

## *Tall Girls*

By Meg Miroshnik

## Study Guide

Created by Decatur High School Language Arts Class of Mrs. Nora Bergman  
As part of the Alliance Theatre Institute for Educators and Teaching Artists'  
Dramaturgy by Students

Under the guidance of Teaching Artist Rachel Jones



*The Tall Girls* at the  
La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series.

### Playwright



**Meg Miroshnik's** plays include *The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls*, *The Droll* {A Stage-Play about the END of Theatre}, and *The Tall Girls*. She is the recipient of a 2012 Whiting Award.

Her work has been developed or produced by La Jolla Playhouse, O'Neill National Playwrights Conference, Center Theatre Group, Pacific Playwrights Festival at South Coast Rep, the Sallie B. Goodman fellowship at the McCarter Theatre Center, Alliance Theatre, The Kennedy Center, Lark New Play Development Center, Chicago Opera Theater, the Moscow Playwright and Director Center, Washington Ensemble Theatre, Yale Cabaret, Perishable Theatre, WordBRIDGE Playwrights Laboratory, One Coast Collaboration, and published in Best American Short Plays, 2008-2009. A finalist for the 2012 Susan Smith Blackburn prize and winner of the 2012 Alliance/Kendeda Graduate Playwriting Award.

## Synopsis

For five girls from Poor Prarie struggling through the poverty of the 1930s, basketball provides an opportunity to forget the Depression and hope for the future.



*The Tall Girls* at La Jolla Playhouse's DNA New Works Series.

## Director



**Susan Booth** joined the Alliance Theatre in 2001, and has initiated the Collision Project for teens, the Alliance/Kendeda National Graduate Playwriting Competition, created local producing partnerships and has overseen regional collaborative productions as well as commercial partnerships on projects including *Ghost Brothers of Darkland County*; *The Color Purple*; *Bring It On: The Musical*; *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*; *Sister Act: The Musical*; *Bring in da' Noise, Bring in da' Funk*; and *Jesus Christ Superstar GOSPEL*. As a director, she has worked nationally at theatres including the Goodman, La Jolla Playhouse, New York Stage and Film, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Northlight Theatre, Victory Gardens, Court

Theatre and many others. She holds degrees from Denison and Northwestern universities and was a fellow of the National Critics Institute and the Kemper Foundation.

## Actors



**Lauren Boyd (Inez)** is thrilled to be in her first production at the Alliance Theatre. She has an MFA in acting from the New School for Drama in NY. Recent theater credits include Benny in *Every Tongue Confess* (Horizon Theatre), Cadee in *Barron, CA* (Samuel French Festival) and Edge in *Screams of the Butterflies* (Off Off Broadway). Film credits include Suzy in *Delusions of Guinevere*, and Polly in the short film *The Brazilian* (WIFTA International Film Festival, Female Eye International Film Fest and Long Island International Film Expo). You can also see her online as Cassio in *Othello: the web series* (Catskills Film Fest).



**Kally Duling** (*Almeda*) is thrilled to be making her Alliance debut in *The Tall Girls*! Originally from Lincoln, Nebraska, she has been living and working in New York for the past several years. Favorite credits include: Shirley Talley in *The Fifth of July* (Williamstown Theater Festival and The Bay Street Theatre), Elma Duckworth in *Bus Stop* (Fulton Theatre), Amy in *Little Women: the musical* (John Engeman Theatre), Mock Turtle in *Alice Unraveled* (NYMF), Izzy in *As It Is In Heaven* (Stonington Opera House), Lourve in *The Short Fall* (Toy Box Theatre Company), Sally in *You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* (Sage Theatre) and Michael in *Peter Pan* (Weathervane Theatre).



**Veronika Duerr** (*Lurlene*) is a proud member of Actors Equity and a founding member of The Weird Sisters Theatre Project. Since graduating from SCAD with a BFA in theatre, she has worked in NYC, LA and ATL. You may have seen her work around town at Theatrical Outfit, Actor's Express, Synchronicity, The Shakespeare Tavern, The Aurora or on the Alliance Hertz stage. In 2009, Veronika was honored to win the Suzi Bass award for best actress and this year she was awarded best actress in Atlanta by the Broadway World organization. Next up Veronika will be playing Lady MacBeth at The Shakespeare Tavern followed by a world premiere at Serenbe Playhouse.



**Emily Kitchens** (*Jean*) Alliance debut. Regional: *Dell/Grace, or the Art of Climbing* (Denver Center New Play Summit), *Natasha/Three Sisters* adapted by Sarah Ruhl (Yale Repertory Theatre/Berkeley Repertory Theatre); *Betsy & Lindsey/Clybourne Park*, *Belle/A Christmas Carol* (American Conservatory Theater); *Lady Windermere/Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Miranda/The Tempest*, *Molly/John Steinbeck's The Pastures of Heaven*, *Hero/Much Ado about Nothing* (California Shakespeare Theater); *Calpurnia/Julius Caesar* and *Helena/A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare Santa Cruz). Emily received her BFA from the University of Evansville and MFA from A.C.T.



**Hayley Platt** (*Puppy*) is honored to be making her Alliance Theatre debut in *Tall Girls*. Her recent Atlanta credits include *Christmas Carol*, *Cordelia* in *King Lear*, and *Puck* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (The Atlanta Shakespeare Company); *Dr. Faustus* (Resurgen's Theatre); and *Peter Pan* (Legacy Theatre). National: Feld Entertainment's *Playhouse Disney Live!* and Entertainment Cast Member for the Walt Disney World Corporation in Florida. International: Feld Entertainment's *Playhouse Disney Live!* (South America, Caribbean, and Canada), *Winnie the Pooh Live* (China, Russia, and Japan), *Disney Live: Three Classic Fairy Tales* (China, Italy, Australia, and Spain), and *Disney Live: Mickey's Music Festival* (Spain). Hayley graduated with a B.A. in Theatre and Classical Culture from the University of Georgia.



**Travis Smith** (Haunt Johnny) was last seen at the Alliance as Andy in *Ghost Brothers of Darkland County*. Other Atlanta credits *Metamorphoses*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Illyria*, *The Glass Menagerie* (GA Shakespeare) *Going With Jenny*, *Godspell*, *Keeping Watch*, *Summer and Smoke*, *Lost Highway* (Theatrical Outfit) *Smoke on the Mountain*, *Sanders Family Christmas*, *MT. Pleasant Homecoming* (Theater in the Square) and Lenny in *Of Mice and Men*(Shakespeare Tavern) Film and Television: *Shotgun Stories*, *Ring of Fire*, *The Good Lie*, *Halt and Catch Fire* and *Necessary Roughness* (USA Network). Trained at North Carolina School of the Arts School of Drama (2000).

### Characters

**Jean** – a cool-headed and decisive 15 ½ year-old forward. A natural strategist, but new to the sport.

**Almeda** – a 14 year-old shooting guard who is scrappy, muscular, and temperamental; most likely to foul.

**Inez** –a 17 year-old small forward who has very little natural athletic skill, but is a nurturing presence.

**Lurlene** –a 16 year-old center who is a boy-crazy liar; unlikely to practice or rebound.

**Puppy** – an 18 year-old point guard who is a little lady in the making; fast, and nimble with a ball.

**Haunt Johnny** – the handsome and much, much older coach.

### Unfamiliar Words and Phrases from *Tall Girls*

(arranged by order of appearance in the show)

**Grave Town** – A reference to Jean’s belief that she will live the rest of her life in Poor Prairie waiting to die

**Correctionville**- Correctionville, Iowa is in Woodbury County as a part of the Sioux City area. In 1930 its population was 1,058, and its current population is approximately 820.

**Babe Dublin**- possibly modeled after exemplary all-around athlete Babe Didrikson (Zaharias). She played golf and basketball at the professional level while winning 3 Olympic medals in track and field in 1932.

**Babe’s Ballers**- possibly the Golden Cyclones, which was a 1930s group of women athletes who competed in the AAU (Amateur Athletic Union) sections of softball, basketball and track and field. They were based in Dallas and were sponsored by the Employers Casualty Insurance Company. Babe Zaharias was their best athlete from 1930-1932.



Babe Didrikson

**“Drove the fathers Downstate.”**- Many farmers were either kicked off their land or abandoned it during the Dust Bowl era. It became the largest exodus in U.S. history. By 1940, 2.5 million people had moved out of the Plains States.

**Brighton**- could be a municipality near Boston, Massachusetts or a town in Monroe County, New York.

**Traveling suit**- a professional look designed to be sturdy, but not for labor.

**Humboldt**- Humboldt County, Iowa

**Mrs. Hoover**- Lou Henry Hoover was born in 1874 in Waterloo, Iowa. According to her biography on [firstladies.org](http://firstladies.org), Lou Hoover chose to attend Los Angeles Normal School “...in part, for its emphasis on physical activity even for women...” In her youth she enjoyed basketball, archery, baseball, and roller-skating among other sports. She was the first woman to graduate with a B.A. in geology from Stanford University. She was a key force in the National Amateur Athletic Federation developing a Women’s Division.

**“Committee on play”** - the National Amateur Athletic Federation developing a Women’s Division. Under Mrs. Hoover’s guidance, the Women’s Division proposed two driving principles: “play for play’s sake” and “a game for every girl and a girl in every game.” The Division intended to counteract the “elitist, sports-for-the-few” development of male intercollegiate sports. This broader view may be responsible for the rise in men’s intramural sports during the 30s, but (according to *The Encyclopedia of North American Sports History*) “Mary K. Baker pointed out in 1939 that most women students hated gym class and stayed away from sports because the games offered them were ‘trivial and boring’.”

**“A new bladder...”**- a bladder is the inflatable part of the basketball. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, balls for sport were made from animal bladders (mostly pigs). Overexposure to these objects could cause lung disease; therefore in the 1840s an inflatable rubber bladder replaced it.

**The Red Book**- *The Red Book Illustrated*, a women’s magazine containing both fiction and non-fiction stories, was first published in 1903. The name changed to *Redbook* in 1927. In 1937, the magazine reached a circulation of a million readers. During this time a *Redbook* sold for a quarter.

**St. John’s Seminary**- there are two seminaries in Iowa: Divine Word College Seminary and Saint Ambrose Seminary.

**St. Catherine-on-the-Wheel**- Saint Catherine of the Wheel or Saint Catherine of Alexandria. Saint Catherine’s hagiography says she was a virgin martyr who was a scholar and a princess. Saint Catherine is one of the two virgin martyrs Joan of Arc sees in her visions. The Roman emperor Maxentius condemned her to die on a breaking wheel, the hagiography says it was destroyed by her touch. She was eventually beheaded.

**oxblood-colored basketball**- oxblood is a shade between red and burgundy. It has purple and brown hues.

**Threshing accident**- a thresher separates grain from stalks and husks. Before the 19th century that job was done by hand. The thresher was large and its exposed machinery and especially its blades were a constant threat to laborers. It was an especially gruesome way to die, and laborers were well-advised to take extreme care.



Laborers threshing

**Ladies' industrial leagues**- leagues for sport supported by businesses within the same industry. These teams often promote the businesses they work within. These leagues became extremely popular and provided opportunities for African Americans and women in the workforce to show their talents and skills in the area of sport.

**Rub** – slang for money

**barnstormers**- refers to sports teams or individuals that often have no home arena that travel to various locations, usually small towns, to stage exhibition matches.

**Wellesley**- a private women's college in Wellesley, Massachusetts. Wellesley is a "Seven Sisters" college (Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, Radcliff, Smith, and Vassar are the others) and it was founded in 1870.

**Shooting Guard**- typically a smaller, quicker player. The main objective of this position is to score points.

**Small Forward**- also lean and quick. A versatile player who scores but must be ready for and capable of other roles.

**Center**- the tallest and typically the strongest player. This player sticks close to the basket. They focus on controlling the area under the basket, rather than exceptional range and shooting skills.

**Point Guard**- the point guard handles strategy on the court. They understand and implement the coach's instruction and make sure the decisions are made in the right timing and with precision.

**All-Stars**- Chuck Taylor All Stars or Converse All Stars are a canvas and rubber shoe produced by Converse. They were introduced in 1917 in an attempt to capture the growing basketball shoe market. Basketball player Chuck Taylor made improvements to the shoes in the 20s and became a salesman.



The 1936 U.S. Olympic Team in All Stars



**bloomers** – large bloomers were worn as sportswear in the 1920s.  
These were made of either wool or cotton duck.

**middies**- a blouse traditionally worn by midshipmen (sailors). It is made from cotton duck and was considered practical sportswear from about 1900 to the mid 1920s. The middie and bloomer combination begins to disappear by about 1929.

**stupe**- slang for a stupid person; a clot.

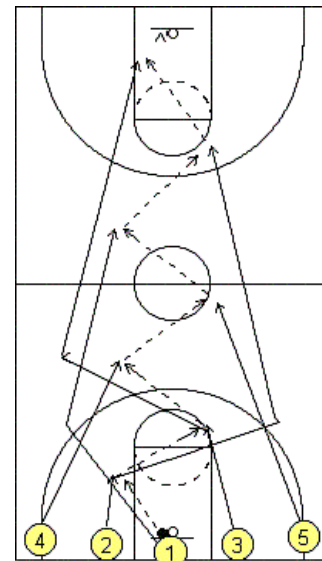
**apest**- to be big, ugly, and clumsy. Stupid.

**Four Corner Chest (drill)**- a drill that asks one to pass and follow the ball in a square box formation. When the coach whistles, the players immediately change direction.

**Diamond Dribble (drill)**- players start underneath the hoop, sprint to half-court, slide diagonally to a mark, dropstep, and slide back to where they began.

**Suicides (drill)** -put down four markers about 15 paces apart. Sprint to the first marker and back, then to the second and back, then the third and then the fourth.

**Five Man Weave (drill)** – an advanced basketball formation pictured here.



## **Tall Girls in the Classroom**

### **Pre-Show Questions**

1. Do women's sports deserve the same attention as men's sports? Why or why not?
2. Does it matter how old individuals in a relationship are if they are in love?
3. Are there any circumstances in which an individual doesn't deserve a second chance? If so, what would that circumstance be? If not, how would you make sure he or she receives a second chance?
4. In your opinion, what was the worst part of the Depression? Why?

### **Post-Show Questions**

1. Jean and Al dream about leaving Poor Prairie by playing professional basketball. Jean gives up her dream to stay home and take care of her baby. Al leaves to become a professional basketball player, in spite of the Committee on Play's ruling against women in sports. Please answer the following questions in complete sentences in paragraph form.
  - a. What is my dream?
  - b. What could keep me from accomplishing my dream (3-5 obstacles)?
  - c. How can I overcome these obstacles (3-5 tactics)?
  - d. Am I more like Jean or Al in my determination to reach my goals?
2. Do you believe that Haunt Johnny should have lost his job because of his relationship with Jean?
3. With which of the characters in *Tall Girls* do you identify? Why?
4. Can Puppy help Inez keep her family's farm? Why or why not?
5. Why is the basketball team important to the girls of Poor Prairie?

### **Creative Writing Prompts**

1. If you were on Jean and Al's team, how would you raise money for uniforms?
2. Have you ever felt like you were in an unwinnable situation? How did you resolve it?
3. If you were Meg Miroshnik, how would you have ended *Tall Girls*? Make sure that the characters are true to who they are.



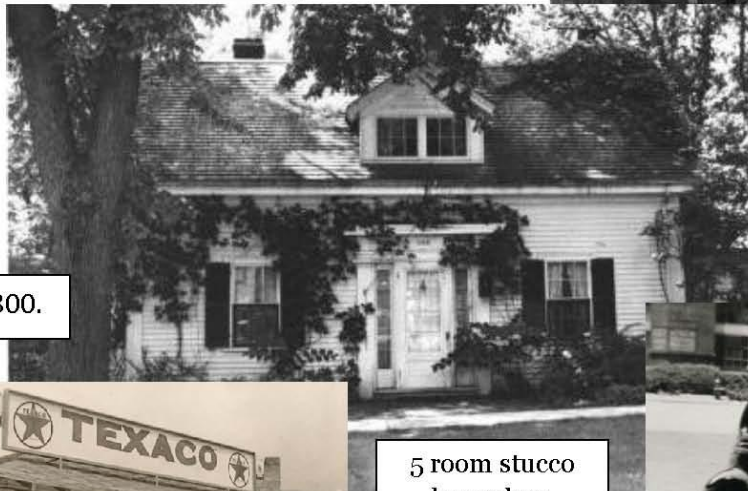
# Income and Expenses in the 1930s



AVG Annual Income \$1,730.



Unemployment 27%



AVG Cost of House \$3,800.



Gas 10¢ a gallon

5 room stucco bungalow, breakfast room, separate garage, delightful location

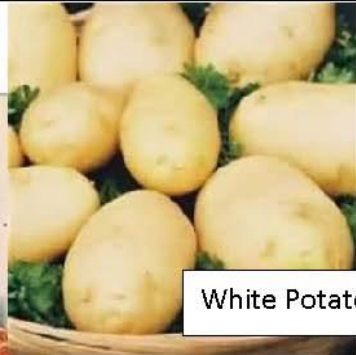


1935 Chevrolet Master Deluxe \$560.

# Income and Expenses in the 1930s



Campbell's Soup 4 cans for 25¢



White Potatoes 19¢ for 10LBS



Cereal 3 pkgs for 25¢



Dozen Eggs 18¢



Oranges 14 for 25¢



Steak 22¢ per LB



## The Dust Bowl



The Dust Bowl affected only the middle of the US.



In some areas, more than 75% of the topsoil was blown away by the end of the 1930s.



Dust Bowl destroyed a lot of houses.



In 1940, 2.5 million people moved out of the Plains states.



Iconic image from the Dust Bowl era



People are living in a trailer in an open field.