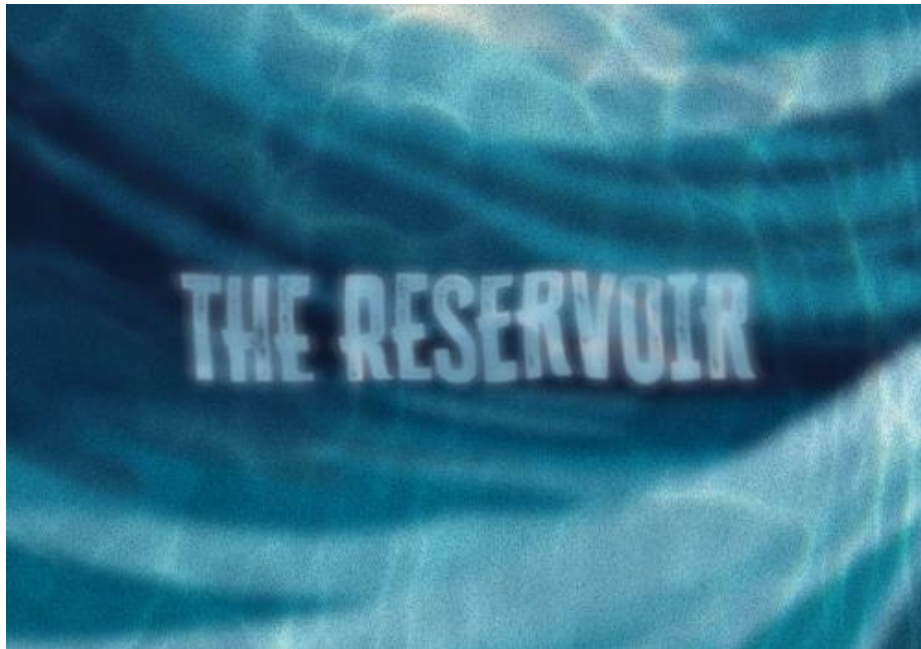


Alliance Theatre

institute



by Jake Brasch

Study Guide

Created as part of the Alliance Theatre's Dramaturgy by Students Program

Led by: Caitlin Slotnick, Teaching Artist, with Ms. Paige Hutchinson and students at Rockdale County High School

March 29 – May 4, 2025

Alliance Theatre Hertz Stage

1280 Peachtree Street NE, Atlanta, GA 30309

Content Advisory: This study guide contains quoted explicit language

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Georgia Standards of Excellence

English Language Arts (ELA)

- ELAGSE9-10RL1 / ELAGSE11-12RL1 – Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text explicitly states as well as inferences drawn from it.
- ELAGSE9-10RL3 / ELAGSE11-12RL3 – Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- ELAGSE9-10RL5 / ELAGSE11-12RL5 – Analyze how an author's choices concerning the structure of a text contribute to its overall meaning and aesthetic impact.
- ELAGSE9-10W7 / ELAGSE11-12W7 – Conduct short and sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
- ELAGSE9-10SL1 / ELAGSE11-12SL1 – Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Health Education (HE)

- HEHS.1 – Analyze how mental health and addiction affect individuals, families, and communities.
- HEHS.2 – Evaluate coping mechanisms, treatment options, and support systems for individuals dealing with addiction and mental health challenges.
- HEHS.5 – Demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health and manage mental well-being.

Social Studies (Psychology & Sociology)

- SSPBF2 – Explain the development and impact of addiction on behavior, relationships, and society.
- SSSocSC4 – Analyze the societal impacts of mental health conditions, addiction, and family dynamics on individuals and communities.

Theatre Arts (TA)

- TAHSFT.CN.1 – Examine the role of theatre in reflecting and shaping social issues, human behavior, and cultural norms.
- TAHSFT.CN.2 – Connect theatre to historical, cultural, and contemporary contexts, analyzing how performance arts can foster discussions about social challenges such as addiction and mental health.
- TAHTA.RE.1 – Engage actively and constructively in discussions and critiques about performances, demonstrating an understanding of dramatic structure, character development, and themes.
- TAHTA.CN.3 – Explore career opportunities in theatre, including playwriting, acting, and production, considering how storytelling can be used to address complex social topics.



Synopsis

Josh's life is a mess. He's come home to Denver from NYU to get his life together but can't manage to stay sober. Desperate for camaraderie, he decides to bring his four loveable grandparents on his road to recovery. He drags them to Jazzercise class. He pressures them into playing memory games. He forces them to eat spinach by the handful. And eventually, when he can no longer help his grandparents, they begin to help him. Served up with outrageous humor and truth, *The Reservoir* reminds us that sometimes the path forward isn't the one we expect.

About the Playwright

Jake Brasch is a queer, sober, Jewish playwright and composer from Colorado. He worked as a birthday party clown throughout New York while developing *CLOWNTOWN*, a comedy series about his clowning career. At 11, he made his professional acting debut in *A Christmas Carol*. He is a graduate of NYU Tisch and the playwrighting program at The Juilliard School. Jake Brasch is a pianist and composer. He has written music and lyrics for several films, musicals, plays, and podcasts. Jake Brasch is a playwright, writer, actor, composer, and clown. They are a first-year playwright in the Juilliard School's Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program. The world premiere of their play *The Reservoir* will be presented this year (2025) as a co-production between the Denver Center, Alliance Theatre, and Geffen Playhouse.

In his other works, Jack Brasch explores themes such as control, fear, nature, curiosity, imagination, universality, and modernity as well as addiction, alcoholism, multigenerational relationships and recovery.

Source : www.broadwayworld.com/people/Jake-Brasch



Watch an interview with the playwright!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcGoMV1yLWY>

Other Works

- *How to Draw a Triangle* – A story about queerness, musical theatre, and occupational therapy, with a more lighthearted tone than *The Reservoir*.
- *CLOWNTOWN* – A comedic series about his experiences as a birthday clown.



Production History and Development

This piece was developed to bring attention to and explore alcoholism and Alzheimer's, two diseases the author's family has struggled with in the past. *The Reservoir*, by Jack Brasch, was developed by the Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST)/ Sloan Project. The **Ensemble Studio Theatre (EST)/Sloan Project** is a prestigious initiative that supports the development and production of new plays that engage with science and technology. The program, in partnership with the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, aims to challenge the public's perception of science through compelling storytelling. The EST/Sloan Project commissions, develops, and produces works that bring scientific ideas and discoveries to the stage in ways that are both accessible and dramatic.

The Reservoir aligns with the mission of the EST/Sloan Project by exploring cognitive reserve, a scientific concept related to brain resilience in aging and memory decline, as well as the impact of addiction on the brain. Through the lens of Josh's struggles with alcoholism and his grandparents' memory loss, the play delves into the intersection of neuroscience, psychology, and personal experience, making it a fitting selection for this initiative.

Upcoming productions include:

- **Alliance Theatre (Atlanta, GA):** March 29 – May 4, 2025
- **Geffen Playhouse (Los Angeles, CA):** Beginning June 18, 2025

Audience Response

The first play was performed in 2023 at the Colorado New Play Summit. The reviews were mostly positive, with many people praising the dialogue and emotional depth of the characters.

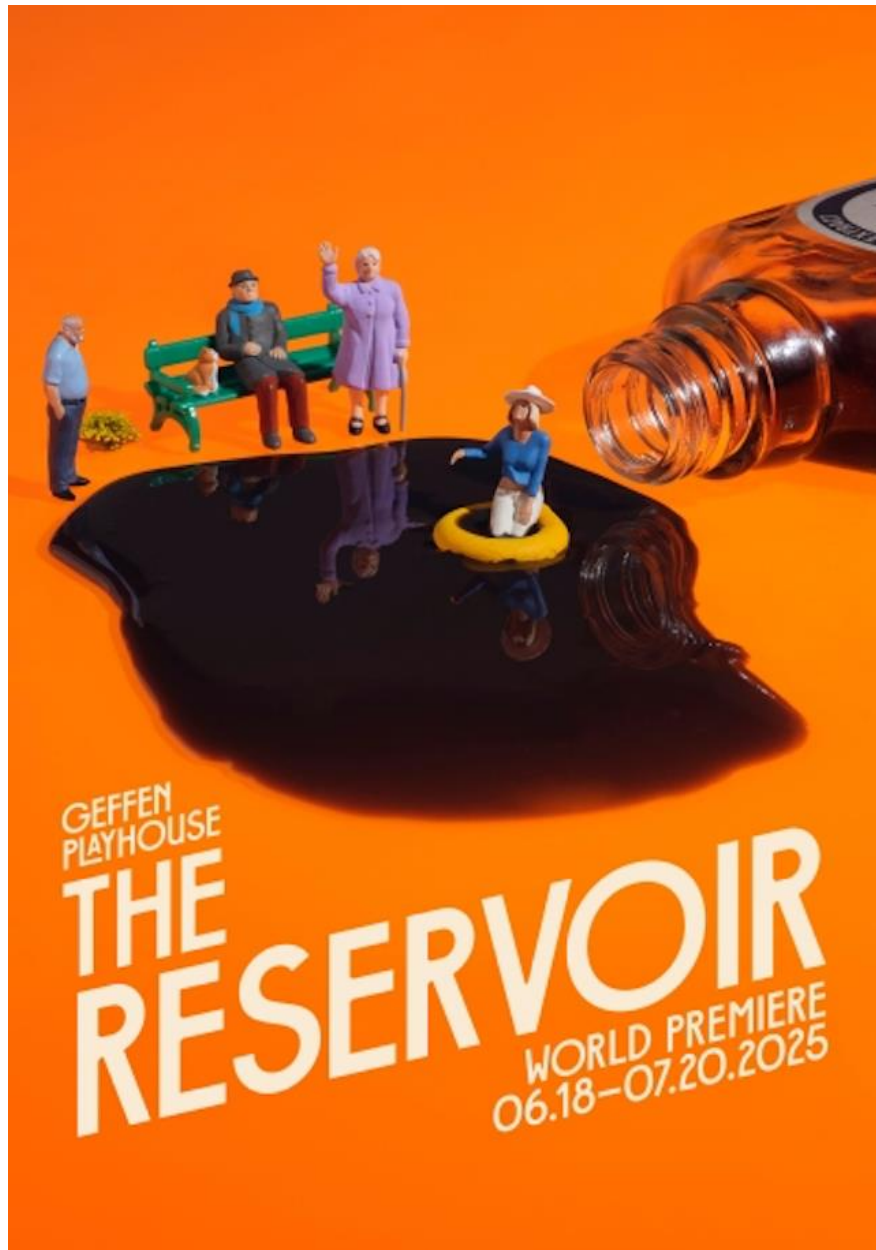
Source: www.ensemblestudiotheatre.org

About the Director

Shelley Butler has over forty Broadway, Off-Broadway and regional credits to date and has worked extensively with writers on new plays and musicals. Notable productions include the world premiere of Lucas Hnath's *A Doll's House Part 2* at South Coast Repertory and the Japanese premiere of *Beautiful: The Carole King Musical*, at the Imperial Theatre in Tokyo. She has directed and developed work across the country for theaters including: Ars Nova, Primary Stages, E.S.T., WP Theater, Hartford Stage, South Coast Repertory, Denver Center Theatre Company, Pioneer Theatre Company, Geva, The Old Globe, Contemporary American Theater Festival, Milwaukee Repertory Theater, New York Stage and Film, Dallas Lyric Stage, PlayPenn, New Dramatists, the Lark, New Georges, Dixon Place, The Playwright's Realm, Wellfleet Harbor Actor's Theatre and Keen Company. Shelley is the recipient of a Drama League Directing Fellowship, a 2005 Director's Guild of America Trainee, a member of SDC, the Lincoln Center Directors' Lab and the Women's Project Directors Lab. Shelley spent two seasons as artistic associate in charge of new play development for Hartford Stage and three seasons as artistic associate for Great Lakes Theater Festival.



Source: <https://www.shelleybutler.com/about>




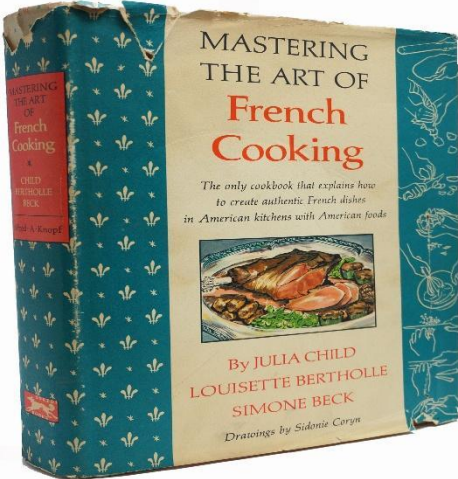
Source: <https://www.geffenplayhouse.org/shows/the-reservoir/>

Discussion Prompts

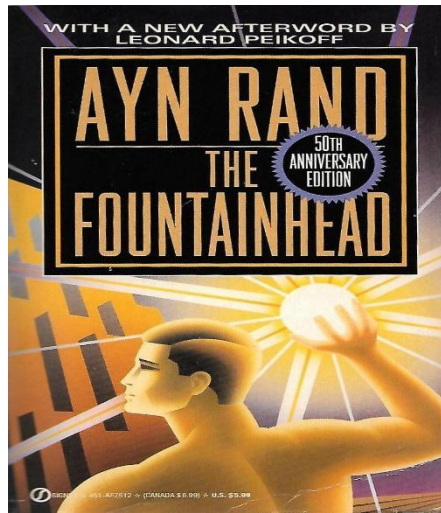
What can you predict about the play based on the program used at the premiere of this production?

Reflect on the artistic choices made for this image and how they might relate to the play or the playwright.

Allusions

Allusion	Description
<p>Whitney Houston's <i>I Have Nothing</i></p> 	<p><i>I Have Nothing</i> was co-written by David Foster and Linda Thompson. In her memoirs, <i>A Little Thing Called Life: On Loving Elvis Presley, Bruce Jenner, and Songs in Between</i>, Thompson mentions that director Mick Jackson asked her to write a song for the film. Thompson was in a relationship with Elvis Presley before he passed away. The lyrics "Stay in my arms if you dare / Or must I imagine you there / Don't walk away from me" was inspired from the time she was with Presley.</p> <p>"Remember: Your brain is broken and "you can't fix broken thinking with broken thinking" which is a slogan that I learned at the group therapy place NYU forced me to go to before I was kicked out for chugging six Smirnoff Ices in the bathroom and then singing the entirety of Whitney Houston's "I Have Nothing" during a group therapy session, no regrets" pg. 4</p> <p>Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I_Have_Nothing</p>
<p>Julia Child's <i>Mastering the Art of French Cooking</i></p> 	<p>Julia Child's <i>Mastering the Art of French Cooking</i> was made after WWII. It is a two-volume French cookbook. The book was made for the American market.</p> <p>"And you're working at the bookstore!/. Figures. You've always loved books. Remember when you came over to our house and read Julia Child's "Mastering The Art of French Cooking" in one sitting." pg. 11</p> <p>Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mastering_the_Art_of_French_Cooking</p>

The Fountainhead

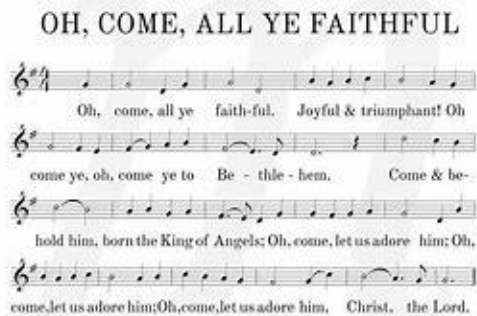


This book was written in 1943 by Ayn Rand. It revolves around a young architect in his fight against collectivism and social norms. Instead, the character, Howard Roark, embodies individualism and the belief that independence is better than conformity.

“How about you just come over for lunch on Saturday? Now. Where’s the fiction at? I wanna buy a copy of *The Fountainhead* for my gastroenterologist.” pg. 13

Source: <https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/f/the-fountainhead/book-summary>

Oh Come All Ye Faithful



O Come All Ye Faithful is a common Christmas carol. Its meaning is to call believers to witness the birth of Jesus Christ. Its long verses and history have been used in the Catholic church since 1711.

“Irene suddenly launches into a full-blown soprano operatic rendition of “Oh Come All Ye Faithful” pg. 17

Source:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/O_Come,_All_Ye_Faithful

Bar Mitzvah



Bar Mitzvah is a significant Jewish coming of age celebration for boys. At this stage of a boy’s life, he begins to take more responsibility.

“Oh for God’s sake, leave me out of your mental illness. You’ve always been way too hippy-dippy touchy-feely. Did I tell you I’m having a second Bar Mitzvah? You know you can do that at 83.” pg. 35

Source:
https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1912609/jewish/Bar-Mitzvah-What-It-Is-and-How-to-Celebrate.htm

Judge Judy



Best known for presiding over the arbitration-based reality court show called *Judge Judy*.

“Look if we leave now, we can make it home for Judge Judy at four.” pg. 39

Source: <https://www.biography.com/movies-tv/judge-judy>

Old McDonald



Old McDonald is a children’s song and nursery rhyme about a farmer and the various animals that he keeps.

“Are you kidding me? Old Mcdonald over here. E-I-E-I-O. What am I supposed to play?” pg. 43

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_MacDonald_Had_a_Farm


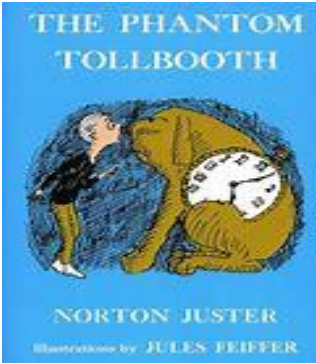
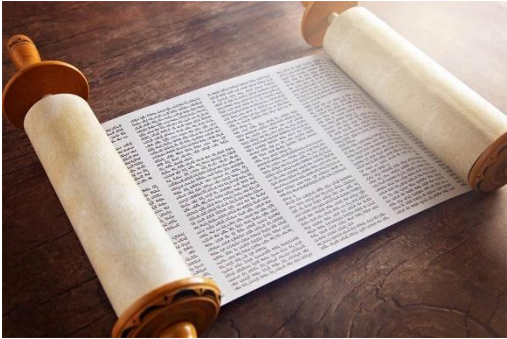
Scrabble

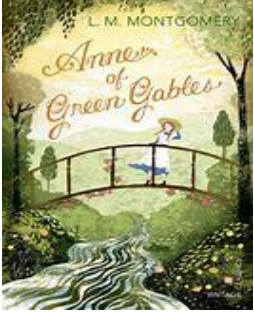




Scrabble is a word game in which two to four players score points by placing tiles, each bearing a single letter, onto a game board divided into a 15×15 grid of squares. The tiles must form words that, in crossword fashion, read left to right in rows or downward in columns, and be included in a standard dictionary or lexicon. Words spelled out by letters on the tiles interlock like words in a crossword puzzle.

“You wanna play Scrabble?” pg. 43

Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scrabble>

<p>Blintzes</p> 	<p>A traditionally Jewish dish that consists of a thin pancake filled with a creamy cheese mixture and is pan fried.</p> <p>“I brought you blintzes.” pg. 67</p> <p>Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blintz</p>
<p><i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i></p> 	<p><i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i>, written by Norton Juster, follows the story of a young boy traveling through a magical realm. This children's fantasy takes the protagonist through a troubled world where he must find “Rhyme” and “Reason” and restore order.</p> <p>“ ...His love for the store starts to rub off on me. I recommend <i>The Phantom Tollbooth</i> to an enthusiastic 9 year old and I feel accomplished. And then it's Day 10.” pg. 67</p> <p>Source: https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/tollbooth/summary</p>
<p><i>Torah</i></p> 	<p><i>The Torah</i> is the compilation of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible.</p> <p>“...She comes over to do my Torah portion and expects me to be halachic out of nowhere, to go into perfect Hebrew chanting so then I get stressed and make it up and go like “rachabacha mimimimim” and she says that this is disrespectful, I mean this Rabbi cannot take a joke...” pg. 69</p> <p>Source: https://www.britannica.com/topic/Torah</p>

<p><i>Anne of Green Gables</i></p> 	<p><i>Anne of Green Gables</i> is a novel that follows the adventures of an 11-year-old orphan girl named Anne Shirley.</p> <p>“This one? Who knew? Anne of Green Gables. Sorry I...it’s just so...” pg. 79</p> <p>Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anne_of_Green_Gables</p>
<p>Meshugenah</p> 	<p>Meshugenah, Yiddish slang, for someone who is crazy or nonsensical. Commonly, and in the play, it is used to describe when something isn’t logical or understandable.</p> <p>“...Nothing like the meshugenah cure you thought it was. But it’s interesting to think about...” pg. 76</p> <p>Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/meshugana</p>
<p>Hanukkah/Chanukah</p> 	<p>Hanukkah is a Jewish holiday that celebrates the defeat of the Syrian Greeks who oppressed the religious freedom of Judaism.</p> <p>“...I want to send you impersonal greeting cards for Chanukah, not be the lady you call when you’re craving a pot brownie..” pg. 85</p> <p>Source: https://www.lcsun-news.com/story/news/history/2024/12/24/hanukkah-when-does-begin-what-meaning-what-know/77057558007/</p>
<p><i>Oseh Shalom</i></p> <p>Oseh Shalom</p> <p>עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרוֹמָיו, הוּא יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶמְרוּ אָמֵן.</p> <p><i>May the One who makes peace up in the heavens, make peace for all of us, and all of Israel, and let us say, Amen.</i></p>	<p><i>Oseh Shalom</i> is a song and prayer about longing for peace. This Jewish prayer is thought to be inspired by Job 25:2 and used at the end of the Kaddish and the Amidah.</p> <p>“Oseh Shalom? I know you don’t know Jew songs, but you do in this fantasy.” pg. 96</p> <p>Source: https://www.shalomlc.org/middle-east/oseh-shalom</p>

Halachic



Halachic is an adjective that **relates to halacha, which is the Jewish law**. Halacha is derived from the interpretation of the laws of the Scriptures, and it guides the daily life of a Jew.

“She says I’m not practicing! She comes over to do my Torah portion and expects me to be halachic out of nowhere, to go into perfect Hebrew chanting so then I get stressed and make it up and go like “rachabacha mimimimim” and she says that this is disrespectful, I mean this Rabbi cannot take a joke.” pg. 69

Source: The free dictionary



Photo by: Jamie Kraus Photography

The Main Motif: *The Reservoir*

This play weaves a powerful motif through various forms of water, symbolizing the ebb and flow of mental strength. Water, essential for sustaining life, mirrors the state of the protagonist's mind—whether it's the deep and steady resilience of a reservoir, the chaotic turbulence of a raging river, or the fragile emptiness of a shallow puddle.

Jack Brasch invites the audience to empathize with Josh as he grapples with the relentless cycle of addiction and recovery. The play vividly captures the anguish of relapse, the gratitude found in support, and the unwavering determination to keep moving forward. Through each scene, the audience experiences the raw emotional weight of struggle, hope, and perseverance.

Vocabulary

Alcoholism – noun (*p.28*)

A chronic disease characterized by an inability to control alcohol consumption

Alzheimer's Disease – noun (*p.23*)

A progressive brain disorder that gradually impairs memory, thinking, and cognitive functions

Axiom – noun (*p.45*)

A fundamental principle or accepted truth that does not require proof

Bliss – noun (*p.51*)

A state of perfect happiness or joy

Cognitive – adjective (*p.49*)

Related to mental processes such as thinking, learning, and memory

Cognitive Reserve – noun (*p.36*)

A mental buffer built through life experiences that helps maintain cognitive function despite brain aging or damage.

Distortion – noun (*p.51*)

The action of distorting or the state of being distorted; a warped or misleading representation

Elusive – adjective (*p.2*)

Difficult to find, catch, or achieve.

Femurs – noun (*p.49*)

The thigh bones; the longest and strongest bones in the human body

Galley – noun (*p.8*)

A portable bookshelf

Harrowing – adjective (p.9)

Extremely distressing; agonizing

Implore – verb (p.7)

To beg someone desperately for something

Imperceptible – adjective (p.50)

So slight or subtle as to be impossible to perceive

Jazzercise – noun (p.52)

A type of fitness training that combines aerobic exercise and dance movements, often set to jazz or popular music.

Melancholy – noun (p.51)

A deep, persistent sadness, often without an apparent cause

Neurotic – adjective (p.1)

Overly sensitive, obsessive, or anxious

Ouroboros – noun (p.49)

An ancient symbol depicting a serpent or dragon eating its own tail, representing infinity and cyclical renewal

Parroting – verb (p.46)

The act of repeating or mimicking speech or behavior without understanding its meaning

Precocious – adjective (p.11)

Having developed certain abilities or skills at an earlier age than usual

Reservoir – noun (p.52)

A large natural or artificial lake used to store water; metaphorically, a deep reserve of strength or resources

Shalom – interjection (p.96)

A Hebrew word meaning both "hello" and "goodbye," often used to convey peace

Tabernacle – noun (p.49)

A fixed or portable dwelling, often with religious significance

Voraciously – adverb (p.11)

Eagerly consuming or devouring great quantities of food

Character List

Josh: A Queer, Jewish, neurotic lost soul. On medical leave from NYU. Wannabe writer/performer. Moves through life with a manic need to understand. Charming, funny, and hopelessly at sea.

Bev: A loving but no-bullshit Jewish grandma. Endlessly curious, sharp as a tack, and relentless. Calls it like it is.

Shrimpy: A lovable schmuck of a Jewish grandpa. A jokester. A total piece of shit, but impossible not to love.

Hank: A judgmental conservative Nebraskan Christian grandfather. Ultimately decent, but prickly.

Irene: A kind Nebraskan grandma. The sweetest person in the whole wide world. In the late stages of Alzheimer's.

Patricia: Josh's Mom. Hilarious, fun, and silly, but very hurt and angered by Josh's recent behavior. Wants so desperately to relax. (Also plays Jeanette Mcfolly, Lenni, and Rabbi Silver.)

Ernie: A long-time bookstore manager. Desperately believes in books and the store. Spectacular at his job. Serious and reserved...until he isn't. (Also plays Taylor, Yaakov Stern, Counselor Rick, Sponsor, Waiter, Nurse)



Photo by: Jamie Kraus Photography

Character Analysis Worksheet

Character Name: _____

Step 1: Overview			Step 3: Relationships
What is the character's role in the play? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protagonist • Antagonist • Supporting Character • Mentor Other: _____			How do the character's actions affect others in the story? Describe (1) significant relationship.
Describe the character's personality in (3) words.			
1.	2.	3.	
What is the character's key motivation or desire?			
Step 2: Development			Step 4: Themes
What is the character's biggest struggle or conflict?			Which themes from the play do this character contribute to or represent? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addiction & Recovery • Family & Generational Trauma • Identity & Self-Discovery • Isolation & Connection • Memory & the Past • Redemption & Change
Does the character change throughout the play? If so, how?			

Step 5: Costume Rendering

Referenced Locations & Relevance

Denver, Colorado (2013-2014)

- **Significance to Josh:** His "thinking place," where he reflects on his past, identity, and history.
- **City Characteristics:**
 - 300 days of sunshine per year.
 - 10th largest downtown area in the U.S.
 - One of the most walkable cities.
 - Over 200 parks.
- **Why Denver?:**
 - Acts as a physical, emotional, and psychological setting influencing Josh's struggles.
 - The reservoir in Denver symbolizes memory, self-reflection, and unresolved tensions from his past.
 - It's the playwright's hometown.



New York University

- **Relevance to Josh:**
 - The place where he struggled with alcohol addiction.
 - A setting that represents both ambition and self-destruction.
 - Located in the same city as the playwright's college, Juilliard.



Bookstore

- **Relevance to Josh:**
 - His workplace.
 - More details needed: What led him to work there? What is the atmosphere like? Is it busy? Does he find it meaningful

Reservoir (Cherry Creek State Park, Colorado)

- **Description:**
 - Located in Arapahoe County, Colorado.
 - A natural prairie and wetland environment.
 - Home to an 880-acre reservoir shared by powerboats, sailboats, and paddle craft.
 - A peaceful retreat for reflection and escape.
- **Significance to Josh:**
 - A place to clear his mind and study.
 - Symbolizes his mental state—sometimes calm and controlled, other times chaotic.



Discussion Prompts

Do you have a special place you go to clear your head? Why is that place special?

If you had to pick any city to live in, where would you go? How do you think it would change you or your normal routine?



Photo by: Jamie Kraus Photography

Historical, Cultural, & Social Context (2013-2014) in *The Reservoir*

The events of 2013-2014, during the time of the play's development, provide a broader historical and cultural backdrop for *The Reservoir*, influencing its themes of addiction, identity, generational trauma, and personal struggles. While not directly mentioned in the play, these events add layers of meaning to the characters' experiences and the societal forces shaping their choices.

Political Context: The 2012 U.S. Election & Its Aftermath

- **Relevance to the Play:**
 - The U.S. was deeply divided politically, with ongoing debates about healthcare, social policies, and mental health resources.
 - Issues like access to addiction treatment, healthcare funding, and public attitudes toward substance abuse were shaped by the political climate.
 - Josh, the protagonist, struggles with addiction and recovery, which could be seen as part of a larger societal issue—how addiction is handled in the U.S., including stigma, accessibility of rehab, and generational cycles of substance abuse.

Global Conflicts: Chemical Weapons Attacks & the Rise of ISIS

- **Chemical Weapons Attacks (Syria, 2013)**
 - In 2013, reports of chemical weapons use in Syria raised ethical and humanitarian concerns worldwide. The attacks resulted in thousands of casualties and sparked global debates about intervention, responsibility, and war crimes.
 - Connection to the Play:
 - This event underscores the fragility of human life and the consequences of destruction, themes that parallel Josh's personal self-destruction through addiction.
 - Just as entire communities were struggling with devastation and loss, Josh faces his own battle with personal devastation and strained relationships.
- **The Rise of ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria)**
 - Around 2013-2014, ISIS rapidly expanded, gaining control over territories in Iraq and Syria. This led to extreme violence, mass displacement, and a new era of global terrorism and fear.
 - Connection to the Play:
 - While not directly related, the global sense of instability, fear, and loss reflects the emotional instability and personal chaos in Josh's life.

- Just as the world was grappling with how to fight an enemy that seemed impossible to control, Josh battles a disease (alcoholism) that constantly threatens to take over his life.
- The loss of control, the destruction of lives, and the fight for survival are themes reflected both on a global and personal level.

Religious & Cultural Significance: Judaism & Heritage Sites

- **Temple Mount (Holiest Site in Judaism)**
 - **Why It's Relevant:**
 - The Temple Mount is a symbol of faith, struggle, and generational history for Jewish people.
 - It has been a site of conflict for centuries, mirroring the theme of internal and external conflict in the play.
 - Josh, like many individuals dealing with addiction, faces a battle between his past, his identity, and his need for recovery, a struggle that mirrors historical battles for identity and ownership.
- **Biblical Mount Sinai**
 - **Why It's Relevant:**
 - In Jewish tradition, Mount Sinai is where Moses received the Ten Commandments, a moment of spiritual awakening and transformation.
 - The idea of receiving guidance and second chances ties into *The Reservoir's* themes of redemption, seeking help, and trying to change one's life.
 - Josh, much like someone seeking spiritual guidance, is searching for a new path—one that can free him from addiction and help him regain control.
- **Rachel's Tomb**
 - **Why It's Relevant:**
 - Rachel's Tomb is believed to be the burial place of Rachel, a matriarch in Judaism. It is a site of mourning, prayer, and connection to family lineage.
 - This ties into the family dynamics in the play, particularly Josh's relationships with his mother, father, and brother.
 - Addiction often creates family rifts, feelings of grief, and the struggle to hold onto family ties—themes that are deeply explored in *The Reservoir*.

Why These Events Matter to the Themes of *The Reservoir*

1. **Loss of Control** – Whether through political division, global conflict, or personal addiction, the idea of losing control over one's life is a recurring theme. Josh, much like the world around him, is caught in a struggle he doesn't fully understand.

2. **Generational Trauma** – The history of war, religious conflict, and societal shifts parallels the cycle of addiction and pain that runs through families.
3. **Searching for Redemption** – Many of these events involve people seeking justice, redemption, or a new beginning—just as Josh is trying to rebuild his life after addiction.
4. **The Weight of History** – Just as the world was dealing with political and cultural baggage, Josh is weighed down by his personal and family history, struggling to break free from it.

While *The Reservoir* is a deeply personal story about addiction, it is set against a world grappling with conflict, instability, and generational struggles. These historical events reinforce the play's themes of loss, redemption, self-destruction, and the fight to reclaim one's identity.

Discussion Prompts

How are the themes of this play relevant to you and your personal experiences?

Why do you think the themes are relevant in today's political and/or social environments compared to the time period when it was written?



Photo by: Jamie Kraus Photography

Pre-Show Questions & Activities

Journal Prompts

Where:

1. Where do you go to think or recharge?
2. Where is the first place you run to when you face a major loss?
3. Is there a place you have visited that feels like home?
4. What is a reservoir? How do you predict this setting might relate to the main themes of the play?

Who:

1. Would you ever get advice from your grandparents or other elder(s) about problems? Why or why not?
2. Who is the first person you run to when you face a major loss?
3. If your family knew your secrets, what do you think would happen? More broadly: How would you feel if your greatest secret was exposed to everyone around you?

What:

1. What are different ways to keep yourself motivated when you want to give up?
2. Is it difficult to shake undesired or problematic habits? If so, why do you think it is hard to break those habits?

Activities

- **Generational Advice Interviews** – Interview someone about what advice they would give to a younger version of themselves. Then, ask the same question to people from three different generations and discuss how their responses are influenced by age and generational beliefs.
- **Create a PSA** – Develop a public service announcement to increase awareness about addiction and resources for help.
- **Memory Simulation Exercise** – Remove a person from the room. Have three people begin a discussion. After 1-2 minutes, bring the removed person back in to replace someone in the discussion and continue as if they were there the entire time. (This explores the concept of blacking out or Alzheimer's.)
- **Sort Books by Smell** – A sensory activity to reflect on how memory and experience are tied to senses.

Post-Show Questions & Activities

Journal Prompts & Discussions

1. Describe your favorite character with one word.
2. If you were going to write a play about an important turning point in your life, what would it be about? What genres would you use?
3. Do you relate to this play? Why or why not?
4. Which character resonated with you the most? Why?
5. Have you ever seen anything similar to this play? What was it, and how do they compare?
6. Reflect on Patricia's reaction to Josh's return. What would you have done in her place?
7. What was the most interesting relationship in the play for you? Why?
8. What was your main takeaway from the play?
9. What lesson would you want an audience to learn from your experiences?

Games & Activities

Interactive Activities

- **Character Interviews** – Take turns playing different characters and answering audience questions.
- **Scenes from a Hat** - *Instructions and prompts below.*
- **Digital Collage of Allusions** – Use Canva or Google Slides to create a collage of images, quotes, and historical references that appear in the play.
- **Social Media “Promo”** – Design an Instagram post, tweet, or TikTok script promoting the play while referencing key dramaturgical elements.
- **Dramaturg’s Choice Awards** – Create a fun awards list for the play’s characters (e.g., “Most Likely to Start a Revolution,” “Biggest Drama Queen”).
- **Mood Board** – Design a board representing the play’s aesthetic, emotions, and historical context.
- **Interactive Timeline** – Build a timeline showing historical events that influenced the play.
- **Character Doodles & Annotations** – Draw or digitally design character sketches with notes on their personalities, relationships, and arcs.
- **Podcast Snippet** – Record a 2-minute dramaturgy podcast explaining an interesting aspect of the play.
- **Alternate Casting List** – Recast the play with modern celebrities or fictional characters and explain why they fit the roles.
 - Example: Jay Pritchett (Modern Family) as Hank
 - Sam Elliott as Shrimpy
 - Richard Belzer as [Character]

Themed Playlist Creation

Create a Spotify/YouTube playlist with songs that connect to the play's themes, characters, or mood. Write a short explanation for each song choice.

Example Playlist:

1. **Reservoir** – Metronomy (Title reference, escape theme)
2. **I Feel Insane** – Starberry (Pain and loneliness)
3. **My Alcoholic Friends** – The Dresden Dolls (Addiction theme)
4. **Back to Black** – Amy Winehouse (Addiction struggle)
5. **Novacane** – Frank Ocean (Substance abuse, college norms)
6. **Everything I Wanted** – Billie Eilish (Drowning metaphor)
7. **She Brings the Rain** – Can (Addiction, water symbolism)
8. **Little Story** – Kehlani (Waves sounds, manipulation theme)
9. **Class of 2013** – Mitski (Parent-child struggles)
10. **Broken Clocks** – SZA (Substance dependency)
11. **Bug like an Angel** – Mitski (Alcoholism theme)
12. **Hard Times** – Paramore (Struggle and perseverance)

Creative Engagement

- **Make a TikTok PSA (Public Service Announcement)**
 - Write a short (30-90 seconds) script spreading awareness about addiction or Alzheimers
 - Include one (1) fact about the subject matter.
 - Film the scene, edit and share out.
- **Meme Collection**
 - Collect a set of memes inspired by key moments in the play.
 - Create a collage with the chosen memes.
- **Create a Print Advertisement**
 - Create a visual design to promote *The Reservoir*.
 - Use the image on page 7 as inspiration.
 - Carefully select colors, text, images and design to help reflect the themes of the play.

How to Play "Scenes from a Hat"

"*Scenes from a Hat*" is a fun improvisational theatre game popularized by *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*. It works great as a warm-up, icebreaker, or full activity for drama classes and rehearsals.

What You Need:

- A hat (or a bowl, box, or any container)
- Small slips of paper with scene prompts written on them
- A group of players (ideally 4-8 at a time, but more can rotate in)

How to Play:

1. Prepare the Prompts

- Before the game, write down funny, unexpected, or challenging scene ideas on slips of paper and place them in the hat.
- Examples:
 - "Things you don't want to hear from your surgeon right before surgery."
 - "Rejected scenes from a superhero movie."
 - "If Shakespeare wrote for reality TV."
 - "The worst way to break up with someone."

2. Select Players

- 3-4 players at a time move forward while the rest watch. Rotate players after a few rounds.

3. Draw a Scene & Perform

- The host (or audience) pulls a prompt from the hat and reads it aloud.
- Players instantly create a short scene (usually 5-15 seconds) based on the prompt.

4. Keep the Energy Up

- The host quickly moves to the next prompt after each scene.
- Keep a fast pace to maintain excitement.

5. Rotate Players

- Swap in new performers every few rounds so everyone gets a chance to participate.

Game Variations:

- **Themed Rounds** – Focus all prompts on a specific topic (e.g., historical settings, sci-fi, Shakespearean).
- **Audience Participation** – Encourage audience members to suggest or write scene ideas.
- **Prop Challenge** – Add a random prop that must be incorporated into every scene.

Character-Based Prompts

- Strangest piece of advice one of the grandparents could give.
- A deeply profound but completely ridiculous thing a grandparent says.
- If the protagonist had to explain his life situation to a five-year-old.
- What happens when someone finds the protagonist's old journal?
- A job interview where the protagonist is way too honest.
- Moments from a dysfunctional family.

Situational Prompts

- A support group that doesn't exist.
- The worst thing to realize after a blackout.
- The most inappropriate time for a memory to come back.
- If *The Reservoir* was an episode of *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*.

"World's Worst" Prompts

- World's worst thing to say when someone reminds you of something you forgot.
- World's worst reason to move back home.
- World's worst support group leader.
- World's worst family dinner conversation starter.
- World's worst thing to say when your grandparent mistakes you for someone else.
- World's worst place to have an emotional breakdown.
- World's worst response to "I'm proud of you."
- World's worst way to bond with a grandparent.
- World's worst way to fill an awkward silence at a family gathering.

Secondary Activity

Have students create their own prompts related to the play.

Resources for Support

If you or someone you know is struggling with addiction or Alzheimer's, these resources may help:

Addiction Support

- SAMHSA's National Helpline – 1-800-662-HELP (4357) – www.samhsa.gov
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) – www.aa.org
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) – www.drugabuse.gov
- Shatterproof – A nonprofit dedicated to reversing the addiction crisis – www.shatterproof.org

Alzheimer's Support

- Alzheimer's Association – 1-800-272-3900 – www.alz.org
- The Alzheimer's Foundation of America – www.alzfdn.org
- Memory Cafe Directory – Social engagement opportunities for those with memory loss – www.memorycafedirectory.com

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