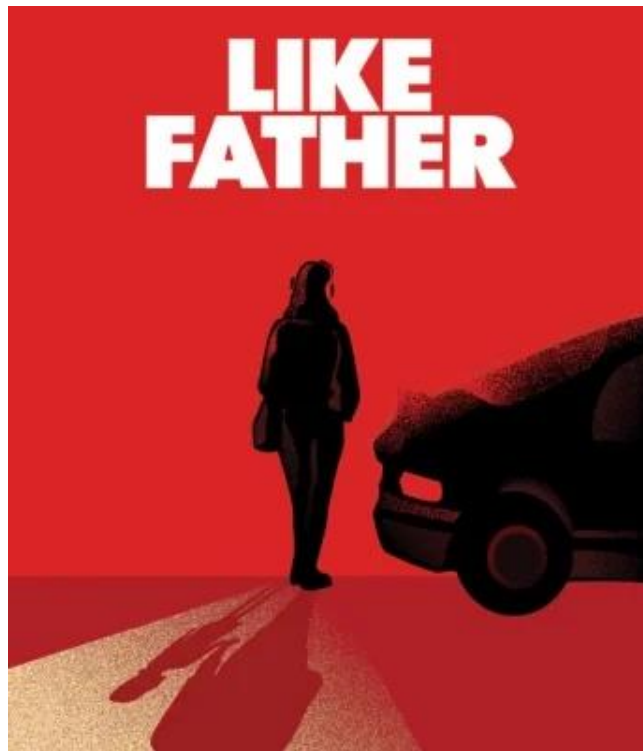


Alliance Theatre

institute

Dramaturgy by Students – Study Guide
by Warren Levi Haney, Teaching Artist
with Dr. Shana Hunt & students at DeKalb School of the Arts
copyediting by Liz Magovern Davis, Head of Secondary Curriculum & Partnerships



World Premiere
October 8 – November 15, 2026
Hertz Stage

Best enjoyed by audiences ages 13+

Content Advisory: contains explicit language and graphic depictions of violence; depicts drinking and smoking marijuana; addresses sexual identity and true-crime topics including violence, murder, suicide, trauma, and grief

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Georgia Standards of Excellence

Source: case.georgiastandards.org

English Language Arts:

- 6.T.RA.2 Curating Sources & Evidence Utilize multiple print and digital texts to address a specific topic or question, assessing source credibility and relevance and integrating evidence properly to avoid plagiarism.
 - 6.T.RA.2.a Locate evidence in print and digital sources to support a central idea or question, recording basic bibliographic information, such as author, title, and page number.
- 10.LDOMAIN: Language (L) Students learn and apply the structures and conventions of standard English. Students observe and analyze how grammar works in reading and writing. Students build vocabularies and determine word meanings as they relate to reading and writing.
- 10.TDOMAIN: Texts (T) Students grow in their learning as they purposefully engage with texts.

Fine Arts - Theatre:

- TAHSTL.CR.1 Develop original theatre literature.
 - TAHSTL.CR.1.a Compare and summarize theatre literature from various historical periods, cultures, and styles.
 - TAHSTL.CR.1.b Examine and outline the steps and conventions involved in the creation of a theatre text.
 - TAHSTL.CR.1.c Develop original texts using theatre techniques (e.g. improvisation, adapting non-theatre literature, playwriting exercises).
- TAHSTL.RE.1 Evaluate various aspects of theatre literature using appropriate supporting evidence.
 - TAHSTL.RE.1.a Develop and apply a set of comprehensive criteria for theatre text analysis.
 - TAHSTL.RE.1.b Compare and contrast theatre texts to live/film performance.
- TAHSTL.CN.1 Connect theatre literature to its dramaturgical contexts and other disciplines.
 - TAHSTL.CN.1.a Trace the development of theatre from earliest forms to contemporary forms.
 - TAHSTL.CN.1.b Identify and summarize contributions made to the development of theatre literature by different cultures and traditions.
 - TAHSTL.CN.1.c Research and explain how cultural and historical factors have influenced playwrights and theatre literature.
 - TAHSTL.CN.1.d Identify the elements, influences, and contributions of other art forms and content areas to theatre literature.

About the Play

Synopsis: Like Father is a coming-of-age musical set against America's true-crime obsession. After her father's arrest, seventeen-year-old Chris moves in with her estranged mother, Michelle, and stepfather, Ben. When a hit true-crime podcast exposes their family's disturbing past to the world, they are forced to face the truth of what brought them together, or risk being undone by its consequences.

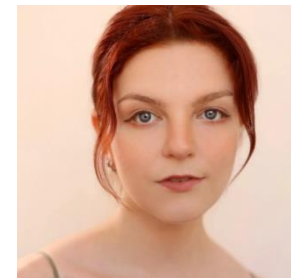
Driven by a bold, innovative folk-pop score, Like Father explores legacy, identity, and the cost of obsession, inspired by the loved ones left in the wake of infamous serial killers—and by the true-crime industry's meteoric rise to over 250 million listeners worldwide.

Playwrights

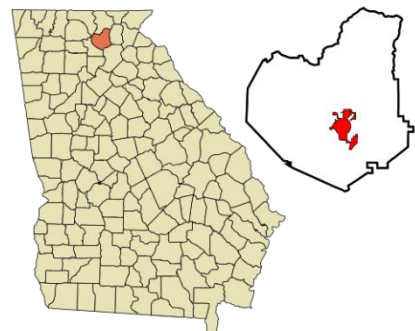
Jacob Ryan Smith is a composer/performer out of New York City, originally from Atlanta, GA. He graduated from The University of Michigan where he received his BFA in Musical Theater Performance & was the first ever graduate of the new Musical Theater Composition minor. In composition, he is known for his prolific writing in a variety of different mediums, including Musical Theater, Ballet, Television, Film, and Pop Music. In 2020, he accomplished a year long project he entitled "The Song Smith," where he wrote and produced a song every day for the entire year (resulting in 366 unique songs). He's worked with an all-star list of Broadway veterans, including Ashley Park, Andrew Barth Feldman, Joe Serafini, Michael McElroy, and many more. His work has been highlighted by NPR, The Today Show, IHeartRadioBroadway, Out Magazine, and many other publications. More than anything though, Jacob simply loves to create art in any fashion. He's always game to collaborate and make something new out of nothing. He feels lucky every day to get to do this as a profession. He also really really likes Survivor and hopes to play one day. Just manifesting that.



Caroline Pernick co-wrote the book, music, and lyrics for *Like Father*. She was born in Alameda, CA, and received her BA in Theatre from the University of California, Los Angeles. She also spent many a year at the American Conservatory Theatre's Young Conservatory. She likes driving, Joni Mitchell, the *Light in the Piazza* Overture, and fantasy football.



Setting: Dahlonega, GA. Seated in Lumpkin County, and is in the foothills of the North Georgia mountains, approximately 70 miles north of Atlanta. Incorporated on December 21, 1833, Dahlonega was the site of the first significant gold rush in the United States. Despite being the home of a prominent university, the city has a poverty rate of 35.9%. Dahlonega had a population of 7,537 in 2020.



Vocabulary: Crime & Forensics

Word (part of speech)	Definition	Used in Context
Confession (noun)	A statement in which someone admits to a crime	"Past mistakes, and wrong corrections Bad decisions, Hard Confessions" (Ben, page 82)
Coroner (noun)	A public official responsible for investigating deaths	"After examining Diana's body, the coroner discovered... " (Lillian Clarke, page 28)
Corpse (noun)	A dead body especially of a human being	"...buried the strangled boy's corpse in the crawl under his ho-" (Lillian Clarke, page 49)
Child Protective Services / CPS (proper noun)	Government agency that investigates allegations of abuse or neglect of children	"YES 'overly Protective' that's exactly what I told CPS- He was just trying to protect me--" (Chris, page 43)
Fatal (adjective)	To cause death	"...Emma seized a final, and nearly fatal Opportunity." (Lillian Clarke, page 33)
Forensics (noun)	Scientific knowledge and analysis of physical evidence	"...when forensics shared their findings ..." (Lillian Clarke, page 12)
Gore (noun)	Thick, clotted blood or graphic violence	The episodes will be stuffed to the brim with all the delicious gore and grim that you've come to expect" (Lillian Clarke, page 100)
Homicide (noun)	The act of one human killing another	"SOME GUY KILLED HIS BRIDE HELL, IT'S A DOUBLE HOMICIDE" (Trevor, page 28)
Mastermind (noun)	Person who supplies creative direction for a project	"A mastermind / Parading in the day / Like any neighbor" (Lillian Clarke, page 50)
Motive (noun)	Something (such as a need or desire) that drives someone	"WAS THE MOTIVE OUT OF HIS CONTROL HAD IT POSSESSED HIM?" (Chris, page 68)
Mutilate (verb)	To cut or damage radically in a way as to make imperfect.	"There he sat, tightly clutching his mum's decapitated head, mutilated in his young arms--" (Lillian Clarke, page 27)
Predator (noun)	Person who secretly harms vulnerable individuals	"What if we could talk to a predator before their strike?" (Lillian Clarke, page 1)
Serrated (adjective)	Having a notched, saw-like edge with sharp teeth	"his mum's decapitated head lay there, severed with a serrated kitchen knife--" (Lillian Clarke, page 30)
Severed (adjective)	Cut apart, divided, or broken off completely	"His mums decapitated head lay there, severed with a serrated kitchen knife." (Lillian Clarke, page 30)

Allusions: Pop Culture & Modern Media

Word, Phrase, Title or Name	Definition or Meaning
Analog King	Someone who possesses and enjoys using older technology, such as CDs, DVDs, cassette tapes, etc.
Camcorder	Portable electronic device that combines a video camera and a recorder into a single handheld unit
Charles Manson	American criminal and cult leader who orchestrated the notorious Tate-LaBianca murders in Los Angeles in 1969
Docu-Series	Television program that presents factual information about reality across multiple connected episodes
Footloose	Movie released in 1984 about a teenager from Chicago who moves to a new town and fights against a local ban on dancing and rock music
Grateful Dead	American rock band formed in 1965, known for their eclectic and extremely unique style that fused many different elements rock
Grey's Anatomy	Medical drama show that has run since 2004, known for its dramatic plot lines following life or death situations at a hospital
Guiding Light	Soap Opera that aired for 57 years following a German family in Illinois pursuing the American dream, featured Kevin Bacon as a troubled teen
Jack "The Ripper"	Unidentified male serial killer active around 1888, known for murdering prostitutes
Jeffery Dahmer	Serial killer with more than a dozen victims, known for targeting young men, who were typically homosexual or part of a minority
Mutuals	Social media users who follow each other's accounts
Ted Bundy	American man (deceased), a notorious serial killer who killed many dark-haired girls, but was glorified due to his appearance and charm
True Crime	A genre of nonfiction books, podcasts, and films that examine real-life criminal events

Character Study

Characters

Chris (Christina Grady) - Teenage girl newly relocated to Dahlonega, GA to live with her estranged mother

John Grady - Chris' biological father, a serial killer

Trevor - Chris' new neighbor and friend (identifies as he/they and gay)

Michelle - Chris' biological mother

Ben — Michelle's partner, Chris' stepfather

Lillian Clark - Host of the popular true crime podcast, *Bloody Good: With Lillian Clark*

Activity: Character Study

Directions: Deeply analyze (1) selected character from *Like Father* by:

- Composing their biography (1 paragraph),
- Curating their 5-track playlist (with rationale connected to text evidence), and
- Revealing 3 items they would carry in their bag or backpack

EXAMPLE

Character: Chris (Christina Grady)
Character Biography Christina Grady is a disconnected, independent, and self-conscious teenager who holds a lot of angst pertaining to her relationships with other characters—especially her father. After discovering her father's dark secrets through her favorite true crime podcast, she uncovers the lies she has been told her entire life and sees her deep bond to her father in a new light. Throughout <i>Like Father</i> , she worries about her similarities to her father, almost feeling herself becoming who he once was. At the same time, she resists connection with her mother, Michelle, and her family, trying to carve her own path while pursuing the truth behind her father's secret double life.

Playlist

Song Title & Artist	Rationale
"Creep" — Radiohead	Chris feels out of place and misunderstood.
"Smells Like Teen Spirit" — Nirvana	Classic teenage angst anthem.
"Jane!" — The Long Faces	About a woman who puts on a kind front to hide a vengeful mindset, which reflects Chris' internal fear that she might fundamentally be a bad person.
"Blackbird" — The Beatles	A song passed down from her dad - reflects their relationship.
"All I Wanted" — Paramore	More raw angst. At her core, all she ever wanted was her father.

What's in their Bag?

Item	Rationale
The Map from Ben	Not to navigate, but to have something physical proving someone cares.
A Camcorder	Carried for nostalgia and to hold onto memories of her upbringing.
A Popped Stress Ball	Originally used to self-regulate when traumatic memories surfaced; broken due to extreme stress.

Graphic Organizer: Character Study

Directions: Deeply analyze (1) selected character from *Like Father* by:

- Composing their biography (1 paragraph),
- Curating their 5-track playlist (with rationale connected to text evidence), and
- Revealing 3 items they would carry in their bag or backpack

Student Name: _____

Character:
Character Biography

Playlist

Song Title & Artist	Rationale
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

What's in their Bag?

Item	Rationale
1.	
2.	
3.	

Nature vs. Nurture

Directions: Students will pick sides of this centuries-old debate: Is human behavior more closely connected to nature (innate genetics) or nurture (upbringing and life experiences)?

- Each team builds a case for their side, regarding our protagonist, Christina Grady.
- Then, hold an informal classroom debate (note requirements and rules below)
 - The teacher will serve as moderator and timekeeper
 - Each team will present (3) times: an opening argument, cross-examination or rebuttal of the other side, and a closing summary (the teacher will determine the winner)

Example Notes - Team Nature

Opening Argument: Chris' plight, trauma, and psychological journey are fundamentally driven by genetic inheritance. While environmental stressors act as triggers, her core personality traits, behavioral impulses, and psychological conditions originate from the biological traits passed down by her parents, Michelle and John Grady.

Evidence:

- Michelle (mother) passed down: 1. Insecurity & Hesitancy to Accept Family; 2. Defensive Loyalty to Family; and 3. Avoidance & Escape Impulses
- John (father) passed down: 1. Physical & Physicalized Similarity; 2. Mood Instability & Sudden Shifts; and 3. Possessiveness & Defensive Guardedness

Closing Argument: While the traumatic revelation of her father's identity triggered her more intense symptoms, Chris' psychological profile indicates an inherited condition present from birth. She appears to suffer from delusions, hallucinations, social withdrawal, irrational impulses, and substance abuse. Her environment is a trigger, not a cause.

Example Notes: Team Nurture

Opening Argument: Chris' plight, trauma, and behavioral journey are directly caused by her environment and the nurture of her home. Growing up in an isolated environment with no peers to interact with and no socialization outside of her father, the odds were never in her favor. An environment like the one Chris was raised in would have devastating, long-term psychological effects on any child, regardless of genetics.

Evidence: Team Nurture asks, "*What has happened to Chris to make her behave this way?*"

1. Isolation (source: *Frontiers in Psychiatry*)
 - Leads to dangerous tendency to misinterpret neutral/benign actions as hostile threats
 - Alters neurological reward pathways, significantly increasing vulnerability to substance abuse
2. Stockholm Syndrome & Identification with the Captor (source: *Britannica*)
3. Conditioning to accept John Grady's cycle of erratic behavior followed by sudden warmth
4. Maternal Abandonment & Preferred Attachment to the Abuser
5. Psychological Abuse - extreme jealousy, control, and threats (source: *People's Law Library of Maryland*)

Closing Argument: No one is born a killer. Violent behavioral patterns are the result of environmental conditioning and lack of emotional regulation. John Grady failed to teach Chris proper coping or regulation skills, nor did he provide a stable, consistent environment of safety and comfort. Children who are never given healthy outlets for overwhelming feelings bottle their emotions for long periods of time until environmental stressors force them to explode. Her actions are the direct product of her upbringing, not her DNA.

Societal Fascination with True Crime

By: Maliah M.

GUIDING INQUIRY: Why are people so fascinated by true crime media?

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TRUE CRIME OBSESSION

Societal obsession with true crime shows, documentaries, podcasts, and related media is deeply wired into human psychology—especially in the Western world or developed areas where populations have the privilege of not experiencing large amounts of grotesque physical violence head-on on a day-to-day basis.

1. Controlled Fear and "Recreational Fear"

- **Psychological Mechanism:** Humans have a built-in survival instinct tied to the amygdala, the brain's threat-processing center. True crime triggers our most powerful baseline emotion, but does so within a safe, controlled environment.
- **The Analogy:** It functions like riding a roller coaster - you experience an adrenaline rush, dopamine spikes, and a racing heart while safely unloading the dishwasher or driving to work. This "recreational fear" lets us flirt with danger without being in actual physical peril.

2. The Survival and Learning Mechanism

- **Psychological Mechanism:** Research shows women are disproportionately drawn to true crime content compared to men, which psychologists link to threat-recognition and survival strategies. Because women face higher statistical risks of gender-based violence, consuming these stories acts subconsciously as a form of mental rehearsal or exposure therapy. By learning warning signs, timelines, and offender behaviors, listeners feel they are gathering tools to spot danger and protect themselves in real life.

3. Morbid Curiosity and the Puzzle-Solving Brain

- **Psychological Mechanism:** Humans are natural pattern-seekers. Our brains gravitate toward puzzles, and true crime provides the ultimate real-life "whodunnit" where listeners dissect clues, analyze timelines, and test their intuition against the investigation's outcome. Beyond the puzzle, there is a deep, unsettling curiosity regarding the dark side of human nature—a desire to understand *why* and *how* someone crosses the line from being a normal member of society to committing heinous acts.

4. The Quest for Justice

- **Psychological Mechanism:** When the world feels chaotic and unfair, true crime narratives offer a moral arc: a crime is committed, an investigation occurs, and the perpetrator is held accountable. This resolution provides a sense of procedural justice and psychological order, reassuring listeners that bad actors face consequences.

THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS & NORMALIZATION OF CRIME MEDIA

1. Desensitization and Emotional Numbing

- Routine exposure to graphic true crime podcasts and media leads to emotional desensitization, though it affects individuals differently.
- When graphic stories of violence and tragedy are consumed regularly, the brain normalizes the content. Over time, narratives that would initially cause shock or deep distress turn into routine background noise or casual entertainment.

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

1. What is a coming-of-age story?
2. What are teens today absolutely obsessed with?
3. Do you listen to podcasts?
 - If yes, which one(s) and why?
4. Do you personally enjoy the true crime genre?
5. Agree or Disagree: Kids are a lot like their parents/caregivers.

Pre-Show Activity: "Inherited Traits" Spectrum

Directions: Draw a continuum line - 100% Nature on the left and 100% Nurture on the right. Name specific traits and behaviors (listed below) and have students physically position themselves along the spectrum to illustrate where they think each trait originates.

- Intelligence (IQ)
- Mental Health
- Sexual Orientation
- Personality Traits
- Aggression
- Addiction
- Gender Roles and Identity
- Obesity
- Athleticism
- Artistry
- Achievement
- Political Ideology
- Religiosity
- Altruism
- Impulsivity
- Risk-Taking
- Happiness
- Well-being
- Memory

Post-Show Activity: People to People

Directions: Students silently move around the space (be mindful not to bump, push, or move in circles). Facilitator/Teacher will call out the prompt, "People to People" and students then find someone close to them to be near or stand next to. The facilitator will prompt students to silently move through the space again, before calling another prompt: "Toe to Toe." Students then find a partner to touch toes with. Continue this process using the prompts provided.

- Toe to Toe: Who's your favorite character in *Like Father* and why?
- Elbow to Elbow: What was your favorite moment in the play and why?
- Back to Back: Besides John Grady, who made the biggest betrayal in the play?
- Knee to Knee: Is Lillian Clarke a villain or simply an entrepreneur?
- Top of Head to Top of Head: Is Chris Grady's plight a product of Nature or Nurture?

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"Thompson's Bouquets"
Logo & Concept
Designed by: Beatriz L.