themes have been suggested near the end of the section on "Oral Interpretation Through Readers Theatre" in Chapter II, page 17. The growing up of two representative young people could be considered one of the themes of the play; the aims and aspirations of youth could be considered another. Related to the growing up process is the nature of life itself--the process of growing old and the concept of the cycle of life. Despite the admonition of Wilder that the play is not offered as a picture of life in a small town, this somewhat sentimentalized aspect is still apparent to the

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<sup>66</sup>Burbank, Thornton Wilder, p. 94.

<sup>67</sup>Donald Haberman, The Plays of Thornton Wilder: A Critical Study (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), p. 11.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 48

reader and does a great deal to explain the play's appeal.

### CHARACTERIZATION

Our Town, it has been suggested, is intended to be representative of life in general. Haberman points out that Wilder intended the play to be allegorical, "like a twentieth century Everyman."<sup>69</sup> The characters of Everyman, such as Knowledge, Discretion, Good Deeds, Fellowship, and Strength, represent moral qualities or general concepts. In a similar way, Haberman points out, Emily and George represent simply a boy and a girl anywhere. He further states:

This kind of characterization determines what happens on stage. It is the reason why a complete marriage proposal is not presented. Emily and George do not have personalities sufficiently distinct to participate in so individual a procedure. When anybody marries, his wedding is much like that of anybody else.<sup>69</sup>

Later he adds that:

If the characters of Our Town are everybody, then their speech, although it is full of specific detail, is also without individual character. Mrs. Gibbs' speech is barely different from Mrs. Webb's or from Emily's . . . . Wilder deliberately cultivated speech patterns for his characters that were similar to each other.<sup>70</sup>

In reading the play, the similarity of speech patterns among the various characters is apparent. Emphasis is given to a colloquial and conversational style of speech

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

which would be identified with the type of characters represented in the play.

### The Stage Manager

The Stage Manager performs almost as a chorus in Greek Theatre. This gives great importance to his role. His functions are to provide narration for purposes of tying events of the play together and to provide a commentary which leads or guides the audience toward an understanding of the themes of the play. Through the omniscience of the Stage Manager, the audience perceives the shifts of time--past, present, and future--which occur in the play.

At the outset, the Stage Manager introduces the characters and sets the stage. The audience immediately recognizes the need to listen, to become involved, to imagine the scene, since no realistic setting is provided. Appealing to the imagination of the audience is an important function of the Stage Manager.

His commentary throughout the play suggests the central theme of the cycle and continuum of life. The introduction of Professor Willard provides some background through references to the early fossil life of the area and to our early forebears. The further characterization of the town by Mr. Webb in this scene helps to establish the universal aspects of the play, since we can see that the activities carried on in "our town" are ordinary and

everyday. The people, too, are classified statistically as people everywhere, according to politics and religion.

The cycle of life is stressed in the first act by the Stage Manager's references to Babylon and Greece. The "real life" of these ancient peoples, he suggests, was not vastly different from the "real life" of 20th century society. That is, "Every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney,--same as here."<sup>71</sup>

The Stage Manager acts as a transitional link between scenes. He announces the end of each act, and clarifies the time lapse at the beginning of the next act. Again in Act II the events become universal through his commentary. Three years have passed, the children have grown, and the mountain has worn down ever so minutely. Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb are still maintaining their morning routines.

In Act II, the time sequence is interrupted to record the beginnings of the romance between George and Emily. The Stage Manager, according to the original script, assumes the role of Mr. Morgan for this scene. (In the present Readers Theatre production a separate reader was used for this character in order to provide an additional student role). Before the flashback scene

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<sup>71</sup>Thornton Wilder, Our Town, ed. by F. Y. Thompson (London: Longmans, 1966), Act I, p. 33.

begins, the Stage Manager invites the audience to reflect back nostalgically to the days of their youth and to think about their first loves.

At the wedding, the Stage Manager offers further comments in his sermon and at the ceremony. His comments again underscore the theme of the play. He refers to the real hero, which is the future generation. Almost simultaneously he refers to the millions of ancestors to remind the audience of life's fleeting yet continuing quality. His somewhat sardonic comments about marriage help to suggest the universality of this event.

In Act III, the Stage Manager helps to make an extraordinary scene credible. His comments about eternity assist in the development of the scene. His statement, "There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being,"<sup>72</sup> suggests the idea of the continuum of life. He warns Emily about the danger of returning to the past, especially if one has foreknowledge of the future. Those who have tried to return to life soon come back to death. At the end of the play he refers symbolically to the stars "doing their old, crisscross journeys in the sky."<sup>73</sup>

The Stage Manager should be a folksy speaker with a sympathetic manner. He should be unobtrusively

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., III, p. 94.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., III, p. 118.

in control of the action, but should not attempt to deliver a didactic message.

### The young people

The young people, as suggested, represent youth everywhere. They attend school, play baseball, chatter to each other, grow up, and think of marriage. Their parents, as parents do generally, express concern over the decisions made by their children. Their concern is particularly apparent prior to the wedding scene in Act II.

George Gibbs appears to be an ordinary but very personable young man. Evidently he is more successful at baseball than at school. His next door neighbor, Emily Webb, is bright at school and is able to assist George with his homework. At the outset, Emily appears to be rather self-centered; by the end of the play, however, her thoughts are for her husband and children.

The second act presents the children as older and more mature. We are given a flashback scene to show how the romance began. The incomplete wedding ceremony, along with the interruptions of the Stage Manager, suggests again the universal nature of the event.

In the third act, Emily is able to observe people and events with particular insight. Her desire to return to life for a day is quickly thwarted by her realization that the imaginative quality of life is gone when one can see into the future. Part of the meaning of life seems

to be that life simply goes on without particular concern about what is to come. Emily, upon returning to her grave, comments upon life in an emotional statement which provides a summary of the main theme of the play:

It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another. I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed . . . . Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you. Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it--every, every minute?<sup>74</sup>

George, meanwhile, is left as a representative of life. His final appearance in the scene is deeply touching as he falls grief stricken at the grave of Emily.

The other young people mentioned in the play serve to represent typical youth as well. The baseball players, for example, tease George as he is about to be married; Wally complains about his homework; Rebecca, however, in her description of the Jane Crofut letter, helps to universalize the action and to give a new dimension to the play. The address on the letter finishes with the words:

The United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God--that's what it said on the envelope.<sup>75</sup>

Haberman comments that "Rebecca's final statement in Act One hints at a meaning that is religious in feeling without depending on a Biblical text or dogma of a special

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<sup>74</sup>Ibid., III, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., I, pp. 46-47.

faith or sect."<sup>76</sup> Later he adds:

These events (Act II to end of play) appear slight if they are considered separately, but together they become meaningful, especially after they are summed up in Rebecca's speech about the letter addressed to Jane Crofut. They are given their place in the mind of God.<sup>77</sup>

### The Adults

Similarly the adults in the play represent the adult world in general. Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb carry out their duties regularly each day. The Stage Manager refers to this daily routine in Act II. He states:

I don't have to point out to the women in my audience that those ladies they see before them, both of those ladies cooked three meals a day--one of 'em for twenty years, the other for forty--and no summer vacation. They brought up two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house--and never a nervous breakdown.<sup>78</sup>

Mr. Webb, as mentioned earlier, provides some of the detailed background to the town. Both he and Dr. Gibbs represent paternal figures. They are kindly, intelligent, and sympathetic. Dr. Gibbs' lecture to George about cutting the wood is sensitive and effective. The listener is able to conjure up similar experiences from his own memories.

Other adults appear on the scene from time to time. They represent the people of our town or every town. Some

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<sup>76</sup>Haberman, The Plays, pp. 36-37.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>78</sup>Wilder, Our Town, II, p. 53.

are stock characters, such as the town drunk Simon Stimson, and the local gossip, Mrs. Soames. Included as well are the milkman, the paper boy, and the town constable.

#### SETTING AND INNOVATIVE QUALITY OF THE PLAY

It has been noted earlier that Readers Theatre may dispense with some of the conventions of formal theatre, such as sets, costumes, make-up, and memorized lines. Wilder, too, has dispensed with some of the conventions of theatre. He has referred to himself as "not an innovator but a rediscoverer of forgotten goods and I hope a remover of obtrusive bric-a-brac."<sup>79</sup>

The purpose of such innovation is to involve the audience imaginatively in the events of the play and to focus its attention on the words and meaning. The absence of specific sets and the rearrangement of time, for example, tend to move the play from a particular time and place to the level of universals. Burbank refers to Wilder's belief that theatre is pretense. According to Burbank,

He (Wilder) contended that, since the theatre is a world of pretense straining towards a general truth, scenery and sets which tie the action to a specific time and place and which are intended to effect a fourth-wall realism tend to deprive the audience of its imaginative participation and require it to accept as real what it knows is not . . . . In this, of course, he was supported by Aristotle, who placed scenery last in the hierarchy of parts of a play, and by the Chinese, whose classic drama had only

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<sup>79</sup>Wilder, Three Plays, p. xiv.

placards to identify the scenery.<sup>80</sup>

This view of the unimportance of sets is further supported by John Gassner:

The primary fact to recognize is that scenery is basically a luxury, not a necessity. In my experience, scenery has made an important contribution to only a handful of plays; it has done great disservice to dozens.<sup>81</sup>

Wilder's concept of sets is not dissimilar from the view of Readers Theatre which suggests that nothing extraneous should interfere with the process of interpretation by the reader and the hoped for empathy with the audience. Elaborating on this concept Wilder says:

Each individual's assertion to an absolute reality can only be inner, very inner. And the method of staging finds its justification . . . not in things, not in "scenery." Moliere said that for the theatre all he needed was a platform and a passion or two. The climax of this play needs only five square feet of boarding and the passion to know what life means to us.<sup>82</sup>

Sets in a Readers Theatre production suggest the nature of the scene and provide a logical basis for movement. The basic set used in the present Readers Theatre production consisted of chairs which were arranged for purposes of suggesting locations to the audience. For example, an arrangement of chairs set at stage right represented the kitchen of the Gibbs' home; an arrangement

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<sup>80</sup>Burbank, Thornton Wilder, pp. 86- 87.

<sup>81</sup>John Gassner, Producing the Play, rev. ed., (New York: The Dryden Press, Publishers, 1955), p. 227.

<sup>82</sup>Wilder, Three Plays, p. xii.

of chairs at stage left represented the kitchen of the Webb's home.<sup>83</sup>

Wilder's rearrangement of the time sequence gives added interest to the play. The variations of time help the audience to focus on the ordinary events of life which are so important to the total idea of the play. The importance of these events is stressed by the narrator, who suggests that the events are happening over and over again at different times and with different people.

Burbank notes that:

We are reminded . . . that this is a theatre play as the Stage Manager points to non-existent properties which the audience is asked to imagine exist. And even as he is giving his detailed factual account of the town and its people, he violates the usual limitations of time sequence by using past, present, and future tenses concurrently; and Wilder achieves thereby on stage a present that encompasses all time--the action becomes an "Act in Eternity."<sup>84</sup>

The effect of theatrical innovation is further suggested by Parrish:

We might consider also the lesson from Thornton Wilder's, Our Town, in which Theatre conventions are almost completely ignored and the performance resembles a rehearsal by small-town amateurs. Properties are make-shift, and when lacking the action is carried on in pantomime. One actor shifts back and forth between acting and addressing the audience as narrator and commentator. It is all highly unorthodox, but highly successful as serious drama.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Diagrams and an explanation of stage arrangements for the Readers Theatre productions are include in Chapter IV.

<sup>84</sup>Burbank, Thornton Wilder, p. 89.

<sup>85</sup>Parrish, Reading Aloud, p. 364.

## SUITABILITY OF THE PLAY FOR READERS THEATRE

In commenting on the suitability of the play for Readers Theatre, it is useful to refer back to the criteria for selecting material as suggested in the Readers Theatre Handbook.<sup>86</sup> Our Town fulfills the first requirement: providing evocative power. The play evokes an imaginative response on the part of the audience. There is, as well, an emotional appeal which stems from a personal response to the characters, situations, and language of the play. Its allegorical nature promotes a recognition and personal application of what is heard. The proposal, the wedding, and the graveyard scenes, for example, arouse an empathic response from the audience. The familiar and conversational nature of the language gives such scenes an air of intimacy. At the end, the audience can respond to Emily's discovery of the importance of living every moment of life.

A second criterion for choosing material is the presence of interesting characters. Although lifestyles have changed somewhat from the unaffected simplicity of George and Emily to the more sophisticated and unsentimental aspect of today's young people, the characters still have an appeal. They are sufficiently familiar to enable the reader or listener to identify with them. They experience routine events, such as going to school, talking to friends,

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<sup>86</sup>Coger and White, Handbook, pp. 22-25.

and planning for a holiday, which are part of the life experience of everyone. At the same time one is intrigued both by the format of the play and by the situations of the characters, especially in Act III as they look back from the dead.

Action, both inward and outward, is a third criterion for selection of material. Our Town has a sufficient variety of events to hold audience interest. According to Haberman:

The play interested because every few minutes there was a new bold effect in presentation methods. . . . I don't mean boldness or oddity for their own sakes, but merely as the almost indispensable reinforcement and refreshment of a play that was never intended to be interesting for its story alone, or even for its background.<sup>87</sup>

He illustrates this point by referring to the wedding scene, which records an experience familiar to all.

Interest in the scene is sustained through such variations as the use of simple setting, the assumption by the Stage Manager of the minister's role, the thinking aloud passages of Mrs. Webb, George, Emily, and the Stage Manager, and the interruptions of Mrs. Soames. The variety of action and style helps to ensure the interest of the material.

The fourth criterion is the presence of enriched language which helps to create the mood and tone of the work. B. Grebanier has stated that "by some kind of magic it (Our Town) moves comfortably in an atmosphere that is

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<sup>87</sup>Haberman, The Plays, p. 77.

largely homely and sometimes effortlessly sublime."<sup>88</sup> Wilder has managed through the conversational quality of the language to create this folksy atmosphere. Some of the Stage Manager's speeches are effective for the wealth of detail which he introduces into the scene. He repeats some of the thematic ideas throughout the play in order to give them emphasis. An example of this is his reference to the mutability of human life in some of the narration of Act I in which he states: "I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us."<sup>89</sup> In the second act he refers to the passage of time with the words:

Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to, without their heart fluttering a little.

All that can happen in a thousand days.<sup>90</sup>

Wilder's repetition of "thousand," and his use of the phrase "a thousand days" instead of three years is effective in emphasizing the speed with which time passes and the importance of each day one lives.

The fifth criterion, wholeness, is immediately

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<sup>88</sup>Bernard Grebanier, Thornton Wilder, Pamphlets on American Writers Number 34 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 31.

<sup>89</sup>Wilder, Our Town, I, p. 33.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., II, p. 51.

achieved through presentation of the entire play, carefully cut to maintain the essential material. The Readers Theatre script of Our Town which follows in Chapter IV results from approximately 300 line cuts which were made without altering the unity of the play. The cuts made possible a presentation time of approximately 65 minutes.

### SUMMARY OF CHAPTER III

The plot outline enables the director to decide what scenes in the play may be reasonably cut or modified without destroying wholeness. Scenes which present important events in the lives of the characters should be kept reasonably intact. The characters of the play were seen to be representative of people in general.

The innovative qualities of Our Town should help students to see that theatre need not adhere strictly to the conventions usually associated with formal theatre. Wilder has written a play which deliberately eliminates sets, manipulates time, makes direct appeals to the audience, and employs narration. The effect appears to be an increase in audience involvement in the imaginative aspects of the play. In a similar way, Readers Theatre looks for an empathic response from the audience. Thus Our Town appeared to be suitable for either a Readers Theatre production of the whole play suitably cut, or as part of a thematic treatment using specific French scenes from the play.

## CHAPTER IV

### DIRECTOR'S SCRIPT

#### A NOTE ON THE DIRECTOR'S SCRIPT

The Director's Script provides a detailed preliminary plan to the staging of the Readers Theatre presentation. Movements and directoral comments are included in prompt copy format. All cuts from and additions to the original text have been shown. Also included is a rehearsal schedule which shows the activities carried out at each rehearsal. Explanatory comments follow the schedule. A cast list indicates the participants and assistants.

#### Abbreviations and terms used in the Director's Script

- D - down
- C - center
- U - up
- S - stage
- DS - downstage
- US - upstage
- CS - center stage
- R - right
- L - left
- DRC - downstage right of center
- X - cross (to)
- Q - cue
- S.M. (A) or S.M. (B) - the role of Stage Manager was divided into two parts, (A) and (B)
- apron - projecting DS portion of stage
- proscenium R or L - R or L proscenium arch
- wings - extreme R and L sides of stage (usually beyond view of audience)

FF - full front - actor is facing directly to audience  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  R or L -  $\frac{1}{4}$  R or L open to audience  
 PR or PL - profile R or L - R or L refers to direction speaker turns to show profile to audience  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  R or L -  $\frac{3}{4}$  R or L closed to audience  
 FB - full back - actor has back to audience<sup>91</sup>

French scenes are numbered on the left margin of the Director's Script. Beats are marked with a vertical line indicating the point that the movement takes place, and a horizontal arrow drawn to the stage direction in the script.

Lighting areas which were possible for the production included SR, SL, CS, and DSC. The areas lighted are referred to in the underlined lighting cues throughout the script. Figure 4 below illustrates the actor's direction of stance, and figure 5 illustrates stage and lighting areas for the performances.

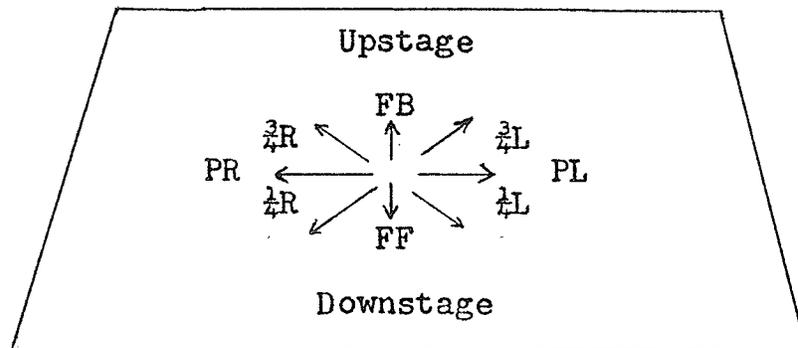


Fig. 4.--Direction of stance.

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<sup>91</sup>Fran Averett Tanner, Basic Drama Projects (Pocatello, Idaho: Clark Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 43-45.

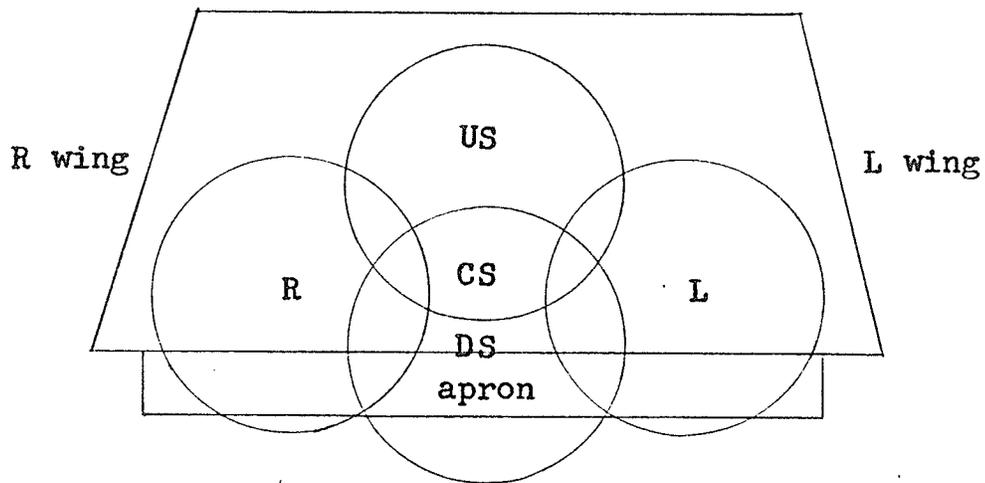


Fig. 5.--Stage and lighting areas.

#### Arrangement of stage and cast

A sketch of the stage and cast arrangement for Acts I and II (excluding the wedding scene) is given in Figure 6. A simple arrangement of chairs and stools suggests the two houses. The high rotating stools suggest the second floor rooms of George and Emily. They were able to rotate towards each other or towards the audience for the scenes taking place upstairs. A bench placed in front of the Webb house represented the garden seat. Chairs were arranged as far DS as possible to provide a closer relationship with the audience. The area between the two houses became the central acting area for the Main Street scenes. Stage Managers were located near the R and L proscenium arches to enable them to observe the scenes and to have easy access to the DS areas. Chairs for the remaining characters were set in two diagonal

rows, mainly for aesthetic reasons. Characters not directly involved in a scene were less conspicuous on the diagonal than if they had been placed directly facing the audience. The seating arrangement was designed to facilitate entrances and exits. Dr. and Mrs. Gibbs and Mr. and Mrs. Webb, for example, were located in the DS diagonal chairs to give them easy access to their respective houses.

Figure 7 gives the arrangement for the wedding scene at the end of Act II. Stage hands quickly arranged the chairs into two rows to represent the pews of a church. A lectern was placed at CS for the Stage Manager (A) in his role as minister. Characters entered from R and L wings depending on whether they were to sit on the bride's or groom's side.

Figure 8 gives the Act III setting. Three rows of chairs at DSR represented the cemetery. An empty chair was left for Emily at the L side of the front row. Mrs. Soames was placed in the L chair of row 2 so that she could be readily seen by the audience during her Act III dialogue. The diagonal row of chairs was replaced on the L side for the living characters. Two chairs were placed DL to represent the Webb's house for the birthday flashback.

The rehearsal schedule and explanatory comments follow the illustrations.

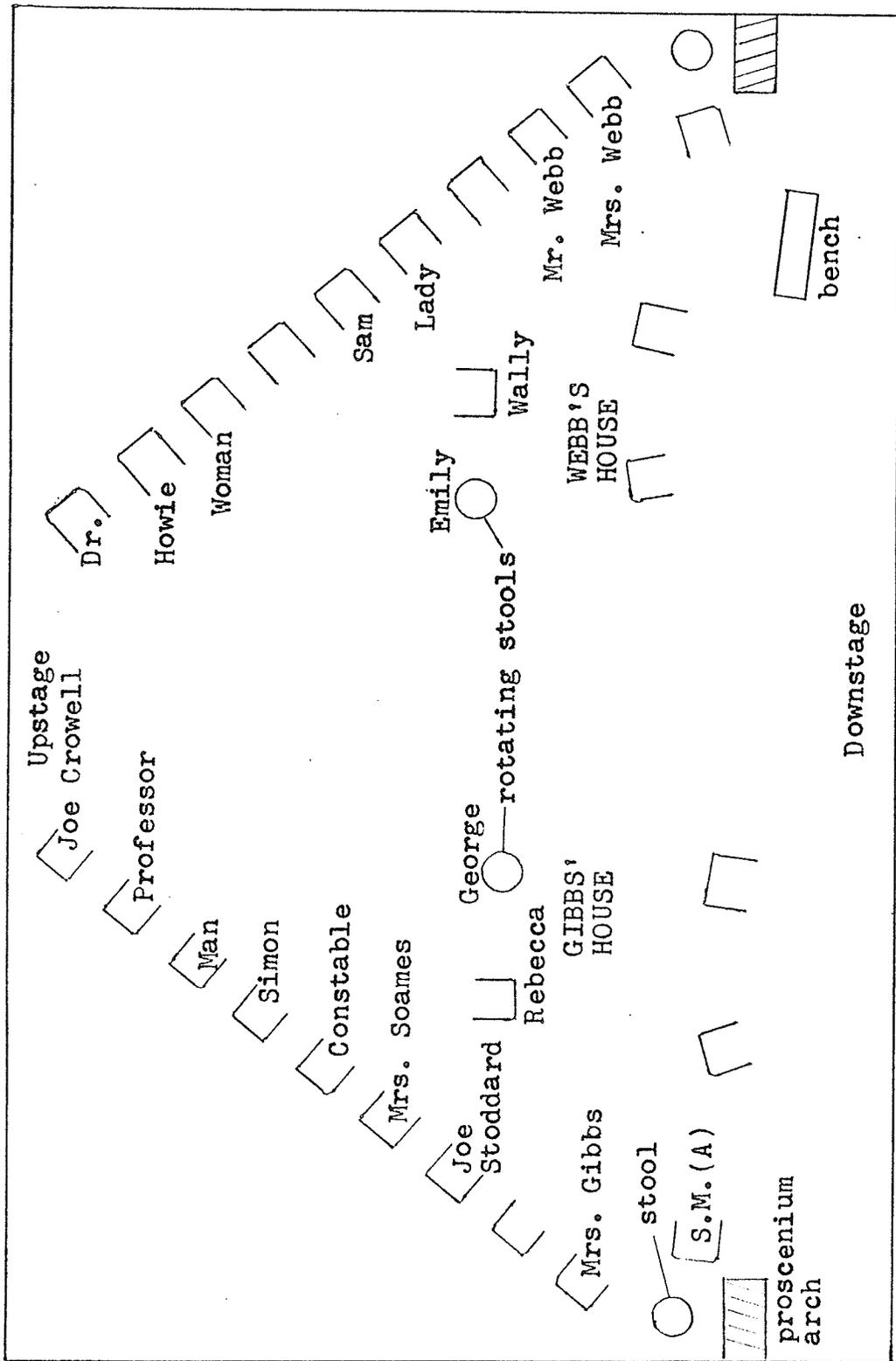


Fig. 6.--Stage and cast arrangement (Acts I and II).

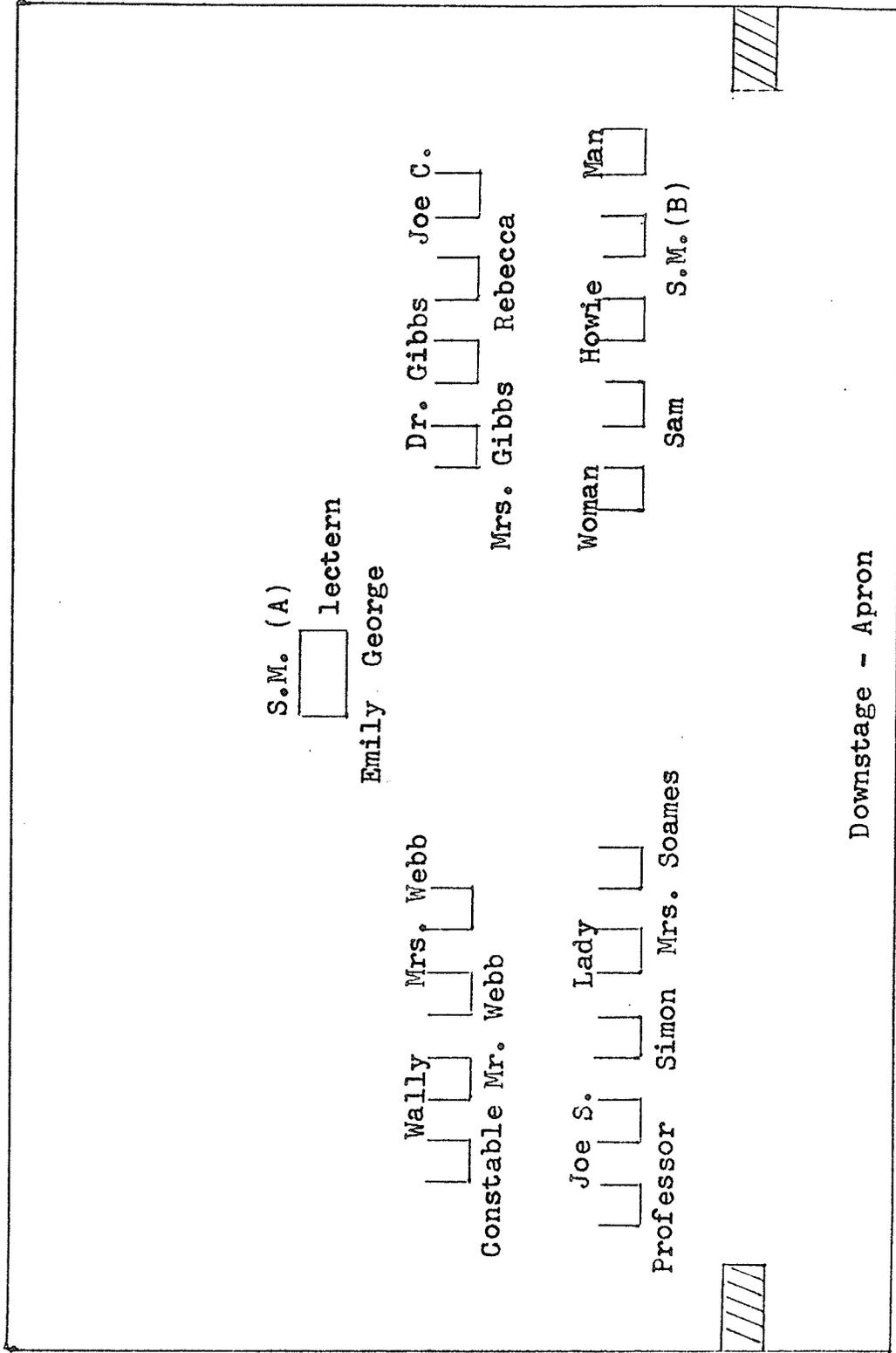


Fig. 7.--Stage and cast arrangement for wedding scene - Act II.

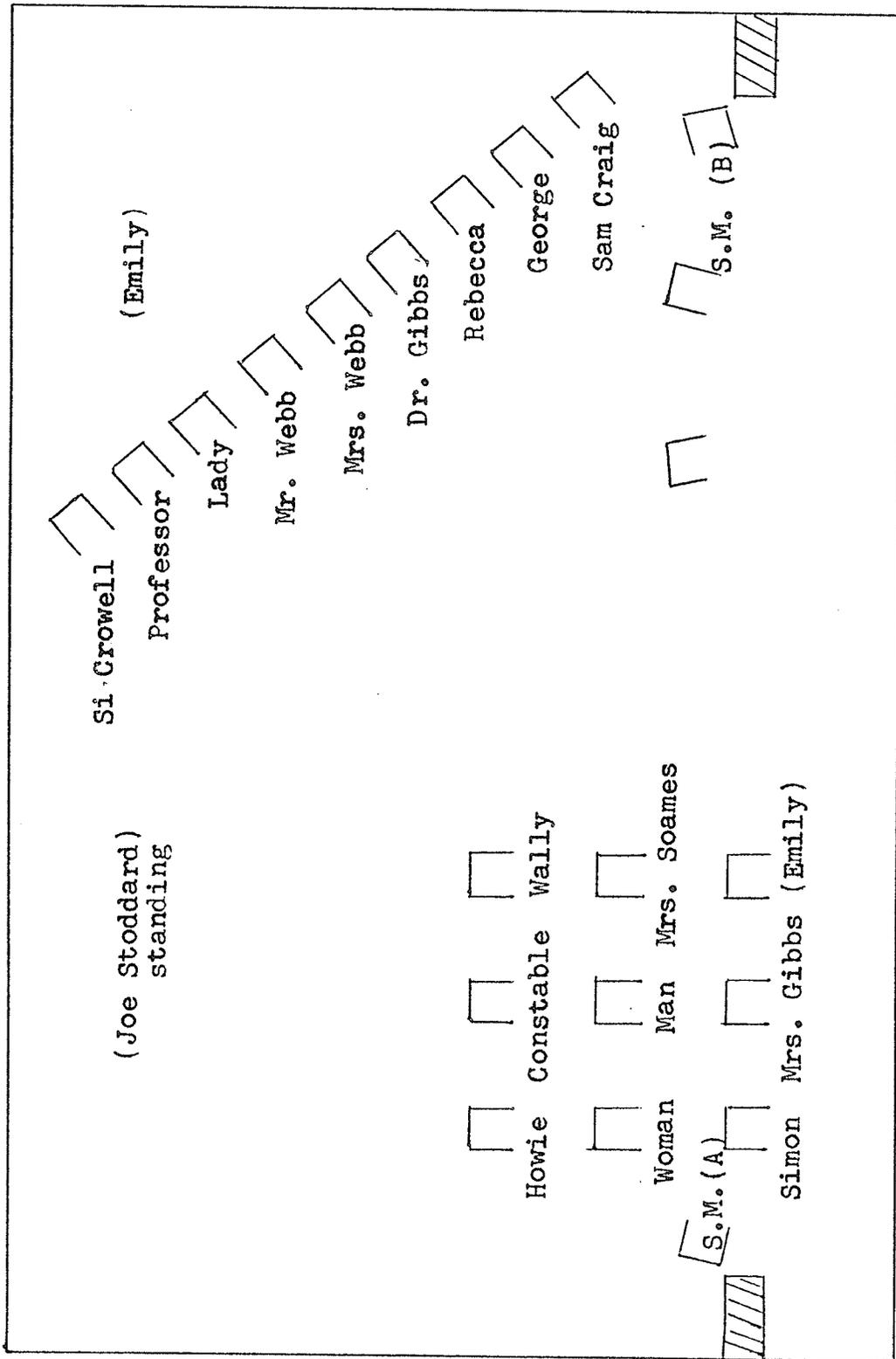


Fig. 8.--Stage and cast arrangement for Act III.

TABLE 1  
REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

Period #	Major Activities	Special Emphasis
1	Introduction to Readers Theatre - begin initial reading of Act I	casting, cutting script
2 & 3	Combined period - complete reading of Act I and II. Discuss oral interpretation	casting, cutting script, focus, projection of voice, use of script
4	Read Act III - Discuss oral interpretation	casting, cutting script, blocking, movement, director's role, projection
5	Mime, improvisation, theatre games	casting, confidence
6	Block and rehearse Act I	movement
7	Block and rehearse Act II	movement
8	Block and rehearse Act III	movement, force
9 & 10	Combined period - complete run-through	movement, force
11	Discussion - review cuts in script, use of representative costume, stance	muscle tone, posture, confidence
12	Work with minor characters	intensity, force, articulation, interpretation
13	Work with major characters	intensity, force, articulation, interpretation

TABLE 1--Continued

Period #	Major Activities	Special Emphasis
14	Play recordings of professional Readers Theatre production of <u>John Brown's Body</u>	listening, use of voice, variety of expression
15 & 16	Combined period - complete run-through	movement, projection, audience contact, focus
17	Theory and practice in oral interpretation	Voice: pitch, pace, projection, pause, emphasis, force, articulation Body: muscle tone, movement, posture, confidence, gesture and expression, empathy
18	Discussion - theme, characterization	interpretation
19	Final rehearsal - Act I	movement, focus, projection
20	Final rehearsal - Act II	movement, focus, projection
21	Final rehearsal - Act III Dynamics of performance	movement, focus, projection, stage presence
22 & 23	Performance	empathy
24	Evaluation of process	questionnaire
Extra	Individual rehearsals as requested or needed	

Explanation of  
rehearsal schedule

During rehearsal periods 1-4, all students read aloud. Parts were rotated frequently. The director made notes on each student as he read, to be used later in deciding the assignment of roles. Students were asked during each of the first four rehearsals to suggest possible places where the script could be cut. The brief time allocated for discussion during the first four periods enabled the teacher to touch on the background necessary for oral interpretation.

The improvisation, mime, and theatre games session in period 5 was intended to reduce student self consciousness and to give a different perspective for casting. The following activities were included: walking--conditions change from snow and cold to sunshine and warmth; catching--using tennis ball, base ball, basket ball, ping-pong ball, lead ball (all imaginary); miming--derived from Our Town, including lighting a wood stove, chopping wood, setting table, cooking breakfast, delivering milk, tending a horse, walking to school, returning from school, going for a milkshake, mourning at graveside for loss of a loved one; and imagining--students created mimes in groups, imagining a basic object to change as it was passed from one hand to the next.

Emphasis during rehearsals 6-8 was on having

students learn their various positions and movements on stage. In addition to rehearsing movements, students were instructed on how to project voices and develop force. Rehearsals 9 and 10 consolidated the movements, and students were stopped if voice projection needed improvement.

Rehearsal 11 was used to clarify all the cuts that had been made in the original text. At this time, too, students were asked to suggest appropriate costuming. It was generally agreed that girls would wear dresses and boys would wear shirts and slacks, not jeans. Older men in the play would wear jackets and ties, as would George at the wedding scene. The remaining time in the period was spent on discussion and emphasis on the importance of posture and muscle tone to satisfactory interpretation.

Separate rehearsals were held with major and minor characters. The cast was divided in this manner to ensure some individual instruction in projection and interpretation for each participant.

The purpose of listening to the professional recordings of the Readers Theatre production of John Brown's Body was to give students the opportunity to hear how effective the human voice can be when used well, and to give them some further idea of the nature and potential of Readers Theatre.

The second major run-through concentrated on

movement, projection, and focus. Comments on individual performances were written by the director during the rehearsal and given to the students at the end of the rehearsal.

Rehearsal 17 attempted to consolidate the understanding students had of the various theoretical and practical concepts presented up to this point in the project. This was essentially an instruction and demonstration period.

Rehearsal 18 allowed for a general discussion in which students were asked to comment on the nature of the character each was to portray. The discussion moved to themes of the play and to comments on the previous run-through. The purpose was to assist students in the interpretation of the play. The discussion was delayed to this point in order not to impose interpretations on the readers.

The next three rehearsals were intended to give a final practice session to each act of the play. Attention was given to all aspects of performance, particularly to focus. After the final rehearsal, students were advised of some of the things which contribute to successful performance. First, every performer must contribute to the total performance; that is, the group must work as a team. Second, an empathic response from the audience is often achieved simply by the observable involvement

of the performer. If the performer is alive and responsive to the literature, and is able to convey a sense of enthusiasm to the audience, then he is almost assured of success. In keeping with this view, the performer's general appearance on stage, whether in the scene or not, should reflect his intense involvement. Appearance is marred by such things as careless posture, gum chewing, too relaxed a stance, and blank facial expression. All performers should listen carefully to the lines of others and respond to them mentally at all times. Those in a scene should be alert to their cues at all times; otherwise, the pace may drag. Those who are not in a scene must avoid distracting the audience since this would upstage the readers and detract from the performance.

A number of additional rehearsals was held with lead characters upon their request or if they appeared to need additional coaching.

The additional activities listed in Table 2 were assigned to students who had volunteered for them or who did not wish to participate in the reading.

TABLE 2  
CAST AND ACTIVITY LIST

Characters	Group One	Group Two
Stage Manager (A)	John Jorgenson	Reuben Banman
Stage Manager (B)	Bob Gessler	Margaret Quatrel
Dr. Gibbs	Brian Kroeker	Robert Schumann
Joe and Si Crowell	George Friesen	Ian Shaw
Howie Newsome	James Evaschuk	Tom Breman
Mrs. Gibbs	Angie Lekkas	Beth Haarsma
Mrs. Webb	Jackie van Leuwen	Hilda Rempel
George Gibbs	Danny Naturk	Henry Enns
Rebecca Gibbs	Joanne Gresch	Susan Irwin
Wally Webb	Mark Doyle	Jack Simpson
Emily Webb	Alice Buikema	Elaine Topor
Professor Willard	James Evaschuk	Mike Wold
Mr. Webb	Fred Hirschfeld	Les Chuy
Woman in balcony	Joanne Gresch	Ilona Glockner
Man in auditorium	Robert Palsson	Greg Hygard
Simon Stimson	Mark Pearce	Greg Hygard
Mrs. Soames	Cathy Sawula	Cindy Shaski
Constable Warren	Bob Gessler	Randy Rebeck
Sam Craig	Darrell Guyda	Tom Breman
Joe Stoddard	Martin Natuik	Mike Wold
Mr. Morgan	Georges-Andre Fambay	Ian Shaw
Lady	Joanne Gresch	Ilona Glockner
<b>Activities</b>		
Tape recording		Mike Kopachena
Video-tape		Gary Hogue
Script assistant	Rick Schmidt	Wayne Glowacki
Lighting		Ian Shaw
Stage hands	Darrell Guyda	Richard Briskie
	Martin Natuik	Jack Simpson
		Victor Baerg

## DIRECTOR'S SCRIPT

## ACT ONE

No curtain.

No scenery.

The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light.

~~Presently the STAGE MANAGER, hat on and pipe in mouth, enters and begins placing a table and three chairs down stage left, and a table and three chairs downstage right. He also places a low bench at the corner of what will be the Webb house, left.~~

"Left" and "right" are from the point of view of the actor facing the audience. "Up" is towards the back wall.

~~As the house lights go down he has finished setting the stage and leaning against the right proscenium pillar watches the late arrivals in the audience.~~

~~When the auditorium is in complete darkness he speaks:~~

See figure 6 for diagram of stage set and initial arrangement of readers

Rebecca, George, Emily, and Wally seated  
FB

Light Q - blackout

Cast comes to their assigned places

Light Q - DC

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 Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced and directed by A. . . . (or: produced by A. . . . ; directed by B. . . .). In it you will see Miss C. . . . ; Miss D. . . . ; Miss E. . . . ; and Mr. F. . . . ; Mr. G. . . . ; Mr. H. . . . ; and many others. The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire—just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes. The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn.

A rooster crows.

→ S.M. (B) at CS

(B) The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there, behind our mount'in. The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go, doesn't it?

~~He stares at it for a moment, then goes upstage.~~

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here—

That is: parallel with the back wall.

is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Polish Town's across the tracks, and some Canuck families.

Toward the left.

→ point UC

→ point US, R to L

→ point to UR

- Over there is Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian. → point to R
- Methodist and Unitarian are over there. Baptist is down in the holla' by the river. → point to L
- Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks. → X UR
- Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement. → X UR
- ~~Bryan once made a speech from these very steps here.~~
- Along here's a row of stores. Hitching posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's going to come along in about five years—belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen . . . lives in the big white house up on the hill. → X from UR to UL along Main Street
- ~~Here's the grocery store and here's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. Most everybody in town manages to look into those two stores once a day.~~
- Public School's over yonder. High School's still farther over. Quarter of nine mornings, noontimes, and three o'clock afternoons, the hull town can hear the yelling and screaming from those school-yards. → point L
- He approaches the table and chairs downstage right.* → Light Q - add R
- This is our doctor's house,—Doc Gibbs'. This is the back door. → X DC
- ~~Two arched trellises, covered with vines and flowers, are pushed out, one by each proscenium pillar.~~
- ~~There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery.~~
- This is Mrs. Gibbs' garden. Corn . . . peas . . . beans . . . hollyhocks . . . heliotrope . . . and a lot of burdock. → X DRC
- Crosses the stage.* → X DLC
- In those days our newspaper come out twice a week—the Grover's Corners *Sentinel*—and this is Editor Webb's house. → Light Q - add L
- And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. Just like Mrs. Gibbs', only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too. Right here . . . 's a big butternut tree. → (B) exit to S.M. chair L
- ~~He looks upward, center stage.~~
- ~~He returns to his place by the right proscenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute.~~
- ~~Nice town, y'know what I mean?~~
- ~~Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s'far as we know.~~
- ~~The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680—they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbises and Herseys—same names as are around here now.~~
- (A) Well, as I said: it's about dawn. → (A) at DRC
- The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by

the tracks where a Polish mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up so as to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkin's is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston.

~~A train whistle is heard. The STAGE MANAGER takes out his watch and nods.~~

Naturally, out in the country—all around—there've been lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late.

[So—another day's begun.]

[There's Doc Gibbs comin' down Main Street now, comin' back from that baby case. And here's his wife comin' downstairs to get breakfast.]

MRS. GIBBS, a plump, pleasant woman in the middle thirties, comes "downstairs" right. She pulls up an imaginary window shade in her kitchen and starts to make a fire in her stove.

Doc Gibbs died in 1930. The new hospital's named after him.

Mrs. Gibbs died first—long time ago, in fact. She went out to visit her daughter, Rebecca, who married an insurance man in Canton, Ohio, and died there—pneumonia—but her body was brought back here. She's up in the cemetery there now—in with a whole mess of Gibbises and Herseys—she was Julia Hersey 'fore she married Doc Gibbs in the Congregational Church over there.

In our town we like to know the facts about everybody.

[There's Mrs. Webb, coming downstairs to get her breakfast, too.]

[—That's Doc Gibbs. Got that call at half past one this morning.]

[And there comes Joe Crowell, Jr., delivering Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*.]

→ (A) X DC

→ Dr. Gibbs enters UL  
→ (A) point UL then DR

→ Mrs. Gibbs enters  
→ kitchen DR. Mimes  
→ lighting stove and  
→ preparing breakfast

→ (A) point L

→ Mrs. Webb enters.

→ Same mime as Mrs. G.

→ (A) X to R proscenium

→ Joe enters from UR  
→ and X to CS

### Scene 1

DR. GIBBS has been coming along Main Street from the left. At the point where he would turn to approach his house, he stops, sets down his—imaginary—black bag, takes off his hat, and rubs his face with fatigue, using an enormous handkerchief.

MRS. WEBB, a thin, serious, crisp woman, has entered her kitchen, left, tying on an apron. She goes through the motions of putting wood into a stove, lighting it, and preparing breakfast.

Suddenly, JOE CROWELL, JR., eleven, starts down Main Street from the right, hurling imaginary newspapers into doorways.

Off-stage focus  
Joe speaking brightly

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

[Morning, Doc Gibbs.]

→ Dr. and Joe meet CS

DR. GIBBS:

Morning, Joe.

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Somebody been sick, Doc?

DR. GIBBS:

No. Just some twins born over in Polish Town.

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Do you want your paper now?

DR. GIBBS:

Yes, I'll take it.—Anything serious goin' on in the world since Wednesday?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Yessir. My schoolteacher, Miss Foster, 's getting married to a fella over in Concord.

DR. GIBBS:

I declare.—How do you boys feel about that?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Well, of course, it's none of my business—but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher, she ought to stay one.

DR. GIBBS:

How's your knee, Joe?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tells me when it's going to rain.

DR. GIBBS:

What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

No, sir.

DR. GIBBS:

Sure?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

Yessir.

DR. GIBBS:

Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE CROWELL, JR.:

No, sir. |

→ Joe X UR to R chairs

Bridge *Joe goes off. DR. GIBBS stands reading his paper.*

~~STAGE MANAGER:~~

~~Want to tell you something about that boy Joe Crowell there. Joe was awful bright—graduated from high school here, head of his class. So he got a scholarship to Massachusetts Tech. Graduated head of his class there, too. It was all wrote up in the Boston paper at the time. Goin' to be a great~~

Dr. Gibbs reads  
newspaper at CS

~~engineer, Joe was. But the war broke out and he died in France. All that education for nothing.~~

~~HOWIE NEWSOME:~~

~~Off left.~~

~~Giddap, Bessie! What's the matter with you today?~~

(A) still standing at  
R proscenium

STAGE MANAGER:

Here comes Howie Newsome, deliverin' the milk.

Sc. 2

~~HOWIE NEWSOME, about thirty, in overalls, comes along Main Street from the left, walking beside an invisible horse and wagon and carrying an imaginary rack with milk bottles. The sound of clinking milk bottles is heard. He leaves some bottles at Mrs. Webb's trellis, then, crossing the stage to Mrs. Gibbs', he stops center to talk to Dr. Gibbs.~~

Off-stage focus

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Morning, Doc.

→ Howie meets Doctor  
at CS. Howie stands  
to L of Doctor

DR. GIBBS:

Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Somebody sick?

DR. GIBBS:

Pair of twins over to Mrs. Goruslawski's.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Twins, eh? This town's gettin' bigger every year.

DR. GIBBS:

Goin' to rain, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME:

No, no. Fine day—that'll burn through. Come on, Bessie.

DR. GIBBS:

Hello Bessie.

~~He strokes the horse, which has remained up center.~~

How old is she, Howie?

~~HOWIE NEWSOME:~~

~~Going on seventeen. Bessie's all mixed up about the route ever since the Lockharts stopped takin' their quart of milk every day. She wants to leave 'em a quart just the same—keeps scolding me the hull trip.~~

~~He reaches Mrs. Gibbs' back door. She is waiting for him.~~

MRS. GIBBS:

Good morning, Howie.

→ Howie X DR to door  
of Gibbs house

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the street.

MRS. GIBBS:

Is he? Seems like you're late today.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes. Somep'n went wrong with separator. Don't know what 'twas.

*He passes Dr. Gibbs up center.*

[Doc!]

→ Howie X to UR chairs  
Pass by Doctor at  
CS

DR. GIBBS:

Howie!

MRS. GIBBS:

*Calling upstairs.*

[Children! Children! Time to get up.]

→ Mrs. G. turns FB to  
call children

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Come on, Bessie!

*He goes off right.*

(A) sits in S.M. chair  
by R proscenium

Sc. 3

MRS. GIBBS:

George! Rebecca!

*DR. GIBBS arrives at his back door and passes through the trellis into his house.*

MRS. GIBBS:

[Everything all right, Frank?]

→ Doctor enters house

DR. GIBBS:

Yes. I declare—easy as kittens.

On-stage focus

MRS. GIBBS:

Bacon'll be ready in a minute. Set down and drink your coffee. You can catch a couple hours' sleep this morning, can't you?

DR. GIBBS:

[Hm! . . . Mrs. Wentworth's coming at eleven. Guess I know what it's about, too. Her stummick ain't what it ought to be.]

→ Doctor sits in R  
chair. Mrs. G.  
standing

MRS. GIBBS:

All told, you won't get more'n three hours' sleep. Frank Gibbs, I don't know what's goin' to become of you. I do wish I could get you to go away someplace and take a rest. I think it would do you good.

MRS. WEBB:

Emileeee! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

MRS. GIBBS:

I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. I can't even get him to cut me some wood.

DR. GIBBS:

*Washing and drying his hands at the sink. MRS. GIBBS is busy at the stove.*

Is he sassy to you?

MRS. GIBBS:

No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that baseball! George! Rebecca! You'll be late for school.

DR. GIBBS:

M-m-m . . .

MRS. GIBBS:

George!

DR. GIBBS:

George, look sharp!

GEORGE'S VOICE:

Yes, Pa!

DR. GIBBS:

*As he goes off the stage.*

Don't you hear your mother calling you? I guess I'll go upstairs and get forty winks.

Doctor X to R diagonal chairs

Sc. 4

MRS. WEBB:

Walleee! Emileee! You'll be late for school! Walleee! You wash yourself good or I'll come up and do it myself.

The scene shifts decisively from one house to the other.

REBECCA GIBBS' VOICE:

Ma! What dress shall I wear?

Mrs. Webb calls loudly

MRS. GIBBS:

Don't make a noise. Your father's been out all night and needs his sleep. I washed and ironed the blue gingham for you special.

Rebecca must speak loudly as he is still FB on stool

REBECCA:

Ma, I hate that dress.

Rebecca--quarrelsome

MRS. GIBBS:

Oh, hush-up-with-you.

REBECCA:

Every day I go to school dressed like a sick turkey.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Rebecca, you always look *very* nice.

REBECCA:

Mama, George's throwing soap at me.

MRS. GIBBS:

I'll come and slap the both of you,—that's what I'll do.

*A factory whistle sounds.*

*The CHILDREN dash in and take their places at the tables. Right, GEORGE, about sixteen, and REBECCA, eleven. Left, EMILY and WALLY, same ages. They carry strapped schoolbooks.*

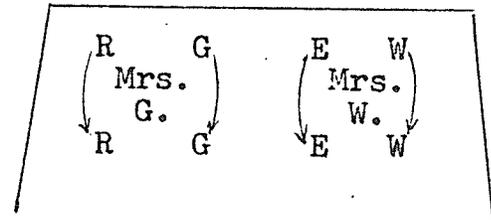
The children enter simultaneously.  
Emily to R chair  
Wally to L chair  
Rebecca to R chair  
George to L chair

Bridge

STAGE-MANAGER:

~~We've got a factory in our town too—hear it? Makes blankets. Cartwrights own it and it brung 'em a fortune.~~

as in above diagram



MRS. WEBB:  
Sc. 5 Children! Now I won't have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won't have you gobbling like wolves. It'll stunt your growth,—that's a fact. Put away your book, Wally.

WALLY:  
 Aw, Ma! By ten o'clock I got to know all about Canada.

MRS. WEBB:  
 You know the rule's well as I do—no books at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

EMILY:  
 I'm both, Mama: you know I am. I'm the brightest girl in school for my age. I have a wonderful memory.

MRS. WEBB:  
 Eat your breakfast.

WALLY:  
 I'm bright, too, when I'm looking at my stamp collection. |

→ Webbs freeze while  
 action shifts to  
 Gibbs

MRS. GIBBS:  
 I'll speak to your father about it when he's rested. Seems to me twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy of your age. I declare I don't know how you spend it all.

GEORGE:  
 Aw, Ma,—I gotta lotta things to buy.

MRS. GIBBS:  
 Strawberry phosphates—that's what you spend it on.

GEORGE:  
 I don't see how Rebecca comes to have so much money. She has more'n a dollar.

REBECCA:  
*Spoon in mouth, dreamily.*  
 I've been saving it up gradual.

MRS. GIBBS:  
 Well, dear, I think it's a good thing to spend some every now and then.

REBECCA:  
 Mama, do you know what I love most in the world—do you?—Money.

MRS. GIBBS:  
 Eat your breakfast.

THE CHILDREN:  
 Mama, there's first bell.—I gotta hurry.—I don't want any more.—I gotta hurry.

increase tempo -  
 urgency

~~The CHILDREN rise, seize their books and dash out through the trellises. They meet, down center, and chattering, walk to Main Street, then turn left.~~

~~The STAGE MANAGER goes off, unobtrusively, right.~~

→ Children exit to C and X UL to diagonal chairs.  
Improvise dialogue for exit

### Scene 6

MRS. WEBB:

Walk fast, but you don't have to run. Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily.

The ladies call loudly and emphatically from their respective doorways

MRS. GIBBS:

⌈ Tell Miss Foster I send her my best congratulations — can you remember that?

→ Mrs. Webb X to bench L apron

REBECCA:

Yes, Ma. ⌈

→ Rebecca moves to UL diagonal chairs

MRS. GIBBS:

You look real nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet.

ALL:

Good-by.

~~MRS. GIBBS fills her apron with food for the chickens and comes down to the footlights.~~

MRS. GIBBS:

~~Here, chick, chick, chick.~~

~~No, go away, you. Go away.~~

~~Here, chick, chick, chick.~~

~~What's the matter with you? Fight, fight, fight, — that's all you do.~~

~~Hi . . . you don't belong to me. Where'd you come from?~~

~~She shakes her apron.~~

~~Oh, don't be scared. Nobody's going to hurt you.~~

~~MRS. WEBB is sitting on the bench by her trellis, stringing beans.~~

⌈ Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

→ Mrs. Gibbs at DRC

MRS. WEBB:

Well, I still get that tickling feeling in my throat. I told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir practice tonight. Wouldn't be any use.

MRS. GIBBS:

Have you tried singing over your voice?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, but somehow I can't do that and stay on the key. While I'm resting myself I thought I'd string some of these beans.

MRS. GIBBS:

~~Rolling up her sleeves as she crosses the stage for a chat.~~

⌈ Let me help you. Beans have been good this year.

→ Mrs. Gibbs X to bench Sits to R of Mrs. W.

~~MRS. WEBB:~~

~~I've decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me.  
The children say they hate 'em, but I notice they're  
able to get 'em down all winter.~~

~~Pause. Brief sound of chickens caekling.~~

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Myrtle. I've got to tell you something, because  
if I don't tell somebody I'll burst.

MRS. WEBB:

Why, Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS:

Here, give me some more of those beans. Myrtle,  
did one of those secondhand-furniture men from  
Boston come to see you last Friday?

MRS. WEBB:

No-o.

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, he called on me. First I thought he was a  
patient wantin' to see Dr. Gibbs. 'N he wormed his  
way into my parlor, and, Myrtle Webb, he offered  
me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grand-  
mother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

MRS. WEBB:

Why, Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS:

He did! That old thing! Why, it was so big I  
didn't know where to put it and I almost give it to  
Cousin Hester Wilcox.

MRS. WEBB:

Well, you're going to take it, aren't you?

MRS. GIBBS:

I don't know.

MRS. WEBB:

You don't know—three hundred and fifty dollars!  
What's come over you?

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money  
and go away someplace on a real trip, I'd sell it like  
that.—Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my  
life to see Paris, France.—Oh, I don't know. It  
sounds crazy, I suppose, but for years I've been  
promising myself that if we ever had the chance—

MRS. WEBB:

How does the Doctor feel about it?

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, I did beat about the bush a little and said  
that if I got a legacy—that's the way I put it—I'd  
make him take me somewhere.

Light Q - SL

On-stage focus

Conversational tone  
with some urgency  
as Mrs. Gibbs tells  
her story

more reflective

MRS. WEBB:

M-m-m . . . What did he say?

MRS. GIBBS:

You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says.

MRS. WEBB:

Well, Mr. Webb just *admires* the way Dr. Gibbs knows everything about the Civil War. ~~Mr. Webb's a good mind to give up Napoleon and move over to the Civil War, only Dr. Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.~~

MRS. GIBBS:

It's a fact! Dr. Gibbs is never so happy as when he's at Antietam or Gettysburg. The times I've walked over those hills, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we were going to buy it.

MRS. WEBB:

Well, if that secondhand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you sell it. And then you'll get to see Paris, all right. Just keep droppin' hints from time to time—that's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know.

MRS. GIBBS:

Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in your life before you die you ought to see a country where they don't talk in English and don't even want to.

*The STAGE MANAGER enters briskly from the right. He tips his hat to the ladies, who nod their heads.*

Light Q - DC

Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Thank you, ladies. Thank you very much. |

MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB gather up their things, return into their homes and disabear.

→ Mrs. Gibbs X through house to diagonal chairs R

Mrs. Webb X to diagonal chairs L

Now we're going to skip a few hours.

But first we want a little more information about the town, kind of a scientific account, you might say.

So I've asked Professor Willard of our State University to sketch in a few details of our past history here.

Is Professor Willard here? |

→ Professor X to DC to L of S.M.

Sc. 7 PROFESSOR WILLARD, a rural savant, pincenez on a wide satin ribbon, enters from the right with some notes in his hand.

May I introduce Professor Willard of our State University.

A few brief notes, thank you, Professor,—unfortunately our time is limited.

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Grover's Corners . . . let me see . . . Grover's Corners lies on the old Pleistocene granite of the Appalachian range. I may say it's some of the oldest land in the world. We're very proud of that. ~~A shelf of Devonian basalt crosses it with vestiges of Mesozoic shale, and some sandstone outcroppings; but that's all more recent: two hundred, three hundred million years old.~~

Some highly interesting fossils have been found . . . I may say: unique fossils . . . two miles out of town, in Silas Peckham's cow pasture. They can be seen at the museum in our University at any time—that is, at any reasonable time. Shall I read some of Professor Gruber's notes on the meteorological situation—mean precipitation, et cetera?

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Afraid we won't have time for that, Professor. We might have a few words on the history of man here.

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Yes . . . anthropological data: Early Amerindian stock. ~~Cotahatchee tribes . . . no evidence before the tenth century of this era . . . hm . . . now entirely disappeared . . . possible traces in three families.~~ Migration toward the end of the seventeenth century of English brachiocephalic blue-eyed stock . . . for the most part. Since then some Slav and Mediterranean—

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) And the population, Professor Willard?

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Within the town limits: 2,640.

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Just a moment, Professor.

*He whispers into the professor's ear.*

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Oh, yes, indeed?—The population, *at the moment*, is 2,642. The Postal District brings in 507 more, making a total of 3,149.—Mortality and birth rates: constant.—By MacPherson's gauge: 6.032.

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Thank you very much, Professor. We're all very much obliged to you, I'm sure.

PROFESSOR WILLARD:

Not at all, sir; not at all.

(A) steps back two paces  
Off-stage focus  
pedantic

X to Professor; whispers in his ear

stress--refers back to birth of twins

Professor X UR to R diagonal chairs

STAGE MANAGER:

~~This way, Professor, and thank you again.~~

~~Exit PROFESSOR WILLARD.~~

Now the political and social report: Editor Webb.

~~Oh, Mr. Webb?~~

MRS. WEBB *appears at her back door.*

### Scene 8

~~MRS. WEBB:~~

~~He'll be here in a minute. . . . He just cut his hand while he was eatin' an apple.~~

~~STAGE MANAGER:~~

~~Thank you, Mrs. Webb.~~

~~MRS. WEBB:~~

~~Charles! Everybody's waitin'.~~

~~Exit MRS. WEBB.~~

### Scene 9

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Mr. Webb is Publisher and Editor of the Grover's Corners *Sentinel*. That's our local paper, y'know.

MR. WEBB *enters from his house, pulling on his coat. His finger is bound in a handkerchief.*

enter Mr. Webb from L

~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Well. . . . I don't have to tell you that we're run here by a Board of Selectmen. All males vote at the age of twenty one. Women vote indirect. We're lower middle class: sprinkling of professional men . . . ten per cent illiterate laborers. Politically, we're eighty six per cent Republicans; six per cent Democrats; four per cent Socialists; rest, indifferent. Religiously, we're eighty five per cent Protestants; twelve per cent Catholics; rest, indifferent.~~

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Have you any comments, Mr. Webb?

S.M. steps back R two paces

MR. WEBB:

Very ordinary town, if you ask me. Little better behaved than most. Probably a lot duller.

But our young people here seem to like it well enough. Ninety per cent of 'em graduating from high school settle down right here to live—even when they've been away to college.

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Now, is there anyone in the audience who would like to ask Editor Webb anything about the town?

~~WOMAN IN THE BALCONY:~~

~~Is there much drinking in Grover's Corners?~~

Woman X DC from diagonal chairs to L of Mr. Webb before speaking. Remains standing beside him.

MR. WEBB:

Well, ma'am, I wouldn't know what you'd call *much*. Satiddy nights the farmhands meet down in Ellery Greenough's stable and holler some. We've got one or two town drunks, but they're always hav-

ing remorse every time an evangelist comes to town. No, ma'am, I'd say likker ain't a regular thing in the home here, except in the medicine chest. Right good for snake bite, y'know—always was.

~~BELLIGERENT MAN AT BACK OF~~  
~~AUDITORIUM:~~

Is there no one in town aware of—

→ speaks from diagonal chairs

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Come forward, will you, where we can all hear you—  
What were you saying?

→ Man X DC from diagonal chairs to R of Mr. Webb.  
Speaks forcefully

BELLIGERENT MAN:

Is there no one in town aware of social injustice and industrial inequality?

MR. WEBB:

Oh, yes, everybody is—somethin' terrible. Seems like they spend most of their time talking about who's rich and who's poor.

BELLIGERENT MAN:

Then why don't they do something about it?

*He withdraws without waiting for an answer.*

→ Man returns to diagonal chairs US

MR. WEBB:

Well, I dunno. . . . I guess we're all hunting like everybody else for a way the diligent and sensible can rise to the top and the lazy and quarrelsome can sink to the bottom. But it ain't easy to find. Meanwhile, we do all we can to help those that can't help themselves and those that can we leave alone.—Are there any other questions?

~~LADY IN A BOX:~~

Oh, Mr. Webb? Mr. Webb, is there any culture or love of beauty in Grover's Corners?

MR. WEBB:

Well, ma'am, there ain't much—not in the sense you mean. Come to think of it, there's some girls that play the piano at High School Commencement; but they ain't happy about it. No, ma'am, there isn't much culture; but maybe this is the place to tell you that we've got a lot of pleasures of a kind here: we like the sun comin' up over the mountain in the morning, and we all notice a good deal about the birds. We pay a lot of attention to them. And we watch the change of the seasons; yes, everybody knows about them. But those other things—you're right, ma'am,—there ain't much.—*Robinson Crusoe* and the Bible; and Handel's "Largo," we all know that; and Whistler's "Mother"—those are just about as far as we go.

~~LADY IN A BOX:~~

So I thought. Thank you, Mr. Webb.

→ Woman X US to diagonal chairs

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Thank you, Mr. Webb.

Bridge ~~MR. WEBB retires.~~

→ Mr. Webb X to L chairs

Now, we'll go back to the town. It's early afternoon. All 2,642 have had their dinners and all the dishes have been washed.

~~MR. WEBB, having removed his coat, returns and starts pushing a lawn mower to and fro beside his house.~~

There's an early-afternoon calm in our town: a buzzin' and a hummin' from the school buildings; only a few buggies on Main Street—the horses dozing at the hitching posts; you all remember what it's like. ~~Doc Gibbs is in his office, tapping people and making them say "ah." Mr. Webb's euttin' his lawn over there; one man in ten thinks it's a privilege to push his own lawn mower.~~

→ X to R proscenium

No, sir. It's later than I thought. There are the children coming home from school already.

Sc. 10 ~~Shrill girls' voices are heard, off left.~~ EMILY comes along Main Street, carrying some books. There are some signs that she is imagining herself to be a lady of startling elegance.

Enter Emily and X  
DC. Mimes picking  
flowers

EMILY:

~~I can't, Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I promised.~~

MR. WEBB:

~~Emily, walk simply. Who do you think you are today?~~

EMILY:

~~Papa, you're terrible. One minute you tell me to stand up straight and the next minute you call me names. I just don't listen to you.~~

~~She gives him an abrupt kiss.~~

MR. WEBB:

~~Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before.~~

~~He goes out of sight. EMILY leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house.~~

~~GEORGE GIBBS comes careening down Main Street. He is throwing a ball up to dizzying heights, and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backwards. He bumps into an OLD LADY invisible to us.~~

Enter George from UL.  
Mimes throwing  
baseball

Sc. 11

GEORGE:

~~Excuse me, Mrs. Forrest.~~

STAGE MANAGER:

~~As Mrs. Forrest.~~

~~Go out and play in the fields, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street.~~

On-stage focus

Sc. 12

GEORGE:

~~Awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest.~~ Hello, Emily.

→ George and Emily  
meet DC

EMILY:  
H'lo.

George to R of Emily

GEORGE:  
You made a fine speech in class.

Initial shyness

EMILY:  
Well . . . I was really ready to make a speech about the Monroe Doctrine, but at the last minute Miss Corcoran made me talk about the Louisiana Purchase instead. I worked an awful long time on both of them.

GEORGE:  
Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head nights when you're doing your homework over in your room.

EMILY:  
Why, can you?

GEORGE:  
You certainly do stick to it, Emily. I don't see how you can sit still that long. I guess you like school.

EMILY:  
Well, I always feel it's something you have to go through.

GEORGE:  
Yeah.

EMILY:  
I don't mind it really. It passes the time.

GEORGE:  
Yeah.—Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from your window to mine; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those algebra problems. I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not . . . just some little hint . . .

George speaking more quickly

EMILY:  
Oh, I think *hints* are allowed.—So—ah—if you get stuck, George, you whistle to me; and I'll give you some hints.

GEORGE:  
Emily, you're just naturally bright, I guess.

emphasize

EMILY:  
I figure that it's just the way a person's born.

GEORGE:  
Yeah. But, you see, I want to be a farmer, and my Uncle Luke says whenever I'm ready I can come over and work on his farm and if I'm any good I

can just gradually have it.

EMILY:

You mean the house and everything?

*Enter MRS. WEBB with a large bowl and sits on the bench by her trellis.*

→ Mrs. Webb enters from  
L (Webb House)  
X to bench - L  
apron

GEORGE:

Yeah. Well, thanks . . . I better be getting out to the baseball field. Thanks for the talk, Emily.—

[ Good afternoon, Mrs. Webb.

→ George turns to speak to Mrs. Webb

MRS. WEBB:

Good afternoon, George.

GEORGE:

So long, Emily.

EMILY:

So long, George.

→ George exits UR

Sc. 13

MRS. WEBB:

Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter. [George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

Light Q - SL

→ Emily X to bench DL.  
Sits by Mrs. Webb to her R  
Off-stage focus

EMILY:

I don't know.

MRS. WEBB:

Let's see. He must be almost sixteen.

reflective

EMILY:

Mama, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

Emily increases tempo

MRS. WEBB:

You must recite it to your father at supper. ~~What was it about?~~

~~EMILY:~~

~~The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. I'm going to make speeches all my life. — Mama, are these big enough?~~

~~MRS. WEBB:~~

~~Try to get them a little bigger if you can.~~

EMILY:

Mama, will you answer me a question, serious?

MRS. WEBB:

Seriously, dear—not serious.

EMILY:

Seriously,—will you?

MRS. WEBB:

Of course, I will.

EMILY:

Mama, am I good looking?

Stress Emily's  
statements of  
concern

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, of course you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't.

EMILY:

Oh, Mamma, that's not what I mean. What I mean is: am I *pretty*?

intense

MRS. WEBB:

I've already told you, yes. Now that's enough of that. You have a nice young pretty face. I never heard of such foolishness.

EMILY:

Oh, Mama, you never tell us the truth about anything.

MRS. WEBB:

I *am* telling you the truth.

EMILY:

Mama, were *you* pretty?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes, I was, if I do say it. I was the prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright.

EMILY:

But, Mama, you've got to say *something* about me. Am I pretty enough . . . to get anybody . . . to get people interested in me?

Pauses indicate  
difficulty of  
phrasing the  
question

MRS. WEBB:

Emily, you make me tired. Now stop it. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes.—Come along now and bring that bowl with you.

Light Q - DC

EMILY:

Oh, Mama, you're no help at all.

(A) X to DRC

Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Thank you. Thank you! That'll do. We'll have to interrupt again here. Thank you, Mrs. Webb; thank you, Emily.

MRS. WEBB and EMILY *withdraw*.

Emily and Mrs. Webb  
exit to L diagonal  
chairs

(B) [There are some more things we want to explore about this town.

*He comes to the center of the stage. During the following speech the lights gradually dim to darkness, leaving only a spot on him.*

(B) enters from L and  
X DC

I think this is a good time to tell you that the Cartwright interests have just begun building a new bank in Grover's Corners—~~had to go to Vermont for the marble, sorry to say.~~ And they've asked a friend of mine what they should put in the cornerstone for people to dig up . . . a thousand years from now. . . . Of course, they've put in a copy of

the *New York Times* and a copy of Mr. Webb's *Sentinel*. . . . We're kind of interested in this because some scientific fellas have found a way of painting all that reading matter with a glue—a silicate glue—that'll make it keep a thousand two thousand years.

We're putting in a Bible . . . and the Constitution of the United States—and a copy of William Shakespeare's plays. What do you say, folks? What do you think?

Y'know, Babylon once had two million people in it, and all we know about 'em is the names of the kings and some copies of wheat contracts . . . and contracts for the sale of slaves. Yet every night all those families sat down to supper, and the father came home from his work, and the smoke went up the chimney,—same as here. ~~And even in Greece and Rome, all we know about the real life of the people is what we can piece together out of the joking poems and the comedies they wrote for the theatre back then.~~

So I'm going to have a copy of this play put in the cornerstone and the people a thousand years from now'll know a few simple facts about us—~~more than the Treaty of Versailles and the Lindbergh flight. See what I mean?~~

~~So people a thousand years from now—this is the way we were in the provinces north of New York at the beginning of the twentieth century.—This is the way we were: in our growing up and in our marrying and in our living and in our dying.~~

~~A choir partially concealed in the orchestra pit has begun singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."~~

~~SIMON STIMSON stands directing them.~~

~~Two ladders have been pushed on to the stage; they serve as indication of the second story in the Gibbs and Webb houses. GEORGE and EMILY mount them, and apply themselves to their schoolwork.~~

~~DR. GIBBS has entered and is seated in his kitchen reading.~~

(A) Well!—good deal of time's gone by. It's evening. **If you listen closely}**

^ You can hear choir practice going on in the Congregational Church.

The children are at home doing their schoolwork.

The day's running down like a tired clock.

→ (A) exits to S.M. chair R

Bridge

~~SIMON STIMSON:~~

~~Now look here, everybody. Music come into the world to give pleasure.—Softer! Softer! Get it out of your heads that music's only good when it's loud. You leave loudness to the Methodists. You couldn't beat 'em, even if you wanted to. Now again. Tenors!~~

Stress this paragraph as another expression of central theme

→ (B) exits to S.M. chair L

Light Q - twilight  
L, R, and C

SC. 14 GEORGE:  
Hsst! Emily!

EMILY:  
Hello.

GEORGE:  
Hello!

EMILY:  
I can't work at all. The moonlight's so *terrible*.

GEORGE:  
Emily, did you get the third problem?

EMILY:  
Which?

GEORGE:  
The *third*?

EMILY:  
Why, yes, George—that's the easiest of them all.

GEORGE:  
I don't see it. Emily, can you give me a hint?

EMILY:  
I'll tell you one thing: the answer's in yards.

GEORGE:  
! ! ! In yards? How do you mean?

EMILY:  
In *square* yards.

GEORGE:  
Oh . . . in square yards.

EMILY:  
Yes, George, don't you see?

GEORGE:  
Yeah.

EMILY:  
In square yards of *wallpaper*.

GEORGE:  
Wallpaper,—oh, I see. Thanks a lot, Emily.

EMILY:  
You're welcome. My, isn't the moonlight *terrible*?  
And choir practice going on.—~~I think if you hold  
your breath you can hear the train all the way to  
Contoocook. Hear it?~~

GEORGE:  
~~M-m-m—~~What do you know!

EMILY:  
Well, I guess I better go back and try to work.

→ George and Emily  
pivot on stools to  
½ L and R  
On-stage focus

tempo - increase

slight pause after  
welcome - reduce  
tempo for next lines

GEORGE:  
Good night, Emily. And thanks.

EMILY:  
Good night, George. → George and Emily  
pivot on stools to

Bridge

~~SIMON STIMSON:~~

~~Before I forget it: how many of you will be able  
to come in Tuesday afternoon and sing at Fred  
Hersey's wedding? show your hands. That'll be  
fine; that'll be right nice. We'll do the same music  
we did for Jane Trowbridge's last month.  
Now we'll do: "Art Thou Weary; Art Thou  
Languid?" It's a question, ladies and gentlemen,  
make it talk. Ready.~~

FB

Light Q - light R

Sc. 15

DR. GIBBS:

Oh, George, can you come down a minute? → enter Doctor from R  
On-stage focus sit

GEORGE:

Yes, Pa. → tempo - fairly rapid

*He descends the ladder.*

→ George enters from  
stool. X to L

DR. GIBBS:

Make yourself comfortable, George; I'll only keep  
you a minute. George, how old are you? → George sits

GEORGE:

I? I'm sixteen, almost seventeen. Doctor speaks in  
in a calm and  
reasoned manner

DR. GIBBS:

What do you want to do after school's over? → George emotionally  
affected

GEORGE:

Why, you know, Pa. I want to be a farmer on Uncle  
Luke's farm.

DR. GIBBS:

You'll be willing, will you, to get up early and milk  
and feed the stock . . . and you'll be able to hoe  
and hay all day?

GEORGE:

Sure, I will. What are you . . . what do you mean,  
Pa?

DR. GIBBS:

Well, George, while I was in my office today I heard  
a funny sound . . . and what do you think it was?  
It was your mother chopping wood. There you see  
your mother—getting up early; cooking meals all  
day long, washing and ironing;—and still she has to  
go out in the back yard and chop wood. I suppose she  
just got tired of asking you. She just gave up and  
decided it was easier to do it herself. And you eat  
her meals, and put on the clothes she keeps nice for  
you, and you run off and play baseball,—like she's  
some hired girl we keep around the house but that

tempo - slower and  
a little heavy

→ George turns  $\frac{1}{4}$  L  
looking down

we don't like very much. Well, I knew all I had to do was to call your attention to it. Here's a handkerchief, son. |George, I've decided to raise your spending money twenty-five cents a week. Not, of course, for chopping wood for your mother, because that's a present you give her, but because you're getting older—and I imagine there are lots of things you must find to do with it.

→ Doctor stands to emphasize this stage in George's maturing process (minor climax)  
Tempo increases slightly

GEORGE:  
| Thanks, Pa.

→ George stands

DR. GIBBS:

Let's see—tomorrow's your payday. You can count on it—Hmm. Probably Rebecca'll feel she ought to have some more too. Wonder what could have happened to your mother. Choir practice never was as late as this before.

GEORGE:

It's only half past eight, Pa.

DR. GIBBS:

I don't know why she's in that old choir. She hasn't any more voice than an old crow. . . . Traipsin' around the streets at this hour of the night . . . Just about time you retired, don't you think?

GEORGE:

Yes, Pa.

*GEORGE mounts to his place on the ladder. Laughter and good nights can be heard on stage left and presently MRS. GIBBS, MRS SOAMES and MRS. WEBB come down Main Street. When they arrive at the corner of the stage they stop.*

→ George exits to his stool FB  
Doctor sits chair R  
Light Q - CS  
S.M. places two stools

MRS. SOAMES:

| Good night, Martha. Good night, Mr. Foster.

→ DRC in Gibbs garden  
Ladies X to CS from USR  
Off-stage focus

MRS. WEBB:

I'll tell Mr. Webb; I *know* he'll want to put it in the paper.

MRS. GIBBS:

My, it's late!

MRS. SOAMES:

Good night, Irma.

MRS. GIBBS:

Real nice choir practice, wa'n't it, Myrtle Webb! Look at that moon, will you! Tsk-tsk-tsk. Potato weather, for sure.

*They are silent a moment, gazing up at the moon.*

MRS. SOAMES:

Naturally, I didn't want to say a word about it in front of those others, but now we're alone—really, it's the worst scandal that ever was in this town!

Mrs. Soames	
Mrs. Gibbs	Mrs. Webb

tempo - fairly quick  
Speeches should overlap so that next speaker begins as previous speaker says last two words  
Mrs. Soames delights in gossip

MRS. GIBBS:

What?

MRS. SOAMES:

Simon Stimson!

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Louella!

MRS. SOAMES:

But, Julia! To have the organist of a church *drink* and *drunk* year after year. You know he was drunk tonight.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Louella! We all know about Mr. Stimson, and we all know about the troubles he's been through, and Dr. Ferguson knows too, and if Dr. Ferguson keeps him on there in his job the only thing the rest of us can do is just not to notice it.

MRS. SOAMES:

*Not to notice it!* But it's getting worse.

MRS. WEBB:

No, it isn't, Louella. It's getting better. I've been in that choir twice as long as you have. It doesn't happen anywhere near so often. . . . My, I hate to go to bed on a night like this.—I better hurry. Those children'll be sitting up till all hours. Good night, Louella. |

*They all exchange good nights. She hurries down-stage, enters her house and disappears.*

→ Mrs. Webb exits to house L

MRS. GIBBS:

Can you get home safe, Louella?

MRS. SOAMES:

It's as bright as day. I can see Mr. Soames scowling at the window now. You'd think we'd been to a dance the way the menfolk carry on. |

*More good nights. MRS. GIBBS arrives at her home and passes through the trellis into the kitchen.*

→ Mrs. Soames exits UL  
Mrs. Gibbs enters house R

Sc. 17

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, we had a real good time.

DR. GIBBS:

You're late enough.

MRS. GIBBS:

Why, Frank, it ain't any later 'n usual.

DR. GIBBS:

And you stopping at the corner to gossip with a lot of hens.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, Frank, don't be grouchy. Come out and smell the heliotrope in the moonlight. |

*They stroll out arm in arm along the footlights.*

Light Q - R

On-stage focus

tempo - slower than previous scene

→ Mrs. Gibbs leads Doctor to two stools DR (garden). Sit

Isn't that wonderful? What did you do all the time I was away?

DR. GIBBS:

Oh, I read—as usual. What were the girls gossiping about tonight?

reflective mood

Doctor somewhat teasing

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, believe me, Frank—there is something to gossip about.

DR. GIBBS:

Hmm! Simon Stimson far gone, was he?

MRS. GIBBS:

Worst I've ever seen him. How'll that end, Frank? Dr. Ferguson can't forgive him forever.

tempo - increase slightly

DR. GIBBS:

I guess I know more about Simon Stimson's affairs than anybody in this town. Some people ain't made for small-town life. I don't know how that'll end, but there's nothing we can do but just leave it alone. Come, get in.

MRS. GIBBS:

No, not yet . . . Frank, I'm worried about you.

DR. GIBBS:

What are you worried about?

MRS. GIBBS:

I think it's my duty to make plans for you to get a real rest and change. And if I get that legacy, well, I'm going to insist on it.

DR. GIBBS:

Now, Julia, there's no sense in going over that again.

MRS. GIBBS:

Frank, you're just *unreasonable!*

intense

They stand. X DRC

DR. GIBBS:

*Starting into the house.*

Come on, Julia, it's getting late. First thing you know you'll catch cold. I gave George a piece of my mind tonight. I reckon you'll have your wood chopped for a while anyway. ~~No, no, start getting upstairs.~~

Exit into house and to diagonal chairs  
R

~~MRS. GIBBS:~~

~~Oh, dear. There's always so many things to pick up, seems like. You know, Frank, Mrs. Fairchild always locks her front door every night. All those people up that part of town do.~~

~~DR. GIBBS:~~

~~*Blowing out the lamp.*~~

~~They're all getting citified, that's the trouble with~~

~~them. They haven't got nothing fit to burgle and  
everybody knows it.  
They disappear.~~

REBECCA *climbs up the ladder beside* GEORGE.

Sc. 18

GEORGE:

Get out, Rebecca. There's only room for one at this window. You're always spoiling everything.

George pivots on stool to FF.  
Rebecca stands by his R side  
Off-stage focus

REBECCA:

Well, let me look just a minute.

GEORGE:

Use your own window.

REBECCA:

I did, but there's no moon there. . . . George, do you know what I think, do you? I think maybe the moon's getting nearer and nearer and there'll be a big 'slosion.

GEORGE:

Rebecca, you don't know anything. If the moon were getting nearer, the guys that sit up all night with telescopes would see it first and they'd tell about it, and it'd be in all the newspapers.

REBECCA:

George, is the moon shining on South America, Canada and half the whole world?

GEORGE:

Well—prob'ly is.

*The STAGE MANAGER strolls on. Pause. The sound of crickets is heard.*

George and Rebecca freeze

Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Nine thirty. Most of the lights are out. No, there's Constable Warren trying a few doors on Main Street. And here comes Editor Webb, after putting his newspaper to bed.

Light Q - R and CS  
(A) stands and speaks from R proscenium

MR. WARREN, *an elderly policeman, comes along Main Street from the right, MR. WEBB from the left.*

Sc. 19

MR. WEBB:

Good evening, Bill.

Constable and Mr. Webb meet CS  
Light Q - fade R  
Off-stage focus  
tempo - even  
conversational tone

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Evenin', Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB:

Quite a moon!

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Yepp.

MR. WEBB:

All quiet tonight?

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Simon Stimson is rollin' around a little. Just saw his wife movin' out to hunt for him so I looked the other way—~~there he is now.~~

~~SIMON STIMSON comes down Main Street from the left, only a trace of unsteadiness in his walk.~~

~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Good evening, Simon . . . Town seems to have settled down for the night pretty well. . . .~~

~~SIMON STIMSON comes up to him and pauses a moment and stares at him, swaying slightly.~~

~~Good evening . . . Yes, most of the town's settled down for the night, Simon. . . . I guess we better do the same. Can I walk along a ways with you?~~

~~SIMON STIMSON continues on his way without a word and disappears at the right.~~

~~Good night.~~

CONSTABLE WARREN:

I don't know how that's goin' to end, Mr. Webb.

MR. WEBB:

Well, he's seen a peck of trouble, one thing after another. . . . Oh, Bill . . . if you see my boy smoking cigarettes, just give him a word, will you? He thinks a lot of you, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

I don't think he smokes no cigarettes, Mr. Webb. Leastways, not more'n two or three a year.

MR. WEBB:

Hm . . . I hope not.—Well, good night, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Good night, Mr. Webb.

*Exit.*

→ Constable exits UL

Sc. 20

MR. WEBB:

Who's that up there? Is that you, Myrtle?

Light Q - L

Mr. Webb PL from CS

EMILY:

No, it's me, Papa.

MR. WEBB:

Why aren't you in bed?

EMILY:

I don't know. I just can't sleep yet, Papa. The moonlight's so *won*-derful. And the smell of Mrs. Gibbs' heliotrope. Can you smell it?

MR. WEBB:

Hm . . . Yes. Haven't any troubles on your mind, have you, Emily?

EMILY:  
*Troubles, Papa? No.*

MR. WEBB:  
 Well, enjoy yourself, but don't let your mother catch you. Good night, Emily.

EMILY: **Good night!**  
 MR. WEBB *crosses into the house, whistling "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds" and disappears.*

Mr. Webb exits into house and L Emily pivots on stool to FB

Sc. 21

REBECCA:  
 I never told you about that letter Jane Crofut got from her minister when she was sick. He wrote Jane a letter and on the envelope the address was like this: It said: Jane Crofut; The Crofut Farm; Grover's Corners; Sutton County; New Hampshire; United States of America.

Light Q - X fade to R  
 tempo - speeds up for conclusion  
 Rebecca - stress these lines for minor climax - universalize the action

GEORGE:  
 What's funny about that?

REBECCA:  
 But listen, it's not finished: the United States of America; Continent of North America; Western Hemisphere; the Earth; the Solar System; the Universe; the Mind of God—that's what it said on the envelope.

GEORGE:  
 What do you know!

REBECCA:  
 And the postman brought it just the same.

intense

GEORGE:  
 What do you know!

STAGE MANAGER:  
~~That's the end of the First Act, friends. You can go and smoke now, those that smoke. We'll be back in one minute with Act II~~

(A) X DRC - addressing audience  
Light Q - blackout

## ACT TWO

*The tables and chairs of the two kitchens are still on the stage.*

*The ladders and the small bench have been withdrawn.*

*The STAGE MANAGER has been at his accustomed place watching the audience return to its seats.*

Light Q - blackout  
then come up on  
whole stage

Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(B) Three years have gone by.

~~Yes, the sun's come up over a thousand times.~~

~~Summers and winters have cracked the mountains a little bit more and the rains have brought down some of the dirt.~~

Some babies that weren't even born before have begun talking regular sentences already; and a number of people who thought they were right young and spry have noticed that they can't bound up a flight of stairs like they used to, without their heart fluttering a little.

All that can happen in a thousand days.

Nature's been pushing and conniving in other ways, too: a number of young people fell in love and got married.

~~Yes, the mountain got bit away a few fractions of an inch; millions of gallons of water went by the mill; and here and there a new home was set up under a roof.~~

Almost everybody in the world gets married,—you know what I mean? In our town there aren't hardly any exceptions. Most everybody in the world climbs into their graves married.

The First Act was called the Daily Life. This act is called Love and Marriage. There's another act coming after this: I reckon you can guess what that's about.

So:

It's three years later. It's 1904.

It's July 7th, just after High School Commencement.

That's the time most of our young people jump up and get married.

~~Soon as they've passed their last examinations in solid geometry and Cicero's Orations, looks like they suddenly feel themselves fit to be married.~~

(A) It's early morning. Only this time it's been raining. It's been pouring and thundering.

→ S.M. (B) enters from  
L. X to DC

→ X DLC

The movement serves  
to stress key lines

→ (B) exits to S.M.  
chair L

→ (A) X from R to DC

~~Mrs. Gibbs' garden, and Mrs. Webb's here:  
drenched.~~

~~All those bean poles and pea vines: drenched.~~

~~All yesterday over there on Main Street, the rain  
looked like curtains being blown along.~~

~~Hum . . . it may begin again any minute.~~

~~There! You can hear the 5.45 for Boston.~~

MRS. GIBBS and MRS. WEBB enter their  
kitchen and start the day as in the First Act.

And there's Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb come down  
to make breakfast, just as though it were an  
ordinary day. I don't have to point out to the  
women in my audience that those ladies they see  
before them, both of those ladies cooked three meals  
a day—one of 'em for twenty years, the other for  
forty—and no summer vacation. They brought up  
two children apiece, washed, cleaned the house—  
and *never a nervous breakdown.*

It's like what one of those Middle West poets said:  
You've got to love life to have life, and you've got  
to have life to love life. . . . It's what they call a  
vicious circle.

→ X DR

~~HOWIE NEWSOME:~~

~~Off-stage-left.~~

~~Giddap, Bessie!~~

STAGE MANAGER:

Here comes Howie Newsome delivering the milk.  
And there's Si Crowell delivering the papers like  
his brother before him.

SI CROWELL has entered hurling imaginary  
newspapers into doorways; HOWIE NEWSOME  
has come along Main Street with Bessie.

→ (A) X to S.M.  
chair R

Light Q - CS

Sc. 22

SI CROWELL:

Morning, Howie.

→ Si and Howie enter  
from UL and UR.

Meet at CS

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Morning, Si.—Anything in the papers I ought to  
know?

Off-stage focus

SI CROWELL:

Nothing much, except we're losing about the best  
baseball pitcher Grover's Corners ever had—George  
Gibbs.

This scene should be  
bright and forceful  
tempo - fairly quick

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Reckon he is.

SI CROWELL:

He could hit and run bases, too.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yep. Mighty fine ball player.—Whoa, Bessie! I  
guess I can stop and talk if I've a mind to!

SI CROWELL:

I don't see how he could give up a thing like that just to get married. Would you, Howie?

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Can't tell, Si. Never had no talent that way.

CONSTABLE WARREN *enters. They exchange good mornings.*

You're up early, Bill.

→ Constable enters from UR. X to R of Si

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Seein' if there's anything I can do to prevent a flood. River's been risin' all night.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Si Crowell's all worked up here about George Gibbs' retiring from baseball.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Yes, sir, that's the way it goes. Back in '84 we had a player, Si—even George Gibbs couldn't touch him. Name of Hank Todd. Went down to Maine and became a parson. Wonderful ball player.—Howie, how does the weather look to you?

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Oh, 'tain't bad. Think maybe it'll clear up for good.

CONSTABLE WARREN *and* SI CROWELL *continue on their way.*

HOWIE NEWSOME *brings the milk first to Mrs. Gibbs' house. She meets him by the trellis.*

→ Constable and Si exit UL to L chairs

### Sc. 23

MRS. GIBBS:

Good morning, Howie. Do you think it's going to rain again?

→ Howie X DRC to Gibbs house

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. It rained so heavy, I think maybe it'll clear up.

Off-stage focus

MRS. GIBBS:

Certainly hope it will.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

How much did you want today?

MRS. GIBBS:

I'm going to have a houseful of relations, Howie. Looks to me like I'll need three-a-milk and two-a-cream.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

My wife says to tell you we both hope they'll be very happy, Mrs. Gibbs. Know they *will*.

MRS. GIBBS:

Thanks a lot, Howie. Tell your wife I hope she gits there to the wedding.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes, she'll be there; she'll be there if she kin.  
 HOWIE NEWSOME *crosses to Mrs. Webb's house.*

→ Howie X L to Webb house

Howie still cheerful

Morning, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB:

Oh, good morning, Mr. Newsome. I told you four quarts of milk, but I hope you can spare me another.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes'm . . . and the two of cream.

MRS. WEBB:

Will it start raining again, Mr. Newsome?

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Well, just sayin' to Mrs. Gibbs as how it may lighten up. Mrs. Newsome told me to tell you as how we hope they'll both be very happy, Mrs. Webb. Know they *will*.

MRS. WEBB:

Thank you, and thank Mrs. Newsome and we're counting on seeing you at the wedding.

HOWIE NEWSOME:

Yes, Mrs. Webb. We hope to git there. Couldn't miss that. ~~Come on, Bessie.~~

*Exit* HOWIE NEWSOME.

DR. GIBBS *descends in shirt sleeves, and sits down at his breakfast table.*

→ Howie exits UR to R chairs

Light Q - R

Sc. 24

DR. GIBBS:

Well, Ma, the day has come. You're losin' one of your chicks.

→ Doctor enters from R Off-stage focus

Doctor - teasing tone

MRS. GIBBS:

Frank Gibbs, don't you say another word. I feel like crying every minute. Sit down and drink your coffee.

Mrs. Gibbs - emotional. Somewhat distraught

DR. GIBBS:

The groom's up shaving himself—only there ain't an awful lot to shave. Whistling and singing, like he's glad to leave us.—Every now and then he says "I do" to the mirror, but it don't sound convincing to me.

→ Doctor sits in R chair DR

MRS. GIBBS:

I declare, Frank, I don't know how he'll get along. I've arranged his clothes and seen to it he's put warm things on, ~~Frank!~~ they're too young. Emily won't think of such things. He'll catch his death of cold within a week.

→ Mrs. Gibbs sits in L chair DRC

Pause before speaking to emphasize concern

DR. GIBBS:

I was remembering my wedding morning, Julia.

MRS. GIBBS:

Now don't start that, Frank Gibbs.

DR. GIBBS:

I was the scarest young fella in the State of New Hampshire. I thought I'd make a mistake for sure. And when I saw you comin' down that aisle I thought you were the prettiest girl I'd ever seen, but the only trouble was that I'd never seen you before. There I was in the Congregational Church marryin' a total stranger.

MRS. GIBBS:

And how do you think I felt!—Frank, weddings are perfectly awful things. Farces,—that's what they are!

*She puts a plate before him.*

Here, I've made something for you.

~~DR. GIBBS:~~

~~Why, Julia Hersey—French toast!~~

~~MRS. GIBBS:~~

~~'Tain't hard to make and I had to do something.~~

~~Pause. DR. GIBBS pours on the syrup.~~

~~DR. GIBBS:~~

~~How'd you sleep last night, Julia?~~

~~MRS. GIBBS:~~

~~Well, I heard a lot of the hours struck off.~~

DR. GIBBS:

Ye-e-s! I get a shock every time I think of George setting out to be a family man—that great gangling thing!—I tell you Julia, there's nothing so terrifying in the world as a *son*. The relation of father and son is the darndest, awkwardest—

stress

MRS. GIBBS:

Well, mother and daughter's no picnic, let me tell you.

DR. GIBBS:

They'll have a lot of troubles, I suppose, but that's none of our business. Everybody has a right to their own troubles.

MRS. GIBBS:

*At the table, drinking her coffee, meditatively.*

Yes . . . people are meant to go through life two by two. 'Tain't natural to be lonesome.

*Pause. DR. GIBBS starts laughing.*

DR. GIBBS:

Julia, do you know one of the things I was scared of when I married you?

Switch to on-stage  
focus and confident  
tone

MRS. GIBBS:

Oh, go along with you!

DR. GIBBS:

I was afraid we wouldn't have material for conversation more'n'd last us a few weeks.

*Both laugh.*

I was afraid we'd run out and eat our meals in silence, that's a fact.—Well, you and I been conversing for twenty years now without any noticeable barren spells.

MRS. GIBBS:

Well,—good weather, bad weather—'tain't very choice, but I always find something to say.

*She goes to the foot of the stairs.*

| Did you hear Rebecca stirring around upstairs?

→ X U to R of George's stool, FF

DR. GIBBS:

No. Only day of the year Rebecca hasn't been managing everybody's business up there. She's hiding in her room—I got the impression she's crying.

MRS. GIBBS:

Lord's sakes!—This has got to stop. | Rebecca!

Rebecca! Come and get your breakfast.

*GEORGE comes rattling down the stairs, very brisk.*

→ PR

Sc. 25

GEORGE:

| Good morning, everybody. Only five more hours to live.

*Makes the gesture of cutting his throat, and a loud "k-k-k," and starts through the trellis.*

→ George enters from his stool. X to chair L, DRC  
On-stage focus  
George bright and cheerful

MRS. GIBBS:

George Gibbs, where are you going?

Mrs. Gibbs - forceful

GEORGE:

| Just stepping across the grass to see my girl.

→ X D to just above and between L and R chairs

MRS. GIBBS:

Now, George! You put on your overshoes. It's raining torrents. You don't go out of this house without you're prepared for it.

GEORGE:

Aw, Ma. It's just a *step!*

MRS. GIBBS:

George! You'll catch your death of cold and cough all through the service.

DR. GIBBS:

George, do as your mother tells you!

*DR. GIBBS goes upstairs.*

*GEORGE returns reluctantly to the kitchen and pantomimes putting on overshoes.*

→ Exit Doctor to R diagonal chairs  
George sits in L chair DRC

MRS. GIBBS:

Sc. 26 From tomorrow on you can kill yourself in all weathers, but while you're in my house you'll live wisely, thank you.—Maybe Mrs. Webb isn't used to callers at seven in the morning.—Here, take a cup of coffee first.

GEORGE:

Be back in a minute.

*He crosses the stage, leaping over the puddles.*

{ Good morning, Mother Webb.

→ George X L to Webb house

MRS. WEBB:

Goodness! You frightened me! — Now, George, you can come in a minute out of the wet, but you know I can't ask you in.

Light Q - X fade to

L

→ Mrs. Webb standing in center of kitchen

GEORGE:

Why not—?

MRS. WEBB:

George, you know's well as I do: the groom can't see his bride on his wedding day, not until he sees her in church.

GEORGE:

Aw!—that's just a superstition.—Good morning, Mr. Webb.

*Enter MR. WEBB.*

MR. WEBB:

{ Good morning, George.

→ Mr. Webb enters and sits in L chair

DL

GEORGE:

Mr. Webb, you don't believe in that superstition, do you?

MR. WEBB:

There's a lot of common sense in some superstitions, George.

*He sits at the table, facing right.*

MRS. WEBB:

Millions have folla'd it, George, and you don't want to be the first to fly in the face of custom.

GEORGE:

How is Emily?

MRS. WEBB:

She hasn't waked up yet. I haven't heard a sound out of her.

GEORGE:

Emily's *asleep*!!!

MRS. WEBB:

No wonder! We were up 'til all hours, sewing and packing. Now I'll tell you what I'll do; you set down here a minute with Mr. Webb and drink this

cup of coffee; and I'll go upstairs and see she doesn't come down and surprise you. There's some bacon, too; but don't be long about it.

*Exit* MRS. WEBB.

*Embarrassed silence.*

MR. WEBB *dunks doughnuts in his coffee.*

*More silence.*

George sits in R chair DLC

Mrs. Webb exits to L diagonal chairs

Sc. 27

MR. WEBB:

*Suddenly and loudly.*

Well, George, how are you?

GEORGE:

*Startled, choking over his coffee.*

Oh, fine, I'm fine.

*Pause.*

Mr. Webb, what sense could there be in a superstition like that?

Switch to off-stage focus to suggest embarrassment

Mr. Webb breaks the silence, speaking loudly

pause - indicates embarrassment

MR. WEBB:

Well, you see,—on her wedding morning a girl's head's apt to be full of . . . clothes and one thing and another. Don't you think that's probably it?

GEORGE:

Ye-e-s. I never thought of that.

MR. WEBB:

A girl's apt to be a mite nervous on her wedding day.

*Pause.*

GEORGE:

I wish a fellow could get married without all that marching up and down.

pause - thinking of something to say  
George speaks earnestly

MR. WEBB:

Every man that's ever lived has felt that way about it, George; but it hasn't been any use. It's the womenfolk who've built up weddings, my boy. For a while now the women have it all their own. A man looks pretty small at a wedding, George. All those good women standing shoulder to shoulder making sure that the knot's tied in a mighty public way.

GEORGE:

But . . . you *believe* in it, don't you, Mr. Webb?

tempo - increases

MR. WEBB:

*With alacrity.*

Oh, yes; *oh, yes*. Don't you misunderstand me, my boy. Marriage is a wonderful thing,—wonderful thing. And don't you forget that, George.

GEORGE:

No, sir.—~~Mr. Webb, how old were you when you got married?~~

~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Well, you see: I'd been to college and I'd taken a little time to get settled. But Mrs. Webb—she wasn't much older than what Emily is. Oh, age hasn't much to do with it, George, not compared with . . . uh . . . other things.~~

~~GEORGE:~~

~~What were you going to say, Mr. Webb?~~

~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Oh, I don't know.—Was I going to say something?~~

*Pause.*

George, I was thinking the other night of some advice my father gave me when I got married. Charles, he said, Charles, start out early showing who's boss, he said. Best thing to do is to give an order, even if it don't make sense; just so she'll learn to obey. And he said: if anything about your wife irritates you—her conversation, or anything—just get up and leave the house. That'll make it clear to her, he said. And, oh, yes! he said never, *never* let your wife know how much money you have, never.

GEORGE:

Well, Mr. Webb . . . I don't think I could . . .

MR. WEBB:

So I took the opposite of my father's advice and I've been happy ever since. And let that be a lesson to you, George, never to ask advice on personal matters.—George, are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE:

What?

MR. WEBB:

Are you going to raise chickens on your farm?

GEORGE:

Uncle Luke's never been much interested, but I thought—

MR. WEBB:

A book came into my office the other day, George, on the Philo System of raising chickens. I want you to read it. I'm thinking of beginning in a small way in the back yard, and I'm going to put an incubator in the cellar—

Sc. 28 *Enter* MRS. WEBB.

MRS. WEBB:

(Charles, are you talking about that old incubator again? I thought you two'd be talking about things worth while.

→ Enter Mrs. Webb. X  
to just above R  
and L chairs

MR. WEBB:

*Bitingly.*

Well, Myrtle, if you want to give the boy some good advice, I'll go upstairs and leave you alone with him.

MRS. WEBB:

*Pulling GEORGE up.*

George, Emily's got to come downstairs and eat her breakfast. She sends you her love but she doesn't want to lay eyes on you. Good-by.

→ Mrs. Webb picks George up by his L arm and pushes him out the door

GEORGE:

Good-by.

GEORGE crosses the stage to his own home, bewildered and crestfallen. He slowly dodges a puddle and disappears into his house.

→ George exits UL to L diagonal chairs

Sc. 29~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Myrtle, I guess you don't know about that older superstition.~~

~~MRS. WEBB:~~

~~What do you mean, Charles?~~

Webbs exit to L diagonal chairs

~~MR. WEBB:~~

~~Since the cave men: no bridegroom should see his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it. Now remember that.~~

~~Both leave the stage.~~

Light Q - DC and CS

Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) | Thank you very much, Mr. and Mrs. Webb.—Now I have to interrupt again here. You see, we want to know how all this began—this wedding, this plan to spend a lifetime together. I'm awfully interested in how big things like that begin.

You know how it is: you're twenty-one or twenty-two and you make some decisions; then whisssh! you're seventy: you've been a lawyer for fifty years, and that white-haired lady at your side has eaten over fifty thousand meals with you.

How do such things begin?

George and Emily are going to show you now the conversation they had when they first knew that . . . that . . . as the saying goes . . . they were meant for one another.

But before they do it I want you to try and remember what it was like to have been very young.

And particularly the days when you were first in love; when you were like a person sleepwalking, and you didn't quite see the street you were in, and didn't quite hear everything that was said to you.

You're just a little bit crazy. Will you remember that, please?

Now they'll be coming out of high school at three o'clock. George has just been elected President of the Junior Class, and as it's June, that means he'll be President of the Senior Class all next year. And Emily's just been elected Secretary and Treasurer. I don't have to tell you how important that is.

→ (A) X DC. He brings out two stools which are placed DC

~~He places a board across the backs of two chairs, which he takes from those at the Gibbs family's table. He brings two high stools from the wings and places them behind the board. Persons sitting on the stools will be facing the audience. This is the counter of Mr. Morgan's drugstore. The sounds of young people's voices are heard off left.~~

Yepp,—there they are coming down Main Street now.

EMILY, carrying an armful of—imaginary—schoolbooks, comes along Main Street from the left.

(A) X DR  
(A) X to S.M. chair  
R

Emily enters from UL and X to CS

Sc. 30

EMILY:

~~I can't, Louise. I've got to go home. Good by. Oh, Ernestine! Ernestine! Can you come over tonight and do Latin? Isn't that Cicero the worst thing—I Tell your mother you *have* to. C'by. G'by, Helen. C'by, Fred.~~

GEORGE, also carrying books, catches up with her.

GEORGE:

Can I carry your books home for you, Emily?

George catches up to Emily. X to her R side  
Off-stage focus  
Emily very cool

EMILY:

Coolly.

Why . . . uh . . . Thank you. It isn't far.  
She gives them to him.

GEORGE:

~~Excuse me a minute, Emily. Say, Bob, if I'm a little late, start practice anyway. And give Herb some long high ones.~~

tempo - slow  
mood - rather strained

EMILY:

~~Good by, Lizzy.~~

GEORGE:

Sc. 31 ~~Good by, Lizzy.~~ I'm awfully glad you were elected, too, Emily.

EMILY:

Thank you.

*They have been standing on Main Street, almost against the back wall. They take the first steps toward the audience when GEORGE stops and says:*

X DC

GEORGE:

Emily, why are you mad at me?

tempo - increase

EMILY:

I'm not mad at you.

GEORGE:

You've been treating me so funny lately.

EMILY:

Well, since you ask me, I might as well say it right out, George,—

*She catches sight of a teacher passing.*

~~Good by, Miss Corcoran.~~

GEORGE:

~~Good by, Miss Corcoran. Wha—what is it?~~

EMILY:

*Not scoldingly; finding it difficult to say.*

I don't like the whole change that's come over you in the last year. I'm sorry if that hurts your feelings, but I've got to—tell the truth and shame the devil.

GEORGE:

A change?—Wha—what do you mean?

EMILY:

Well, up to a year ago I used to like you a lot. And I used to watch you as you did everything . . . because we'd been friends so long . . . and then you began spending all your time at *baseball* . . . and you never stopped to speak to anybody any more. Not even to your own family you didn't . . . and, George, it's a fact, you've got awful conceited and stuck-up, and all the girls say so. They may not say so to your face, but that's what they say about you behind your back, ~~and it hurts me to hear them say it, but I've got to agree with them a little.~~ I'm sorry if it hurts your feelings . . . but I can't be sorry I said it.

GEORGE:

I . . . I'm glad you said it, Emily. I never thought that such a thing was happening to me. I guess it's hard for a fella not to have faults creep into his character.

*They take a step or two in silence, then stand still in misery.*

EMILY:

I always expect a man to be perfect and I think he should be.

GEORGE:

Oh . . . I don't think it's possible to be perfect, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, my *father* is, and as far as I can see *your father* is. There's no reason on earth why you shouldn't be, too.

GEORGE:

Well, I feel it's the other way round. That men aren't naturally good; but girls are.

Vary tempo of Emily's speeches. Use of pauses at dashes and ellipsis marks suggests her difficulty in voicing the criticism  
Emily blurts out her statements  
tempo - brisk

X one or two steps  
DC

Pause - time for both  
to reflect

tempo - slower

EMILY:

Well, you might as well know right now that I'm not perfect. It's not as easy for a girl to be perfect as a man, because we girls are more—more—nervous.—Now I'm sorry I said all that about you. I don't know what made me say it.

Emily relents and  
feels tearful

GEORGE:

Emily,—

EMILY:

Now I can see it's not the truth at all. And I suddenly feel that it isn't important, anyway.

GEORGE:

Emily . . . would you like an ice-cream soda, or something, before you go home?

EMILY:

Well, thank you. . . . I would.

*They advance toward the audience and make an abrupt right turn, opening the door of Morgan's drugstore. Under strong emotion, EMILY keeps her face down. GEORGE speaks to some passers-by.*

X DC turn R and enter  
store from R.  
Emily leads and  
sits on L stool.  
George sits on R  
stool

GEORGE:

Hello, Stew,—how are you?—Good afternoon, Mrs. Slocum.

Sc. 32

*The STAGE MANAGER, wearing spectacles and assuming the role of Mr. Morgan, enters abruptly from the right and stands between the audience and the counter of his soda fountain.*

STAGE MANAGER: Mr. Morgan:

[Hello, George. Hello, Emily.—What'll you have?—Why, Emily Webb,—what you been crying about?

Mr. Morgan enters  
from DL and X to  
L of Emily's stool

GEORGE:

*He gropes for an explanation.*

She . . . she just got an awful scare, Mr. Morgan. She almost got run over by that hardware-store wagon. ~~Everybody says that Tom Huckins drives like a crazy man.~~

STAGE MANAGER: Mr. Morgan:

*Drawing a drink of water.*

Well, now! You take a drink of water, Emily. You look all shook up. I tell you, you've got to look both ways before you cross Main Street these days. Gets worse every year.—What'll you have?

Mime giving her  
drink of water

EMILY:

I'll have a strawberry phosphate, thank you, Mr. Morgan.

GEORGE:

No, no, Emily. Have an ice-cream soda with me.  
Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, Mr. Morgan.

~~STAGE-MANAGER:~~ Mr. Morgan:

*Working the faucets.*

Two strawberry ice-cream sodas, yes sir. Yes, sir. There are a hundred and twenty-five horses in Grover's Corners this minute I'm talking to you. State Inspector was in here yesterday. And now they're bringing in these auto-mo-biles, the best thing to do is to just stay home. Why, I can remember when a dog could go to sleep all day in the middle of Main Street and nothing come along to disturb him.

*He sets the imaginary glasses before them.*

Here they are. Enjoy 'em.

*He sees a customer, right.*

Yes, Mrs. Ellis. What can I do for you?

*He goes out right.*

mime creating  
strawberry sodas

Off-stage focus  
continues

→ Mr. Morgan X L to

EMILY:

They're so expensive.

diagonal chairs  
Conversational tone  
and tempo

GEORGE:

No, no,—don't you think of that. We're celebrating our election. And then do you know what else I'm celebrating?

EMILY:

N-no.

GEORGE:

I'm celebrating because I've got a friend who tells me all the things that ought to be told me.

EMILY:

George, *please* don't think of that. I don't know why I said it. It's not true. You're—

GEORGE:

No, Emily, you stick to it. I'm glad you spoke to me like you did. But you'll *see*: I'm going to change so quick—you bet I'm going to change. And, Emily, I want to ask you a favor.

EMILY:

What?

GEORGE:

Emily, if I go away to State Agriculture College next year, will you write me a letter once in a while?

EMILY:

I certainly will. I certainly will, George . . .

*Pause. They start sipping the sodas through the straws.*

It certainly seems like being away three years you'd get out of touch with things. Maybe letters from Grover's Corners wouldn't be so interesting after a while. Grover's Corners isn't a very important place when you think of all—New Hampshire; but I think it's a very nice town.

GEORGE:

The day wouldn't come when I wouldn't want to know everything that's happening here. I know *that's* true, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, I'll try to make my letters interesting.  
*Pause.*

GEORGE:

Y'know, Emily, whenever I meet a farmer I ask him if he thinks it's important to go to Agriculture School to be a good farmer.

Tempo increases as  
George warms to his  
subject

EMILY:

Why, George—

GEORGE:

Yeah, and some of them say that it's even a waste of time. You can get all those things, anyway, out of the pamphlets the government sends out. And Uncle Luke's getting old,—he's about ready for me to start in taking over his farm tomorrow, if I could.

EMILY:

My!

GEORGE:

And, like you say, being gone all that time . . . in other places and meeting other people . . . Gosh, if anything like that can happen I don't want to go away. I guess new people aren't any better than old ones. I'll bet they almost never are, Emily . . . I feel that you're as good a friend as I've got. I don't need to go and meet the people in other towns.

EMILY:

But, George, maybe it's very important for you to go and learn all that about—cattle judging and soils and those things. . . . Of course, I don't know.

GEORGE:

*After a pause, very seriously.*

Emily, I'm going to make up my mind right now. I won't go. I'll tell Pa about it tonight.

Pause, then switch  
to on-stage focus  
for proposal scene

EMILY:

Why, George, I don't see why you have to decide right now. It's a whole year away.

tempo - slower

GEORGE:

Emily, I'm glad you spoke to me about that . . . that fault in my character. What you said was right;

but there was *one* thing wrong in it, and that was when you said that for a year I wasn't noticing people, and . . . you, for instance. Why, you say you were watching me when I did everything . . . I was doing the same about you all the time. Why, sure,—I always thought about you as one of the chief people I thought about. ~~I always made sure where you were sitting on the bleachers, and who you were with,~~ and for three days now I've been trying to walk home with you; but something's always got in the way. Yesterday I was standing over against the wall waiting for you, and you walked home with *Miss Corcoran*.

EMILY:

George! . . . Life's awful funny! How could I have known that? Why, I thought—

GEORGE:

Listen, Emily, I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to Agriculture School. I think that once you've found a person that you're very fond of . . . I mean a person who's fond of you, too, and likes you enough to be interested in your character . . . Well, I think that's just as important as college is, and even more so. That's what I think.

EMILY:

I think it's awfully important, too.

GEORGE:

[Emily.

→ Turn to each other.

Hold hands

On-stage focus

George speaking

earnestly

minor climax

EMILY:

Y-yes, George.

GEORGE:

Emily, if I *do* improve and make a big change . . . would you be . . . I mean: *could* you be . . .

pauses to indicate important question

EMILY:

I . . . I am now; I always have been.

GEORGE:

*Pause.*

So I guess this is an important talk we've been having.

EMILY:

Yes . . . yes.

GEORGE:

*Takes a deep breath and straightens his back.*

Wait just a minute and I'll walk you home.

*With mounting alarm he digs into his pockets for the money.*

→ Release hands suddenly. George stands

Sc. 34 *The STAGE-MANAGER enters, right.*

GEORGE, *deeply embarrassed, but direct, says to him:*

searches pockets speaks urgently

[Mr. Morgan, I'll have to go home and get the

→ Mr. Morgan X DLC

money to pay you for this. It'll only take me a minute.

tempo - increases

~~STAGE-MANAGER:~~

*Pretending to be affronted.*

What's that? George Gibbs, do you mean to tell me—!

GEORGE:

Yes, but I had reasons, Mr. Morgan.—Look, here's my gold watch to keep until I come back with the money.

~~STAGE-MANAGER:~~

That's all right. Keep your watch. I'll trust you.

GEORGE:

I'll be back in five minutes.

~~STAGE-MANAGER:~~

I'll trust you ten years, George,—not a day over.—Got all over your shock, Emily?

EMILY:

Yes, thank you, Mr. Morgan. It was nothing.

GEORGE:

*Taking up the books from the counter.*

I'm ready.

*They walk in grave silence across the stage and pass through the trellis at the Webbs' back door and disappear.*

*The STAGE MANAGER watches them go out, then turns to the audience, removing his spectacles.*

→ Exit R from store and X to UC and US hand in hand. Then Emily X to L and George to R diagonal chairs

Bridge

~~STAGE MANAGER:~~

(A) Well,—

*He claps his hands as a signal.*

Now we're ready to get on with the wedding!

*He stands waiting while the set is prepared for the next scene.*

*STAGEHANDS remove the chairs, tables and trellises from the Gibbs and Webb houses.*

*They arrange the pews for the church in the center of the stage. The congregation will sit facing the back wall. The aisle of the church starts at the center of the back wall and comes toward the audience.*

*A small platform is placed against the back wall on which the STAGE MANAGER will stand later, playing the minister. The image of a stained-glass window is cast from a lantern slide upon the back wall.*

*When all is ready the STAGE MANAGER strolls to the center of the stage, down front, and, musingly, addresses the audience.*

→ Stage hands set up wedding scene. See figure 7 for detailed diagram  
 (A) X to R stool and sit  
 (B) X to L stool and sit

The arrangement of chairs suggests pews in a church

Chairs facing US

(B) There are a lot of things to be said about a wedding; there are a lot of thoughts that go on during a wedding.

We can't get them all into one wedding, naturally, and especially not into a wedding at Grover's Corners, where they're awfully plain and short.

(A) In this wedding I play the minister. That gives me the right to say a few more things about it.

(B) For a while now, the play gets pretty serious.

(A) Y'see, some churches say that marriage is a sacrament. I don't quite know what that means, but I can guess. Like Mrs. Gibbs said a few minutes ago: People were made to live two-by-two.

This is a good wedding, but people are so put together that even at a good wedding there's a lot of confusion way down deep in people's minds and we thought that that ought to be in our play, too.

(B) The real hero of this scene isn't on the stage at all, and you know who that is. It's like what one of those European fellas said: every child born into the world is nature's attempt to make a perfect human being. Well, we've seen nature pushing and

(A) contriving for some time now. We all know that nature's interested in quantity; but I think she's interested in quality, too,—that's why I'm in the ministry.

And don't forget all the other witnesses at this wedding—the ancestors. Millions of them. Most of them set out to live two-by-two, also. Millions of them.

Well, that's all my sermon. 'Twan't very long, anyway.

*The organ starts playing Handel's "Largo."*

*The congregation streams into the church and sits in silence.*

*Church bells are heard.*

MRS. GIBBS sits in the front row, the first seat on the aisle, the right section; next to her are REBECCA and DR. GIBBS. Across the aisle MRS. WEBB, WALLY and MR. WEBB. A small choir takes its place, facing the audience under the stained-glass window.

MRS. WEBB, on the way to her place, turns back and speaks to the audience.

MRS. WEBB:

I don't know why on earth I should be crying. I suppose there's nothing to cry about. It came over me at breakfast this morning; there was Emily eating her breakfast as she's done for seventeen years and now she's going off to eat it in someone else's house. I suppose that's it.

And Emily! She suddenly said: I can't eat another mouthful, and she put her head down on the table and she cried.

Use of alternating narration helps to give emphasis to lines

(B) stress these lines

(A) stress these key lines

(A) X to R carrying stool

(B) X to L carrying stool

Congregation has formed in R and L wings

They now process into pews by crossing from DL and DR to

C and entering R or L pew with FB

Light Q - full stage

Mrs. Webb stops at DC and addresses audience

*She starts toward her seat in the church, but turns back and adds:*

[Oh, I've got to say it: you know, there's something downright cruel about sending our girls out into marriage this way.

I hope some of her girl friends have told her a thing or two. It's cruel, I know, but I couldn't bring myself to say anything. I went into it blind as a bat myself.

*In half-amused exasperation.*

The whole world's wrong, that's what's the matter.

There they come.

*She hurries to her place in the pew.*

GEORGE starts to come down the right aisle of the theatre, through the audience.

→ Mrs. Webb starts UC then turns to face audience

→ Mrs. Webb X UC to R front pew

Sc. 35

~~Suddenly THREE MEMBERS of his baseball team appear by the right proscenium pillar and start whistling and catcalling to him. They are dressed for the ball field.~~

George comes to apron R

~~THE BASEBALL PLAYERS:~~

~~Eh, George, George! Hast—yaow! Look at him, fellas—he looks scared to death. Yaow! George, don't look so innocent, you old geezer. We know what you're thinking. Don't disgrace the team, big boy. Whoo-oo-oo.~~

~~STAGE MANAGER:~~

~~All right! All right! That'll do. That's enough of that.~~

~~Smiling, he pushes them off the stage. They lean back to shout a few more catcalls.~~

~~There used to be an awful lot of that kind of thing at weddings in the old days, Rome, and later. We're more civilized now, so they say.~~

~~The choir starts singing "Love Divine, All Love Excelling." GEORGE has reached the stage. He stares at the congregation a moment, then takes a few steps of withdrawal, toward the right proscenium pillar. His mother, from the front row, seems to have felt his confusion. She leaves her seat and comes down the aisle quickly to him.~~

Light Q - R

SC. 36

MRS. GIBBS:

[George! George! What's the matter?

GEORGE:

Ma, I don't want to grow old. Why's everybody pushing me so?

MRS. GIBBS:

Why, George . . . you wanted it.

GEORGE:

No, Ma, listen to me—

MRS. GIBBS:

No, no, George,—you're a man now.

→ Mrs. Gibbs X from L front pew to DR, L of George  
On-stage focus  
George upset  
Mrs. Gibbs speaks urgently

tempo - fairly quick

GEORGE:

Listen, Ma,—for the last time I ask you . . . All I want to do is to be a fella—

MRS. GIBBS:

George! If anyone should hear you! Now stop. Why, I'm ashamed of you!

GEORGE:

*He comes to himself and looks over the scene.*  
What? Where's Emily?

MRS. GIBBS:

*Relieved.*

George! You gave me such a turn.

GEORGE:

Cheer up, Ma. I'm getting married.

MRS. GIBBS:

Let me catch my breath a minute.

GEORGE:

*Comforting her.*

[Now, Ma, you save Thursday nights. Emily and I are coming over to dinner every Thursday night . . . you'll see. Ma, what are you crying for? Come on, we've got to get ready for this.

MRS. GIBBS, *mastering her emotion, fixes his tie and whispers to him.*

*In the meantime, EMILY, in white and wearing her wedding veil, has come through the audience and mounted onto the stage. She too draws back, frightened, when she sees the congregation in the church. The choir begins: "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."*

Slight pause as  
George collects  
his wits  
tempo - slow

→ George places L arm  
around Mrs. Gibbs'  
shoulder

Mrs. Gibbs adjusts  
his tie, etc.

Emily enters apron L  
preceded by Mr.  
Webb

Light Q - X fade  
to L

Sc. 37

EMILY: Papa!

I never felt so alone in my whole life. And George over there, looking so . . . I hate him. I wish I were dead. Papa! Papa!

→ They stop at DL  
On-stage focus  
Emily tense and  
upset  
tempo - fairly quick

MR. WEBB:

~~Leaves his seat in the pews and comes toward her anxiously.~~

Emily! ~~Emily!~~ Now don't get upset. . . .

EMILY:

But, Papa,—I don't want to get married. . . .

intense

MR. WEBB:

Sh—sh—Emily. Everything's all right.

EMILY:

Why can't I stay for a while just as I am? Let's go away,—

MR. WEBB:

No, no, Emily. Now stop and think a minute.

EMILY:

Don't you remember that you used to say,—all the time you used to say—all the time: that I was *your* girl! There must be lots of places we can go to. I'll work for you. I could keep house.

MR. WEBB:

Sh . . . You mustn't think of such things. You're just nervous, Emily.

*He turns and calls:*

George! George! Will you come here a minute?

*He leads her towards George.*

Why you're marrying the best young fellow in the world. George is a fine fellow.

EMILY:

But Papa,—

*MRS. GIBBS returns unobtrusively to her seat.*

*MR. WEBB has one arm around his daughter. He places his hand on GEORGE'S shoulder.*

MR. WEBB:

I'm giving away my daughter, George. Do you think you can take care of her?

GEORGE:

Mr. Webb, I want to . . . I want to try. Emily, I'm going to do my best. I love you, Emily. I need you.

EMILY:

~~Well, if you love me, help me. All I want is some one to love me.~~

GEORGE:

~~I will, Emily. Emily, I'll try.~~

EMILY:

~~And I mean for ever. Do you hear? For ever and ever.~~

~~*They fall into each other's arms.*~~

~~*The March from Lohengrin is heard.*~~

*The STAGE MANAGER, as CLERGYMAN, stands on the box up center.*

MR. WEBB:

Come, they're waiting for us. Now you know it'll be all right. Come, quick.

*GEORGE slips away and takes his place beside the STAGE MANAGER-CLERGYMAN.*

Sc. 38 *EMILY proceeds up the aisle on her father's arm.*

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Do you, George, take this woman, Emily, to be your wedded wife, to have . . .

*MRS SOAMES has been sitting in the last row of the congregation.*

*She now turns to her neighbours and speaks in a shrill voice. Her chatter drowns out the rest of the clergyman's words.*

George X to DL to R of Mr. Webb

Mrs. Gibbs returns to her pew  
Mr. Webb places hand on George's shoulder

minor climax

George X to ULC  
The congregation rises as Emily moves up aisle on father's arm

Light Q - full stage

Mr. Webb steps back and moves to his spot by R of Mrs. Webb

MRS. SOAMES:

Perfectly lovely wedding! Loveliest wedding I ever saw. Oh, I do love a good wedding, don't you? Doesn't she make a lovely bride?

→ Mrs. Soames turns to neighbor  $\frac{1}{4}$  R

GEORGE:

I do.

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Do you, Emily, take this man, George, to be your wedded husband,—  
*Again his further words are covered by those of MRS. SOAMES.*

MRS. SOAMES:

Don't know *when* I've seen such a lovely wedding. But I always cry. Don't know why it is, but I always cry. I just like to see young people happy, don't you? Oh, I think it's lovely.

→ George and Emily kneel. Mime ring

*The ring.*

*The kiss.*

Bridge

*The stage is suddenly arrested into silent tableau. The STAGEMANAGER, his eyes on the distance, as though to himself:*

All freeze except S.M.

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) I've married over two hundred couples in my day. Do I believe in it? I don't know. M. . . . marries N. . . . millions of them.

The cottage, the go-cart, the Sunday-afternoon drives in the Ford, the first rheumatism, the grandchildren, the second rheumatism, the deathbed, the reading of the will,—

*He now looks at the audience for the first time, with a warm smile that removes any sense of cynicism from the next line.*

Once in a thousand times it's interesting.

—Well, let's have Mendelssohn's "Wedding March"!

*The organ picks up the March.*

*The BRIDE and GROOM come down the aisle, radiant, but trying to be very dignified.*

→ George and Emily stand and exit down C aisle. Congregation

MRS. SOAMES:

Aren't they a lovely couple? Oh, I've never been to such a nice wedding. I'm sure they'll be happy. I always say: *happiness*, that's the great thing! The important thing is to be happy.

*The BRIDE and GROOM reach the steps leading into the audience. A bright light is thrown upon them. They descend into the auditorium and run up the aisle joyously.*

follows. Form receiving line DL. Congratulations Mrs. Soames stops DC

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) That's all the Second Act, folks. ~~Ten minutes'~~ intermission. We'll be back with Act III in one minute.

S.M. X DC and addresses audience  
Light Q - blackout

## ACT THREE

*During the intermission the audience has seen the STAGEHANDS arranging the stage. On the right-hand side, a little right of the center, ten or twelve ordinary chairs have been placed in three openly spaced rows facing the audience.*

*These are graves in the cemetery.*

*Toward the end of the intermission the ACTORS enter and take their places. The front row contains: toward the center of the stage, an empty chair; then MRS. GIBBS; SIMON STIMSON.*

*The second row contains, among others, MRS. SOAMES. The third row has WALLY WEBB.*

*The dead do not turn their heads or their eyes to right or left, but they sit in a quiet without stiffness. When they speak their tone is matter-of-fact, without sentimentality and, above all, without lugubriousness.*

*The STAGE MANAGER takes his accustomed place and waits for the house lights to go down.*

Light Q - blackout  
then whole stage

See Figure 8 for detailed diagram of cast and stage arrangement

The dead speak directly towards the audience using off-stage focus at all times. They do not turn their heads. Emily is the exception to this rule.

### Bridge

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) [This time nine years have gone by, friends—summer, 1913.] → (A) X DR

(B) [Gradual changes in Grover's Corners. Horses are getting rarer. Farmers coming into town in Fords. Everybody locks their house doors now at night. Ain't been any burglars in town yet, but everybody's heard about 'em. You'd be surprised, though—on the whole, things don't change much around here.] → (B) X DL  
Vary tempo according to pauses and thought groupings. Short pauses at the dashes to give conversational quality

[This is certainly an important part of Grover's Corners. Its on a hilltop—a windy hilltop—lots of sky, lots of clouds,—often lots of sun and moon and stars.] → (B) X DC

You come up here, on a fine afternoon and you can see range on range of hills—awful blue they are—up there by Lake Sunapee and Lake Winnepesaukee . . . and way up, if you've got a glass, you can see the White Mountains and Mt. Washington where North Conway and Conway is. And, of course, our favorite mountain, Mt. Monadnock, 's right here—and all these towns that lie around it: Jaffrey, 'n East Jaffrey, 'n Peterborough, 'n Dublin; and

*Then pointing down in the audience.*

there, quite a ways down, is Grover's Corners. Yes, beautiful spot up here. Mountain laurel and li-lacks. I often wonder why people like to be buried

in Woodlawn and Brooklyn when they might pass the same time up here in New Hampshire. Over there—

*Pointing to stage left.*

are the old stones,—1670, 1680. Strong-minded people that come a long way to be independent. Summer people walk around there laughing at the funny words on the tombstones . . . it don't do any harm. ~~And genealogists come up from Boston get paid by city people for looking up their ancestors. They want to make sure they're Daughters of the American Revolution and of the *Mayflower*. . . . Well, I guess that don't do any harm, either. Wherever you come near the human race, there's layers and layers of nonsense. . . .~~

~~Over there are some Civil War veterans. Iron flags on their graves . . . New Hampshire boys . . . had a notion that the Union ought to be kept together, though they'd never seen more than fifty miles of it themselves. All they knew was the name, friends—the United States of America. The United States of America. And they went and died about it.~~

(A) ~~This here is the new part of the cemetery. Here's your friend Mrs. Gibbs. 'N let me see—Here's Mr. Stimson, organist at the Congregational Church. And Mrs. Soames who enjoyed the wedding so—you remember? Oh, and a lot of others. And Editor Webb's boy, Wallace, whose appendix burst while he was on a Boy Scout trip to Crawford Notch.~~

~~Yes, an awful lot of sorrow has sort of quieted down up here. People just wild with grief have brought their relatives up to this hill. We all know how it is—and then time . . . and sunny days . . . and rainy days . . . 'n snow . . . We're all glad they're in a beautiful place and we're coming up here ourselves when our fit's over.~~

Now there are some things we all know, but we don't take 'em out and look at 'em very often. We all know that *something* is eternal. And it ain't houses and it ain't names, and it ain't earth, and it ain't even the stars . . . everybody knows in their bones that *something* is eternal, and that something has to do with human beings. All the greatest people ever lived have been telling us that for five thousand years, and yet you'd be surprised how people are always losing hold of it. There's something way down deep that's eternal about every human being.

*Pause.*

You know as well as I do that the dead don't stay interested in us living people for very long. Gradually, gradually, they lose hold of the earth . . . and the ambitions they had . . . and the pleasures they had . . . and the things they suffered

→ (B) X DL

→ (A) X DC

tempo - increases

Pause before introducing concept of eternity. Stress key lines

tempo - slows

Pause to allow audience reflection

... and the people they loved.  
~~They get weaned away from earth—that's the way~~  
~~I put it, weaned away.~~

And they stay here while the earth part of 'em  
 burns away, burns out; and all that time they  
 slowly get indifferent to what's goin' on in Grover's  
 Corners.

They're waitin'. They're waitin' for something that  
 they feel is comin'. Something important, and  
 great. Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in  
 them to come out clear?

Some of the things they're going to say maybe'll  
 hurt your feelings—but that's the way it is:  
 mother 'n daughter ... husband 'n wife ...  
 enemy 'n enemy ... money 'n miser ... all  
 those terribly important things kind of grow pale  
 around here. ~~And what's left when memory's gone,~~  
~~and your identity, Mrs. Smith.~~

*He looks at the audience a minute, then turns  
 to the stage.*

(B) Well! There are some *living* people. There's Joe  
 Stoddard, our undertaker, supervising a new-made  
 grave. And here comes a Grover's Corners boy, that  
 left town to go out West.

*JOE STODDARD has hovered about in the back-  
 ground. SAM CRAIG enters left, wiping his fore-  
 head from the exertion. He carries an umbrella  
 and strolls front.*

Sc. 39

SAM CRAIG:

Good afternoon, Joe Stoddard.

JOE STODDARD:

Good afternoon, good afternoon. Let me see now:  
 do I know you?

SAM CRAIG:

I'm Sam Craig.

JOE STODDARD:

Gracious sakes' alive! Of all people! I should'a  
 knowed you'd be back for the funeral. You've been  
 away a long time, Sam.

SAM CRAIG:

Yes, I've been away over twelve years. I'm in busi-  
 ness out in Buffalo now, Joe. But I was in the East  
 when I got news of my cousin's death, so I thought  
 I'd combine things a little and come and see the  
 old home. You look well.

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, yes, can't complain. Very sad, our journey  
 today, Samuel.

SAM CRAIG:

Yes.

Stress key lines

(A) X to S.M. chair  
 R

tempo - increases as  
 new scene intro-  
 duced

(B) X to S.M. chair  
 L

Light Q - DC - fade  
L and R

Sam enters from USC  
 Joe enters from SL  
 They meet DC  
 Off-stage focus

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, yes. I always say I hate to supervise when a young person is taken. They'll be here in a few minutes now. I had to come here early today—my son's supervisin' at the home.

~~SAM CRAIG:~~

~~Reading stones.~~

~~Old Farmer McCarty, I used to do chores for him  
—after school. He had the lumbago.~~

~~JOE STODDARD:~~

~~Yes, we brought Farmer McCarty here a number  
of years ago now.~~

~~SAM CRAIG:~~

~~Staring at Mrs. Gibbs' knees.~~

~~Why, this is my Aunt Julia . . . I'd forgotten that  
she'd . . . of course, of course.~~ → Sam X DRC

JOE STODDARD:

Yes, Doc Gibbs lost his wife two-three years ago . . . about this time. And today's another pretty bad blow for him, too.

MRS. GIBBS:

*To Simon Stimson: in an even voice.*

That's my sister Carey's boy, Sam . . . Sam Craig.

SIMON STIMSON:

I'm always uncomfortable when *they're* around.

MRS. GIBBS:

Simon.

SAM CRAIG:

Do they choose their own verses much, Joe?

JOE STODDARD:

No . . . not usual. Mostly the bereaved pick a verse.

SAM CRAIG:

Doesn't sound like Aunt Julia. There aren't many of those Hersey sisters left now. ~~Let me see: where are . . . I wanted to look at my father's and mother's . . .~~

~~JOE STODDARD:~~

~~—Over there with the Craigs . . . Avenue F.~~

~~SAM CRAIG:~~

~~Reading Simon Stimson's epitaph.~~

~~He was organist at church, wasn't he?—Hm, drank a lot, we used to say.~~

~~JOE STODDARD:~~

~~Nobody was supposed to know about it. He'd seen a peck of trouble.~~

~~Behind his hand.~~

~~Took his own life, y'know?~~

~~SAM CRAIG:~~  
Oh, did he?

~~JOE STODDARD:~~  
Hung himself in the attic. They tried to hush it up, but of course it got around. He chose his own epy taph. You can see it there. It ain't a verse exactly.

~~SAM CRAIG:~~  
Why, it's just some notes of music—what is it?

~~JOE STODDARD:~~  
Oh, I wouldn't know. It was wrote up in the Boston papers at the time.

SAM CRAIG:  
| Joe, what did she die of? → Sam X DC

JOE STODDARD:  
Who?

SAM CRAIG:  
My cousin.

JOE STODDARD:  
Oh, didn't you know? Had some trouble bringing a baby into the world. 'Twas her second, though. There's a little boy 'bout four years old.

SAM CRAIG:  
*Opening his umbrella.*  
The grave's going to be over there?

JOE STODDARD:  
Yes, there ain't much more room over here among the Gibbises, so they're opening up a whole new Gibbs section over by Avenue B. You'll excuse me now. I see they're comin'.  
*From left to center, at the back of the stage, comes a procession. ~~FOUR MEN~~ carry a casket, ~~invisible to us~~. All the rest are under umbrellas. one can vaguely see: DR. GIBBS, GEORGE, the WEBBS, etc. They gather about a grave in the back center of the stage, a little to the left of center.*

Group of mourners enter from L diagonal chairs. Joe and Sam join mourners. The remaining Webbs and Gibbs are at front of mourners

Sc. 40 MRS. SOAMES:

Who is it, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS:  
*Without raising her eyes.*  
My daughter-in-law, Emily Webb.

MRS. SOAMES:  
*A little surprised, but no emotion.*  
Well, I declare! The road up here must have been awful muddy. What did she die of, Julia?

MRS. GIBBS:  
In childbirth.

Off-stage focus  
The mourners stand in a group with downcast eyes

MRS. SOAMES:

Childbirth.

*Almost with a laugh.*

I'd forgotten all about that. My, wasn't life awful—

*With a sigh.*

and wonderful.

SIMON STIMSON:

*With a sideways glance.*

Wonderful, was it?

MRS. GIBBS:

Simon! Now, remember!

MRS. SOAMES:

I remember Emily's wedding. Wasn't it a lovely wedding! And I remember her reading the class poem at Graduation Exercises. Emily was one of the brightest girls ever graduated from High School. I've heard Principal Wilkins say so time after time. I called on them at their new farm, before I died. Perfectly beautiful farm.

A WOMAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD:

It's on the same road we lived on.

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD:

Yepp, right smart farm.

~~*They subside. The group by the grave starts singing "Blessed Be the Tie That Binds."*~~

~~A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD:~~

~~I always liked that hymn. I was hopin' they'd sing a hymn.~~

*Pause. Suddenly EMILY appears from among the umbrellas. She is wearing a white dress. Her hair is down her back and tied by a white ribbon like a little girl. She comes slowly, gazing wonderingly at the dead, a little dazed.*

*She stops halfway and smiles faintly. After looking at the mourners for a moment, she walks slowly to the vacant chair beside Mrs. Gibbs and sits down*

Sc. 41

EMILY:

*To them all, quietly, smiling.*

Hello.

MRS. SOAMES:

Hello, Emily.

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD:

Hello, M's Gibbs.

EMILY:

*Warmly.*

Hello, Mother Gibbs.

Mrs. Soames maintains enthusiasm

Pause while Emily approaches  
Emily X from USL  
to DC

→ Emily sits in vacant chair by Mrs. Gibbs  
Emily uses on-stage focus. The dead use off-stage focus

MRS. GIBBS:

Emily.

EMILY:

Hello.

*With surprise.*

It's raining.

*Her eyes drift back to the funeral company.*

MRS. GIBBS:

Yes . . . They'll be gone soon, dear. Just rest yourself.

EMILY:

It seems thousands and thousands of years since I . . . Papa remembered that that was my favourite hymn.

Oh, I wish I'd been here a long time. I don't like being new here.—How do you do, Mr. Stimson?

SIMON STIMSON:

How do you do, Emily.

*EMILY continues to look about her with a wondering smile; as though to shut out from her mind the thought of the funeral company she starts speaking to Mrs. Gibbs with a touch of nervousness.*

EMILY:

Mother Gibbs, George and I have made that farm into just the best place you ever saw. We thought of you all the time. We wanted to show you the new barn and a great long ce-ment drinking fountain for the stock. We bought that out of the money you left us.

MRS. GIBBS:

I did?

EMILY:

Don't you remember, Mother Gibbs—the legacy you left us? Why, it was over three hundred and fifty dollars.

MRS. GIBBS:

Yes, yes, Emily.

EMILY:

Well, there's a patent device on the drinking fountain so that it never overflows, Mother Gibbs, and it never sinks below a certain mark they have there. It's fine.

*Her voice trails off and her eyes return to the funeral group.*

It won't be the same to George without me, but it's a lovely farm.

*Suddenly she looks directly at Mrs. Gibbs.*

Live people don't understand, do they?

Emily - questioning  
and seems some-  
what dazed

tempo - increases

Pause as Emily  
remembers  
tempo - slower

intense

MRS. GIBBS:

No, dear—not very much.

EMILY:

They're sort of shut up in little boxes, aren't they? I feel as though I knew them last a thousand years ago . . . ~~My boy is spending the day at Mrs. Carter's.~~

*She sees MR. CARTER among the dead.*

~~Oh, Mr. Carter, my little boy is spending the day at your house.~~

~~MR. CARTER:~~

~~Is he?~~

EMILY:

~~Yes, he loves it there.~~—Mother Gibbs, we have a Ford, too. Never gives any trouble. I don't drive, though. Mother Gibbs, when does this feeling go away?—Of being . . . one of *them*? How long does it . . . ?

MRS. GIBBS:

Sh! dear. Just wait and be patient.

EMILY:

*With a sigh.*

I know.—Look, they're finished. They're going.

MRS. GIBBS:

Sh—.

*The umbrellas leave the stage. DR. GIBBS has come over to his wife's grave and stands before it a moment. EMILY looks up at his face. MRS.*

*GIBBS does not raise her eyes.*

Sc. 42

EMILY:

~~Look! Father Gibbs is bringing some of my flowers to you. He looks just like George, doesn't he? Oh, Mother Gibbs, I never realized before how troubled and how . . . how in the dark live persons are. Look at him. I loved him so. From morning till night, that's all they are—troubled.~~

Sc. 43 ~~DR. GIBBS goes off.~~

THE DEAD:

Little cooler than it was.—Yes, that rain's cooled it off a little. Those northeast winds always do the same thing, don't they? If it isn't a rain, it's a three-day blow.—

*A patient calm falls on the stage. The STAGE MANAGER appears at his proscenium pillar, smoking. EMILY sits up abruptly with an idea.*

Sc. 44

EMILY:

But, Mother Gibbs, one can go back; one can go back there again . . . into living. I feel it. I know it. Why just then for a moment I was thinking about . . . about the farm . . . and for a minute I

Pause as Emily remembers

tempo - increases

Pause while mourners exit to L diagonal chairs

Light Q - R side up  
intense

Pause reflecting passage of time in eternity

These lines distributed amongst the dead

Pause

→ S.M. (A) stands by R proscenium  
tempo - increases

*was* there, and my baby was on my lap as plain as day.

MRS. GIBBS:

Yes, of course you can.

EMILY:

I can go back there and live all those days over again . . . why not?

MRS. GIBBS:

All I can say is, Emily, don't.

EMILY:

*She appeals urgently to the stage manager.*

But it's true, isn't it? I can go and live . . . back there . . . again.

intense

STAGE MANAGER:

Yes, some have tried—but they soon come back here.

MRS. GIBBS:

Don't do it, Emily.

MRS. SOAMES:

Emily, don't. It's not what you think it'd be.

EMILY:

But I won't live over a sad day. I'll choose a happy one—I'll choose the day I first knew that I loved George. Why should that be painful?

*THEY are silent. Her question turns to the stage manager.*

tempo - slows

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) You not only live it; but you watch yourself living it.

EMILY:

Yes?

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) And as you watch it, you see the thing that they—down there—never know. You see the future. You know what's going to happen afterwards.

EMILY:

But is that—painful? Why?

MRS. GIBBS:

That's not the only reason why you shouldn't do it, Emily. When you've been here longer you'll see that our life here is to forget all that, and think only of what's ahead, and be ready for what's ahead. When you've been here longer you'll understand.

stress

EMILY:

*Softly.*

But, Mother Gibbs, how can I *ever* forget that life? It's all I know. It's all I had.

MRS. SOAMES:

Oh, Emily. It isn't wise. Really, it isn't.

EMILY:

But it's a thing I must know for myself. I'll choose a happy day, anyway.

MRS. GIBBS:

No!—At least, choose an unimportant day. Choose the least important day in your life. It will be important enough.

EMILY:

*To herself.*

Then it can't be since I was married; or since the baby was born.

*To the stage manager, eagerly.*

I can choose a birthday at least, can't I?—I choose my twelfth birthday.

tempo - increases

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) All right. February 11th, 1899. A Tuesday.—Do you want any special time of day?

Light Q - L and C  
lights come up

EMILY:

Oh, I want the whole day.

intense

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) We'll begin at dawn. You remember it had been snowing for several days; but it had stopped the night before, and they had begun clearing the roads. The sun's coming up.

EMILY:

*With a cry; rising.*

There's Main Street . . . why, that's Mr. Morgan's drugstore before he changed it! . . . And there's the livery stable.

*The stage at no time in this act has been very dark; but now the left half of the stage gradually becomes very bright—the brightness of a crisp winter morning.*

~~EMILY walks toward Main Street.~~

Emily remains at  
her chair

Light Q - R lights  
fade

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Yes, it's 1899. This is fourteen years ago.

Emily stands in front  
of her chair

EMILY:

Oh, that's the town I knew as a little girl. And, look, there's the old white fence that used to be around our house. Oh, I'd forgotten that! Oh, I love it so! Are they inside?

STAGE MANAGER:

Yes, your mother'll be coming downstairs in a minute to make breakfast.

EMILY:  
Softly.  
Will she?

STAGE MANAGER:  
(A) And you remember: your father had been away for several days; he came back on the early-morning train.

EMILY:  
No . . . ?

STAGE MANAGER:  
(A) He'd been back to his college to make a speech—in western New York, at Clinton.

EMILY:  
Look! There's Howie Newsome. There's our policeman. But he's *dead*; he *died*.  
*The voices of HOWIE NEWSOME, CONSTABLE WARREN and JOE CROWELL, JR., are heard at the left of the stage. EMILY listens in delight.*

Sc. 45

HOWIE NEWSOME:  
~~Whoa, Bessie!—Bessie!~~ 'Morning, Bill.

Off-stage focus  
Constable and Howie meet USC

CONSTABLE WARREN:  
Morning, Howie.

HOWIE NEWSOME:  
You're up early.

tempo - increases for flashback scene to differentiate living from dead  
X CS

CONSTABLE WARREN:  
Been rescuin' a party; darn near froze to death, down by Polish Town thar. Got drunk and lay out in the snowdrifts. Thought he was in bed when I shook'm.

EMILY:  
Why, there's Joe Crowell. . . .

JOE CROWELL:  
Good morning, Mr. Warren. 'Morning, Howie.  
MRS. WEBB has appeared in her kitchen, but EMILY does not see her until she calls.

Joe X from UL to L of Constable and Howie

MRS. WEBB:  
Chil-dren! Wally! Emily! . . . Time to get up.

Light Q - L

EMILY:  
Mama, I'm here! Oh! how young Mama looks! I didn't know Mama was ever that young.

Emily stands

MRS. WEBB:  
You can come and dress by the kitchen fire, if you like; but hurry.  
HOWIE NEWSOME has entered along Main Street and brings the milk to Mrs. Webb's door.  
Good morning, Mr. Newsome. Whhhh—it's cold.

Joe exits to UL, Constable X UR  
Howie X to Webbs L

HOWIE NEWSOME:  
Ten below by my barn, Mrs. Webb.

MRS. WEBB:

Think of it! Keep yourself wrapped up. |  
*She takes her bottles in, shuddering.* → Howie exits to UL

EMILY:

*With an effort.*

Mama, I can't find my blue hair ribbon anywhere.

MRS. WEBB:

Just open your eyes, dear, that's all. I laid it out for you special—on the dresser, there. If it were a snake it would bite you.

EMILY:

Yes, yes . . .

*She puts her hand on her heart.* MR. WEBB comes along Main Street, where he meets CONSTABLE WARREN. Their movements and voices are increasingly lively in the sharp air.

Sc. 46

MR. WEBB:

Good morning, Bill.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Good morning, Mr. Webb. You're up early.

→ Constable and Mr. Webb meet CS

MR. WEBB:

Yes, just been back to my old college in New York State. Been any trouble here?

CONSTABLE WARREN:

Well, I was called up this mornin' to rescue a Polish fella—darn near froze to death he was.

MR. WEBB:

We must get it in the paper.

CONSTABLE WARREN:

'Twan't much.

EMILY:

*Whispers.*

Papa.

MR. WEBB *shakes the snow off his feet and enters his house.* CONSTABLE WARREN goes off, right.

→ Constable exits R to grave  
 Mr. Webb enters house

Sc. 47

MR. WEBB:

Good morning, Mother.

MRS. WEBB:

How did it go, Charles?

MR. WEBB:

Oh, fine, I guess. I told'm a few things—Everything all right here?

MRS. WEBB:

Yes—can't think of anything that's happened,

On-stage focus tempo - quick  
 Both Mr. and Mrs. Webb are youthful

special. Been right cold. ~~Howie Newsome says it's ten below over to his barn.~~

MR. WEBB:

~~Yes, well, it's colder than that at Hamilton College. Students' cars are falling off. It ain't Christian. Paper have any mistakes in it?~~

MRS. WEBB:

~~None that I noticed. Coffee's ready when you want it.~~

*He starts upstairs.*

Charles! Don't forget; it's Emily's birthday. Did you remember to get her something?

MR. WEBB:

*Patting his pocket.*

Yes, I've got something here.

*Calling up the stairs.*

Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

*He goes off left.*

MRS. WEBB:

Don't interrupt her now, Charles. You can see her at breakfast. She's slow enough as it is. Hurry up, children! It's seven o'clock. Now, I don't want to call you again.

→ Mr. Webb X to L  
diagonal chairs

Bridge

EMILY:

*Softly, more in wonder than in grief.*

I can't bear it. They're so young and beautiful. Why did they ever have to get old? Mama, I'm here. I'm grown up. I love you all, everything.— I can't look at everything hard enough.

*She looks questioningly at the STAGE MANAGER, saying or suggesting: "Can I go in?" He nods briefly. She crosses to the inner door to the kitchen, left of her mother, and as though entering the room, says, suggesting the*

Emily - use off-stage focus here. Highly emotional state. Intense

Sc. 48

*voice of a girl of twelve?*

Light Q - L. Fade  
R and C

Good morning, Mama.

→ Emily X to house L

MRS. WEBB:

*Crossing to embrace and kiss her; in her characteristic matter-of-fact manner.*

Well, now, dear, a very happy birthday to my girl and many happy returns. There are some surprises waiting for you on the kitchen table.

On-stage focus

EMILY:

Oh, Mama, you *shouldn't* have!

*She throws an anguished glance at the stage manager.*

I can't—I can't.

→ Emily sits in R chair  
DLC

intense

MRS. WEBB:

*Facing the audience, over her stove.*

But birthday or no birthday, I want you to eat your breakfast good and slow. I want you to grow up and be a good strong girl.

That in the blue paper is from your Aunt Carrie; and I reckon you can guess who brought the post-card album. I found it on the doorstep when I brought in the milk—George Gibbs . . . must have come over in the cold pretty early . . . right nice of him.

EMILY:

*To herself.*

Oh, George! I'd forgotten that. . . .

MRS. WEBB:

Chew that bacon good and slow. It'll help keep you warm on a cold day.

EMILY:

*With mounting urgency.*

Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me. Mama, fourteen years have gone by. I'm dead. You're a grandmother, Mama. I married George Gibbs, Mama. Wally's dead, too. Mama, his appendix burst on a camping trip to North Conway. We felt just terrible about it—don't you remember? But, just for a moment now we're all together. Mama, just for a moment we're happy. Let's look at one another.

MRS. WEBB:

That in the yellow paper is something I found in the attic among your grandmother's things. You're old enough to wear it now, and I thought you'd like it.

EMILY:

And this is from you. Why, Mama, it's just lovely and it's just what I wanted. It's beautiful!

*She flings her arms around her mother's neck.*

*Her MOTHER goes on with her cooking, but is pleased.*

MRS. WEBB:

Well, I hoped you'd like it. Hunted all over. Your Aunt Norah couldn't find one in Concord, so I had to send all the way to Boston.

*Laughing.*

Wally has something for you, too. He made it at manual-training class and he's very proud of it. Be sure you make a big fuss about it.—Your father has a surprise for you, too; don't know what it is myself. Sh—here he comes.

Mrs. Webb - maintain quick tempo

Emily - use off-stage focus here intense

→ stress key line, minor climax  
On-stage focus  
Mrs. Webb does not respond to Emily's emotional outburst

MR. WEBB:

*Off stage.*

Where's my girl? Where's my birthday girl?

EMILY:

*In a loud voice to the stage manager.*

I can't. I can't go on. It goes so fast. We don't have time to look at one another.

Off-stage focus

intense

Bridge *She breaks down sobbing.*

*The lights dim on the left half of the stage.*

*MRS. WEBB disappears.*

Light Q - X fade  
to DC

I didn't realize. So all that was going on and we never noticed. Take me back—up the hill—to my grave. But first: Wait! One more look.

→ Emily stands. X DC

Good-by, Good-by, world. Good-by, Grover's Corners . . . Mama and Papa. Good-by to clocks ticking . . . and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths . . . and sleeping and waking up. Oh, earth, you're too wonderful for anybody to realize you.

→ X to chair DRC

Sc. 49 *She looks toward the stage manager and asks abruptly through her tears:*

Light Q - X fade to R

Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it?—every, every minute?

Climax - intense

STAGE MANAGER:

No.

Off-stage focus

*Pause.*

The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.

EMILY:

I'm ready to go back.

*She returns to her chair beside Mrs. Gibbs.*

*Pause.*

Sc. 50

MRS. GIBBS:

Were you happy?

→ She sits

EMILY:

No . . . I should have listened to you. That's all human beings are! Just blind people.

tempo - slows

MRS. GIBBS:

Look, it's clearing up. The stars are coming out.

EMILY:

Oh, Mr. Stimson, I should have listened to them.

SIMON STIMSON:

*With mounting violence; biting.*

Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those . . . of those about you. To spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion, or another. Now you know—that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to. Ignorance and blindness.

intense

MRS. GIBBS:

*Spiritedly.*

Simon Stimson, that ain't the whole truth and you know it. Emily, look at that star. I forget its name.

tempo - increases

A MAN AMONG THE DEAD:

My boy Joel was a sailor,—knew 'em all. He'd set on the porch evenings and tell 'em all by name. Yes, sir, wonderful!

~~A MAN AMONG THE DEAD:~~

~~A star's mighty good company.~~

~~A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD:~~

~~Yes. Yes. 'tis.~~

SIMON STIMSON:

[Here's one of *them* coming.]

→ George X to CS

THE DEAD:

That's funny. 'Tain't no time for one of them to be here.—Goodness sakes.

EMILY:

Mother Gibbs, it's George.

Emily - use on-stage focus here

MRS. GIBBS:

Sh, dear. Just rest yourself.

EMILY:

It's George.

Sc. 51 GEORGE enters from the left, and slowly comes toward them.

Light Q - R and C

A MAN FROM AMONG THE DEAD:

And my boy, Joel, who knew the stars—he used to say it took millions of years for that speck o' light to git to the earth. Don't seem like a body could believe it, but that's what he used to say—millions of years.

GEORGE *sinks to his knees then falls full length at Emily's feet.*

George X to DC

A WOMAN AMONG THE DEAD:

[Goodness! That ain't no way to behave!]

George sinks to his knees, head bowed PR. Maintain position to end of play

MRS. SOAMES:

He ought to be home.

EMILY:

Mother Gibbs?

MRS. GIBBS:

Yes, Emily?

EMILY:

They don't understand, do they?

MRS. GIBBS:

No, dear. They don't understand.

~~The STAGE MANAGER appears at the right, one hand on a dark curtain which he slowly draws across the scene.~~

~~In the distance a clock is heard striking the hour very faintly.~~

Light Q - R, L, and  
C

STAGE MANAGER:

(A) Most everybody's asleep in Grover's Corners. There → S.M. (A) X to DLC  
are a few lights on: Shorty Hawkins, down at the depot, has just watched the Albany train go by. And at the livery stable somebody's setting up late and talking.—Yes, it's clearing up. There are the stars—doing their old, old crisscross journeys in the sky. Scholars haven't settled the matter yet, but they seem to think there are no living beings up there. Just chalk . . . or fire. Only this one is straining away, straining away all the time to make something of itself. The strain's so bad that every sixteen hours everybody lies down and gets a rest.

*He winds his watch.*

Hm. . . . Eleven o'clock in Grover's Corners.— You get a good rest, too. ~~Good night.~~

Light Q - fade to  
blackout

## CHAPTER V

### EVALUATION OF PROCEDURES AND PRODUCTION

#### INTRODUCTION

The main purposes of this study are first, to establish a procedural model for a Readers Theatre approach to the teaching of a selected literary work, and second, to test the approach through classroom application and evaluation. In accordance with these purposes, the study has reviewed the theory, application, and organization of the Readers Theatre approach. A specific literary work was selected and analyzed; a Director's Script was prepared in conjunction with the participating classes in the project; rehearsal procedures were outlined and explained; and both classes prepared and presented a Readers Theatre production of the play.

Following the production, students were requested to evaluate this approach to the study of a play. Thirty-one of the participants completed an evaluative questionnaire. In addition, six students participated in a tape-recorded interview. The interview was intended to provide an informal supplement to the responses given in the questionnaire.

Although the process involved in the study of the

literature was considered the more important part of this project, the production did provide a motivational force for student involvement and for their interpretation of the play. Accordingly, a critique of the performances has been prepared by the graduate committee. A summary of this critique, along with a personal evaluation of the project and performances, is included in the second part of this chapter.

### STUDENT RESPONSES

#### Questionnaire<sup>92</sup>

Student responses to the questions are summarized below. Comments have been grouped under general reaction to the approach, applicability of the approach, development of critical faculties, understanding of the play, development of voice and performance skills, understanding of terminology, and additional suggestions.

The general response to the approach was clearly favorable. Twenty-eight of 31 respondents stated that they were satisfied with the approach, while 24 indicated that they felt further instruction in oral interpretation would be beneficial. Twenty-nine would recommend the approach to other students and would prefer no alternative approach to the study of drama. Among reasons advanced

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<sup>92</sup>The questionnaire and tabulated student responses are included as Appendix A.

for such a favorable response, students suggested that the approach encouraged a close involvement of individuals in the project and a spirit of cooperation among the class. The activities were felt to be different, enjoyable, and interesting. Certain students noted the benefits of Readers Theatre participation in the development of confidence, in an improved understanding of literature and theatre, and in the improvement of public speaking.

In response to a question asking about the application of the Readers Theatre approach to other types of literature and language activities, 17 of the students saw the approach as applicable to the study of short stories, novels, speaking, listening, and other subject fields. The question proved somewhat leading, however, and students did not give much indication of how the approach might be applied.

Students agreed that observation of a similar performance of the play by members of another class had been a worthwhile activity. They felt the experience had helped them to gain an understanding of the play through seeing different interpretations and to improve their own performance through assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the performance observed. The students demonstrated that such a critical response had taken place by commenting in subsequent questions on how they would improve upon the performance they had observed and what

aspects of the performance they would praise.

A number of questions attempted to assess student understanding of the play. The majority of the students felt that they had gained a clear understanding of the play through this approach. Responses to a question concerning the dominant traits of the character each portrayed suggest that more attention during the course of rehearsals should have been given to the analysis of character. Students indicated a good understanding of the function of the Stage Manager. They were less clear, however, on the reasons for Emily's becoming such an enduring character by the end of the play. Students indicated that the familiarity of the characters and situations and the humor of the play were main reasons why it had been successful theatrically.

Twenty-eight of the 31 respondents indicated that training in oral interpretation had helped them become more confident before an audience, while 24 suggested that Readers Theatre participation had been useful in developing a more effective use of the voice. In particular, students cited emphasis, force, and pitch as areas of voice production which had been improved through this approach.

Students indicated a poor understanding of the meaning of the terms focus, tempo, and muscle tone. This suggests that more instruction in the technical aspects of Readers Theatre was needed before starting a production.

Students suggested that a number of follow-up or supplementary activities might be included in the study of the play. Eighteen suggested that more class or group discussion of the play would be helpful, while 5 wanted more group or individual presentations, and 4 urged more analysis of character, plot, and theme. Additional suggestions included that more time be spent on rehearsals and that Readers Theatre be introduced sooner than grade XII, perhaps in grade X, so that interpretation, presentation, and other skills could be improved.

Taped interview with students<sup>93</sup>

Six students participated in the tape-recorded interview. The interview was conversational and unstructured. Students were encouraged to respond openly whenever they wished. Although certain questions were asked, the direction of the interview followed the responses of the students.

The students generally felt the approach was enjoyable because it was different and interesting. They suggested that the approach enabled them to get to know other members of the class better as they worked towards the common goal.

The students felt they had gained an empathic response from the audience. The favorable audience response

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<sup>93</sup>A typescript of the tape-recorded interview is included as Appendix B.

and involvement enabled the performers to relax on stage and gain in confidence as the performance progressed. A number of the students were singled out by the group for the excellence of their performance.

The students indicated that the approach had helped them to develop some skill in the principles of public speaking. The performance, they felt, provided a motivation which was hard to resist. They felt that the performance enabled them to develop their interpretative and creative abilities. By this, they appeared to mean that through analysis they had developed an interpretation of the role, while through synthesis they were able to bring their creative powers to the stage presentation. Students felt that the approach had helped them to discover what creativity implied.

#### EVALUATIVE COMMENTS

##### Graduate Committee critique<sup>94</sup>

The evaluation of the performance by Professor D. H. Turner and the graduate committee noted a number of the strengths and weaknesses. It noted that students had captured the essential spirit of the play. This accords with the students' feeling that they had gained a favorable response from the audience. At the same time, however, the committee felt that more time was

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<sup>94</sup>The critique is included as Appendix C.

needed, particularly in the analysis-synthesis part of interpretation and in technique, to bring about a more successful performance.

Faults in performance, it was stated, were largely due to inexperience on the part of the actors. Nevertheless, a few faults were noted. The students who shared the role of Stage Manager, it was felt, did not convey an adequate understanding of the part. A particular weakness of many of the actors was a tendency to be bound to the script, thus failing to achieve the necessary audience contact through focus. The use of mime was considered generally unconvincing, and many of the students were unable to convey the appropriate muscle tone required as an integral part of interpretation. Certain characters lacked the necessary emphasis for successful stage performance. The tempo of the play was at times weak with lack of attention to scene climaxes.

On the positive side, the committee noted that the cutting of the script had been achieved successfully. A number of the students managed their roles adequately, at times creating good characterization and mood. Setting and seating arrangements of the cast were judged to be good. An exception noted was that distance from the audience was too great for some scenes. The simple costuming and lighting were considered helpful to the development of character and mood. The actors, in general, were able to get across

the everyday style of the play.

Although the committee was agreed on the positive merit of the program, it was suggested that much more work on the study of interpretation would be needed before a critic could adequately assess this approach to the teaching of a play.

#### Investigator's Critique

Rehearsal Schedule.--The rehearsal schedule outlined in Chapter IV could be modified in a normal classroom situation. Considerable time was spent, for example, on casting procedures and on an explanation of the principles of Readers Theatre. A teacher familiar with the students in a class would be able to save time in casting through personal knowledge of the students' abilities. Similarly, the teacher could do much of the theoretical groundwork in oral interpretation and Readers Theatre before attempting a full production. The time saved in this way could be used profitably to increase the amount of actual rehearsal time available in the schedule, to assist interpretation through additional discussion of the characters and the play, and to provide more time for individual coaching.

The improvisational session introduced in rehearsal 5 proved highly successful with both groups. Students quickly overcame their initial reserve and participated fully. Further work in mime and improvisation might

usefully be added to the rehearsal schedule to improve the quality of the mime used in the performance and to assist the development of imaginative response through muscle tone.

The division of the cast during rehearsals 12 and 13 for more intensive individual coaching worked well. This allowed for some individual instruction while the other group rehearsed on its own. An additional rehearsal with each group would have been helpful.

The use of recordings of professional Readers Theatre productions in rehearsal 14 was intended to provide an example of what could be done in oral interpretation. A number of good recordings of individual and group readings are available at the public library. A session on speech, using such recordings, might well be used as an introduction to Readers Theatre rather than as part of the rehearsal schedule.

The uninterrupted run-throughs helped to consolidate the movements of the play and to improve the tempo. Written notes on strengths and weaknesses in the rehearsal performance provided a simple but immediate evaluation for the students.

The discussions initiated in rehearsal 18 should have been extended. A number of the students felt that more discussion and analysis of characterization would have been beneficial to interpretation. A revised

rehearsal schedule could allow for more time for such discussion, partly to give each member of the cast greater assurance in the interpretation he was to give.

The final rehearsal included a short talk on the dynamics of performance. This was in the nature of a pep-talk designed to anticipate and prevent some of the problems which might needlessly detract from a stage presentation. Such a session may not be necessary for seasoned performers, but is generally useful for giving final advice and instructions.

Student responses.--The students in both groups responded positively to the instructional program. Problems of motivation were apparently overcome by the interesting nature of the work expected from the students and by the anticipation of the performance. They could note the developmental nature of the rehearsal schedule and see improvement as the rehearsals progressed.

One problem with this particular script was that many of the roles were brief. This meant that some students spent most of the time as participant-observers. To overcome this problem, different types of Readers Theatre programs could be introduced to allow for greater participation by all students.

Performance.--The investigator agrees with the strengths and weaknesses of the performances discussed by

the graduate committee. It should be noted, however, that both student groups improved greatly in interpretation and technique during the rehearsal period. The level of oral reading, for example, improved noticeably as the rehearsals progressed. Further experience in Readers Theatre would help these students to achieve the poise and confidence necessary for performance.

The first group to perform appeared to be quite confident. Audience response to their presentation was enthusiastic, and this in turn was reflected through the obvious enjoyment of the cast and the improved tempo of the performance over previous rehearsal sessions. The lead characters in this group performed very well. Dr. Gibbs was impressive, particularly in his ability to introduce effective pauses and emphasis on certain lines. Mrs. Gibbs had an outstanding voice and her energy and obvious enjoyment on stage were a delight to watch. Unfortunately her focus tended to be on her script rather than on the scene. Emily gave an excellent interpretation of the role, with some good audience contact and a convincing performance. George clearly demonstrated his enthusiasm for the role even though his technique and audience contact were not always successful.

The second group had missed one complete run-through in their rehearsal schedule as a result of a film conflict. The missed rehearsal time was apparent

in the early stages of the performance, as several of the students appeared to be nervous. By the end of the first act, however, the nervousness was overcome and the general interpretation improved. One reader demonstrated his presence of mind by filling in for a student who was unaccountably absent for the performance. Projection and force of voice were good with both groups. Stage Manager (A) in the second group projected his voice well but needed to improve focus and avoid nervous gestures. The Stage Manager (B) began in a shaky fashion but recovered in later moments in the play and managed some good focus and clear expression. Dr. Gibbs in this performance managed a fine interpretation of the role. Again, however, there was a need for greater audience contact. Mrs. Gibbs tended to rattle off her lines at first, but developed poise as the play progressed. The interpretation and voice projection by Mrs. Webb were excellent. Mr. Webb showed definite signs of nervousness at the beginning, but he, too, improved as the play progressed. He made a good attempt at audience contact. George spoke with an excellent voice and developed a good interpretation of the role, but his performance was marred by poor focus. Emily provided an excellent interpretation of the role. The student who played both Professor Willard and Joe Stoddard showed definite development. He enthusiastically tackled both roles and was

rewarded by a successful performance.

Both groups rose to the challenge of the performance and clearly worked hard to achieve success. Most of the students participated enthusiastically in the project and proved amenable to direction and suggestion. Improvement in interpretation and expression was apparent and consistent throughout the rehearsal period.

#### SUMMARY OF CHAPTER V

Student response to the Readers Theatre approach proved favorable. Students indicated a reasonable understanding of the play. They felt that training in oral interpretation had helped them to gain confidence and to improve their public speaking technique. The performance by both groups was considered to have captured the essential spirit of the play. A number of strengths and weaknesses in the performance were noted. A successful cutting of the original script and arrangement of the cast proved to be a strength of the performances, while a lack of audience contact through focus appeared to be a general weakness. Some alteration of the rehearsal schedule seemed desirable to separate instruction in the fundamentals of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre from the actual time spent on rehearsal of the script. A number of activities and procedures, including improvisation and mime, division of the cast for individual

coaching, professional recordings, uninterrupted run-throughs, discussion sessions, and instruction in the dynamics of performance, proved helpful in facilitating the final performances.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has established and evaluated a procedural model for a Readers Theatre approach to the study of a play. Procedures were derived from a review of the theoretical background to oral interpretation and Readers Theatre. The evaluation examined the effectiveness of the model in translating the theory into practice and in providing students with a meaningful study of the play. Following are presented the main conclusions arising from the study and certain implications of these conclusions for teaching and for further study.

#### CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO STUDENT RESPONSE

1. Students indicated strong approval of the Readers Theatre approach. They felt the approach helped them to get to know each other better and led to greater cooperation among the class members.
2. Students felt that the approach had helped them to understand and interpret the literature and to improve certain oral skills such as force, emphasis, and confidence in public speaking.

3. Because of the flexibility of the Readers Theatre approach, students felt that the approach could be recommended for other students and that it could be used successfully with other types of literature such as poetry, short stories, and novels, and with other language activities such as library research and creative writing.

4. The apparent success of this project from the student point of view supports the claims of a number of writers reviewed in Chapter II who found that the dramatic approach encouraged enthusiastic student involvement.

#### CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO PROCEDURES

1. This study found that careful preliminary work in cutting the script and arranging the movements helped to ensure useful and well organized rehearsal sessions.

2. Some individual coaching appeared to be necessary to improve performance and contribute to confidence.

3. Improvisation and mime sessions appeared to promote confidence through reduction of feelings of self-consciousness. Practice in mime seemed important to improve mime sequences in the performance and to improve muscle tone.

4. This study found that the Readers Theatre approach was effective in reducing the amount of time that would have been needed for a formal theatrical presentation.

5. Nevertheless, the time allowed for instruction in the fundamentals of oral interpretation was found to be inadequate to accomplish all the basic instruction. The rehearsal time had been limited to approximately the time which would normally be spent on an intensive unit of work.
6. Although there was considerable evidence that students had developed some skill at literary analysis through oral interpretation, the rehearsal time allowed for the analysis-synthesis process was found to be inadequate for satisfactory interpretation by all of the performers.

#### CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO PERFORMANCE

1. Audience response to the performances appeared to be favorable.
2. Student observation of a similar performance by members of a different class proved useful in encouraging the development of critical skills.
3. The evidence of this study suggests that the performance acted as a strong motivational device for student involvement with the literature.
4. Similarly, the performance appeared to give students the opportunity to consolidate the speaking and interpretation skills they had practiced during the rehearsals.
5. The performers generally required further training and experience in audience contact through focus and

muscle tone.

6. More attention should have been given to the tempo of the play and to the climax of individual scenes.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM USE

1. Because the Readers Theatre approach contributed to student enjoyment and understanding of the literature, and helped to develop their confidence and skill in public speaking, it should be introduced into the classroom and at an earlier level than grade XII.
2. Because of the flexibility of the Readers Theatre approach, teachers should plan for its use in teaching English. The approach should be organized to provide for maximum involvement of all students. A variety of Readers Theatre programs selected and prepared by students could help to promote writing, reading, and research skills.
3. Instruction in the fundamentals of oral interpretation and Readers Theatre should be separated from the rehearsal schedule and should precede a formal production.
4. Preliminary work in mime and improvisation may help students to gain confidence and imaginative response in performance.
5. Rehearsal time should be long enough to allow for discussion and analysis of character, theme, plot, and mood, and to allow for guided development in the roles.

6. Having a different group of students perform the same play appeared to be a promising method of developing constructive self-criticism through comparison.
7. Because mastery of focus is complex and difficult, it needs to be developed patiently over a period of time.

#### IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

1. The writers reviewed in Chapter II have indicated certain benefits to be derived from using a dramatic approach in teaching. The results of this project tend to confirm these views and suggest that teachers should acquaint themselves with the possibilities of drama as methodology.
2. In-service sessions organized by the school divisions could be one method of promoting instruction in oral interpretation.
3. A course in oral interpretation offered as part of the secondary level teacher training program at the Faculty of Education would be another way to promote instruction using the dramatic approach.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. There has been a tendency in English classes for evaluation to stress written work. The evidence of this study suggests that considerable learning has taken place as a result of using an oral interpretation approach.

Part of the evaluation of students should be based on the learning that is revealed through oral interpretation. A study might be set up, therefore, to examine such areas as the feasibility, method, purpose, and extent of evaluating oral interpretation.

2. This study has mentioned the flexibility of the Readers Theatre approach. A further study might explore some of the alternative possibilities for Readers Theatre programs using a variety of literary genre.

3. A study might be instituted on the ways the dramatic approach could be satisfactorily utilized in other subject fields and as an aid to inter-disciplinary studies.

4. A long term study might be initiated to see what effects participation in Readers Theatre at one grade level might have in subsequent years in terms of participation in extra-curricular productions, classroom leadership, and public speaking.

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APPENDIX A

## QUESTIONNAIRE

(Student responses are summarized after each question. Similar comments have been grouped together and listed according to the number of times the comment was repeated.)

NOTE: THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO ASSIST IN THE EVALUATION OF THE READERS THEATRE APPROACH USED IN THE STUDY OF THE PLAY, OUR TOWN. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO RESPOND ACCORDING TO YOUR THOUGHTS AND OPINIONS ON THE APPROACH AND THE PLAY.

1. What did you think of this approach to studying the play?

Comments:

- good (13)
- different (8)
- the best approach (4)
- great way to study play (1)
- beneficial (1)
- new experience (1)
- better familiarization with the play (1)
- should be part of English course (1)

2. Would you prefer an alternative approach to studying drama? If so, give suggestions.

- no (3)
- yes (1) - memorize lines

3. Can you see any other possible application of the Readers Theatre approach to the study of literature and language in general? (eg. poetry, novels, short stories, drama, non-fiction, biography, speaking, listening).

- yes (17)
  - short stories (6)
  - drama (4)
  - speaking (4)
  - listening (3)
  - applicable to other subjects (2)
  - novels (2)
  - good opportunity for student to put his feelings into his work physically and mentally (2)

- language (1)
- no (10)
  - mainly good for drama (4)
- no response (4)

4. Was it useful to you in any way to observe a similar performance of the play by members of another class?

- yes (29)
  - helped understanding by seeing different interpretations (5)
  - became more critical of faults (4)
  - shows areas for improvement (4)
  - helped to assess my own role (3)
  - gave audience viewpoint (2)
  - showed how dependence on books could lead to loss of meaning (1)
- no response (2)

5. In the performance you observed, what changes or improvements would you suggest?

- more rehearsal time (4)
- better lighting (4)
- improve interpretation of characters (3)
- more sets and props (3)
- project voices better (2)
- memorize lines (2)
- more enthusiasm (2)
- more audience contact - better focus (2)
- improve stage arrangement - eg. location of minister (2)
- more action (1)
- no suggestions (4)
- no response (3)

6. What aspects of the performance you observed would you compliment?

- specific characterizations (8)
- good expression and use of voice (4)
- enthusiasm and enjoyment of actors (3)
- the whole performance (2)
- pacing (2)
- involvement and effort of students (2)
- projection (2)
- focus good at times (1)
- lighting (1)
- none (1)
- no response (8)

7. What character role did you portray?

- Students named the role they played.

8. What sort of character was the one you portrayed? That is, what were his or her predominant traits?

- good understanding (15)
- fair understanding (9)
- poor understanding (5)
- no response (2)

9. How effective do you feel the Readers Theatre approach has been in helping you to gain an understanding of the play Our Town? (eg. maturing process of Emily; unusual treatment of time in the play; the cycle of life concept; and the importance of living every minute of life.)

- theme emerges clearly through Readers Theatre approach (8)
- understanding came through rehearsals (6)
- very effective (4)
- became involved with characters and events (3)
- learned without really thinking about it (1)
- not effective (3)
- no response (3)

10. How typical of teenagers is George or Emily? (eg. pastimes, courting, relationship with parents, etc.)

- typical (19)
- not typical (10)
- no response (2)

11. What picture of North American life does the play present? In what way is "our town" similar to the town depicted in the play?

- a typical small town (10)
- friendly, simple society (7)
- not typical (2)
- no response (7)

12. What were the functions of the Stage Manager?

- to appeal to the audience - help audience (9)
- to narrate (7)
- to introduce sets and time (7)
- to fill in details (4)
- to inspire audience imagination (1)

13. How has the author made Emily such an enduring character by the end of the play when at first she appears rather self-centered.

- Emily has matured by end of play (11)
- relationship to George (5)
- Emily devoted to her children and family by end of play (4)
- no response (11)

14. In what ways has the presentation of Our Town helped you to see why this has been a successful play for the theatre? (eg. humor, pathos, nostalgia, climax, flashbacks, use of narration, abandonment of traditional sets and properties.)

- close to the individual (6)
- humor (4)
- use of flashbacks (3)
- variety of the play (4)
- believable (2)
- enjoyable, interesting (1)
- plot (1)
- no response (8)

15. Check in which of the following ways the approach has been of value in training for public speaking:

22 development of confidence

13 awareness of audience

17 focus of lines to audience

15 actions coordinated with thought and meaning

     other (specify)

- no response (3)

16. Check which of the following areas of voice production have been improved or developed through this approach:

12 pitch

5 pace

19 volume or force

2 articulation

23 emphasis

\_\_\_ other (specify)

- no response (2)

17. What do you understand by the following terms:

- (a) Focus -
  - On-stage focus -
  - Off-stage focus -
- (b) Tempo -
- (c) Muscle tone -

- generally a poor understanding of these terms

18. Were you satisfied that this approach to the study of the play was sufficient for your purposes as a grade XII student?

- yes (28)
- no (1)
- no response (2)

In addition, check the activities that might be useful as a follow-up:

18 class or group discussion of play

\_\_\_ written assignments

4 analysis of character, plot, theme, etc.

5 group or individual presentations

1 other (specify) - take the play elsewhere  
(i.e. on tour)

- nothing else (2)

19. Do you feel further instruction and practice in oral interpretation would be beneficial?

- yes (24)
- no (5)
- no response (2)

20. What procedures in the approach do you feel should be modified or added?

- more time for rehearsals, characterization, preparation (9)
- more cooperation from some students and really get involved (2)

- more advice regarding characterization (1)
- let students pick roles before assigning them (1)
- more improvisational work (1)
- use this approach more often (1)
- voice control (1)
- no suggestions (13)
- no response (2)

21. Mark a number next to each of the following statements to indicate the extent of your agreement or disagreement according to the following scale:

- 1 - strongly disagree
- 2 - disagree
- 3 - not sure
- 4 - agree
- 5 - strongly agree

\_\_\_\_\_ (a) Training in oral interpretation helps one to become more confident before an audience.

- strongly agree (11)
- agree (17)
- not sure (2)
- disagree (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ (b) Readers Theatre is useful for developing a spirit of team work and cooperation amongst the class.

- strongly agree (15)
- agree (13)
- not sure (2)
- disagree (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ (c) Participation in Readers Theatre is useful for developing a more effective use of the voice.

- strongly agree (6)
- agree (18)
- not sure (5)
- disagree (2)

\_\_\_\_\_ (d) Participation in Readers Theatre has no value for the student.

- strongly disagree (20)
- disagree (10)
- not sure (1)

\_\_\_\_\_ (e) Oral interpretation of literature is a good method of ensuring an understanding of the literature.

- strongly agree (1)
- agree (18)
- not sure (11)
- disagree (1)

22. Would you recommend this approach for other students?  
Why or why not?

- yes (29)
  - gets class working together (7)
  - gets people involved (6)
  - enjoyable, interesting (5)
  - different, new experience (5)
  - develop confidence (4)
  - helpful, beneficial (2)
  - fun way to learn (2)
  - gives feeling of satisfaction (1)
  - gets students more aware of life (1)
  - helps public speaking (1)
  - helps understanding of literature (1)
  - helps understanding of theatre (1)
- no (1)
- no response (1)

Additional Suggestions:

- have only one person per role
- allow students to play different roles before assigning parts
- provide more time
- do another play
- add sound effects to production
- take production on tour to other schools
- start Readers Theatre in Grade X and develop interpretation, presentation, and other skills.

APPENDIX B

TYPESCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH SIX STUDENTS

Q. Did you enjoy studying a play using the oral interpretation approach?

A. I thought it was very interesting. It was something different that we had never tried before, and it gave everyone a chance to get to know each other a lot better. We didn't really know anyone that well before, but because we have been working so closely together it gave us a chance to get to know people better.

Q. As a result of the approach do you feel you gained a firm understanding of the play?

A. Our understanding of the play was developed and our understanding of ourselves. Most of us had never been on stage before and we never knew what it was like to be on stage. But once we got out there on Friday and said our lines by the second act we felt confident.

Q. Did you find it an alarming experience or did you find it beneficial to be forced to speak before an audience?

A. It depends a lot. If you capture the audience, then it is not very hard to be on stage. On Friday we did capture the audience and it was a lot easier for every one of us to talk and to say our lines.

Q. What do you mean by capturing the audience?

A. You could tell they were interested. They got involved in the play too.

A. Most of them hadn't seen Readers Theatre. They had heard about it but hadn't seen it. They were looking forward to it.

Q. It is demanding for the audience as well. The audience does have to listen and use its imagination. I have to agree that you did capture the audience and as a result it made you feel more comfortable in the whole approach.

A. That's right. Although, I was shaking like a leaf.

A. Take the rehearsal just before we put the play on. Everybody was making a mess of things, but when we went on stage everything seemed to work out.

Q. What is the difference then?

A. You have to do it.

A. You know that now is the time.

A. Just like when you are playing a sport. You are really keyed up before a game. You are all nervous, but once you get onto the field or the ice you lose all your nervousness.

Q. After you got into the production, after you captured the audience, did you find that you could get more out of the lines in terms of interpretation?

A. Yes, etc.

A. At the beginning of the play you felt that if you really went out there and tried to emphasize the person you were acting it might seem a little strange to the audience. But after you sort of got hold of the audience, you figured they were interested so you could really start to put yourself into the role. Cathy and Brian did a really good job in that respect.

Q. Yes, there were a few lines which were emphasized beautifully. I think most of the cast seemed to get involved in the production. It was the stimulus of the audience...

A. Especially because we go to school here. They are people we are going to have to meet in the halls.

A. We thought they would laugh at the actors, but they didn't.

A. Remember when Danny was kneeling beside the grave--one of my girl friends said she was nearly in tears.

Q. Did the presentation help you to see why this particular play has been a successful play?

A. I think it is because it is so real. It shows how a small town in the United States really was. It shows people growing up there, living there, marrying, dying.

Q. Did the presentation help you to see what Thornton Wilder was getting at--his theme?

A. I think its just a presentation of a small town where everyone knows everyone else. This is what goes on all the time.

A. Everybody was expecting that the last act would be when they are older, but it wasn't. It shows how quickly life can change. You can't count on living to a ripe old age with grandchildren visiting. It can happen just like that.

A. I think everyone was surprised that Emily would die, especially in childbirth rather than in old age.

A. As the Stage Manager said, "You have to have life to love life and you have to love life to have life."

A. And I think in the third act we had everybody really involved.

A. They were so quiet.

A. In the first two acts they were laughing, but in the last act they were quiet, which for some of those people out there is extraordinary.

Q. That is a good point because it suggests that you were creating the mood you wanted in that scene.

A. I think it is because of the difference--first of all the wedding, and then the funeral right away.

A. There was no music and no sound for the wedding and it seemed so odd that the music would be missing.

Q. Sound effects could very readily be added. Were the rehearsals beneficial in teaching how to use the voice?

A. During the performance we certainly remembered everything you said.

A. We remembered to keep looking up from our scripts.

A. It made you project. You were on stage and had to direct the words to the audience. So you have to speak louder and put in more emphasis.

Q. Several of the teachers spoke to me after and said that they thought the projection was good. They were surprised that the voices could come through so very well.

A. The best thing was to convince the kids they had to get up on stage.

Q. I think again this comes down to the idea of the performance as the motivating thing. Once you finally got the idea you had to perform...

A. I think even if the audience wasn't--even if they didn't like us, it was still fun to do.

A. I think the rehearsals were more fun. After the production was done we felt sorry there would be no more rehearsals.

Q. In a sense, the process or rehearsals is the most important part of the program. The purpose of the production is to give a certain dynamism to the process, a certain urgency to it.

A. They should introduce this more often.

A. People will learn a lot more out of getting up and doing it. If a person is going to go into public speaking he is going to speak in front of hundreds of people like we did in the play--about 150 people. You learn a lot more out of a program like this. I think it would be a lot better for kids to take something like this.

A. If I had to start over again from grade ten, I would go out for drama. Before I was afraid, but now, with this, I really wish that I had.

A. Our teacher was always talking about creativity--using your imagination. We didn't really know what to expect. This time we actually had something to really practice on--to really teach us creativity.

Q. I think it does. It leaves enough room for creativity. The reader can develop within the role as many of you did.

APPENDIX C

## EVALUATION OF READERS THEATRE PROGRAMS OF OUR TOWN

by

Thornton Wilder

Directed by Peter Spencer, March 16 and 19, 1973

While there was evidence in both groups that the casts had grasped the essential spirit of the play - evidence shown in their performances and in the audience reaction to the play - there was also evidence that insufficient time had been spent in the analysis-synthesis process of interpretation and in the practical technique of focus that is necessary to effective Readers Theatre.

Bearing in mind that this was a new method of approaching a play for these students, and that they had had no previous training in interpretation, it is not surprising that in many places the actors were ineffective in reproducing the evocative power of the play.

In both performances the weakest interpretation was done by the students who divided the role of Stage Manager between themselves. Their role was to set the scene for the audience at every stage of the development of the action by focus, voice, and muscle tone, and these techniques were conspicuous by their absence in all four people.

There was lack of emphasis in some of the other characters' interpretations notably the Professor on March 16, further evidence of a lack of the analysis-synthesis process.

Where mime was used, as for example, the two women preparing breakfast, the passing of a handkerchief from father to son, the actions were superficial and unconvincing.

The greatest weakness in both performances was the inability of many of the actors to wrest their focus from the page and place it in the auditorium either above the heads of the audience or in the case of the narrators to make an audience focus. A second profound weakness was the lack of muscle tone in too many of the actors.

On the other hand, there was evidence of real learning in the excellent cutting of the play. Such good cutting implies that the students understood the place of climax and unity in the play and knew what they wanted to accomplish in their performance. Their faults for the most part were those of inexperience.

There were exceptions, too, among the actors, students who obviously had analyzed their parts and who were able to recreate the roles adequately. The Doctor in the March 16 production was one; George was another. In the scene between George and the Doctor, though their characterization was good, the mood which the two students began to build was weakened by their inattention to its inherent climax. This same lack of tempo was evident in the scene between Mr. Webb and George.

The setting of the stage was very good with one exception. The upstage benches were too far back. Movement to and from these two areas took so long that tempo in picking up cues was sometimes affected. There was a general feeling that the scene lost some of the intimacy that is necessary to Readers Theatre. I feel that it was this distance from the audience that was responsible for the fact that the audience missed such bits of humor as Emily's being born smart and the extra two members in the population.

The changes in seating arrangements which went on during the program were handled efficiently both in the director's planning and the students' handling of these difficult transitions.

The costuming was simple and completely effective. It was a matter of suggestion rather than naturalism that made for a good impression and did help the characterization.

Lighting was used effectively throughout the performance and added to the mood of the cutting.

In weighing up the performance I am of the opinion that there are far more positive values than negative ones. The actors did get across a great deal of

the common, everyday style of the play a certain careful casualness that was pleasing to watch and hear.

In discussion with the other members of the committee it was evident that all were agreed on the positive merit of the programs.

The one conclusion that I would draw from these performances is that much work would have to be done on the study of interpretation before a critic could judge to what extent this method of teaching a play can be effective.



D. Harold Turner,  
Chairman of Mr. Spencer's Committee

APPENDIX D

## ILLUSTRATION OF BEAT IN A PLAY

1.

Belligerent Man:

Is there no one in town  
aware of--

→ The man stands and  
speaks from his spot  
UR

- The stimulus the belligerent man's desire to raise the question of social injustice.

- The response is expressed through speech and movement as he stands to voice his concern.

2.

Stage Manager:

Come forward, will you,  
where we can all hear you.

→ Man X DC from diagonal  
chairs to R of Mr. Webb

- The stimulus is the Stage Manager's statement to come forward.

- The response is expressed through the man's movement to the downstage area.

3.

Belligerent Man:

Then why don't they do  
something about it.

→ Man returns to diagonal  
chairs UR

- The stimulus is the completion of the man's expression of opinion.

- The response is his movement back to his chair upstage.

APPENDIX E

SAMPLE LITERATURE FOR THEMATIC PRESENTATION

Theme or topic: "The Marriage Proposal"

1. Drama.--the proposal scene of George and Emily from Our Town, and/or the proposal scene between Jack and Gwendolyn in The Importance of Being Earnest, by Oscar Wilde.
2. Poetry.--the romantic story in "A Subaltern's Love Song" by John Betjeman and/or the plea of "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love" by Christopher Marlowe.
3. Prose.--the comical proposal scene between Mr. Bumble and Mrs. Corny from Dickens' Oliver Twist and/or the impassioned proposal of Mr. Collins to Elizabeth in Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen.

Some of the prose could be converted to dialogue. A suitable narration could be written to unite the episodes into a suitable Readers Theatre script.

APPENDIX F

## CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING ORAL PERFORMANCE

The following checklist for use in evaluating oral performance is suggested by F. A. Tamer in Basic Drama Projects, page 85. Each item would be evaluated on a five-point scale ranging from superior to poor. The items listed include:

### Selection

1. Significance and quality of material
2. Appropriate for speaker, audience, occasion

### Introduction

1. Appropriate material
2. Conversational directness

### Meaning

1. Communicated author's intended meaning
2. Accurate phrasing to convey meaning
3. Appropriate emphasis

### Emotion

1. Communicated emotion the author intended
2. Communicated the climax

### Voice

1. Pleasant, clear quality
2. Appropriate pitch level
3. Appropriate inflection
4. Adequate volume
5. Appropriate rate
6. Clear articulation
7. Correct pronunciation

### Delivery

1. Readers physically poised and at ease
2. Unobtrusively handled the script
3. Bodily action coordinated with thought and emotion
4. Adequate eye contact with audience

### Additional Suggestions