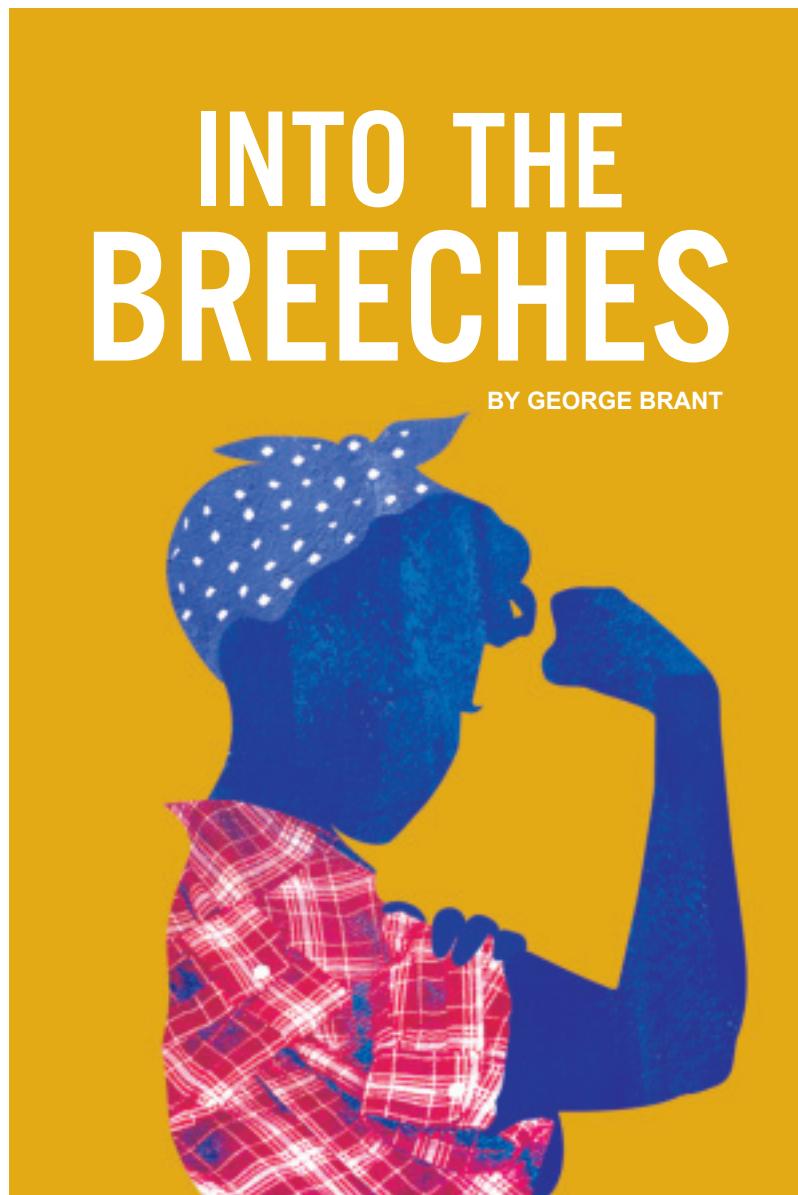


# ASF Study Materials for



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## Plot Synopsis

It's 1942 and the Oberon Theater, known for its Shakespearean productions, has lost its men to the war efforts. The company's diva Celeste claims she is "an unwatered flower" withering away without the laughter, tears, and applause of her audience. But Maggie, the director's wife, has other ideas. With her husband's blessing, she sets out to move forward with their originally planned production of *The Henriad*—a combination of *Henry IV* and *Henry V*—with all the parts being played by the women of the company.

Initially skeptical, Celeste soon signs on—thrilled at the notion of taking on juicy new roles. The board president, Ellsworth Snow, is harder to convince. He is concerned about the audience—half of them are away at war and the ones who are left aren't in the mood for entertainment. He is concerned for the future of their theater—an untested director and women pretending to be men will certainly tarnish the esteemed organization's reputation for years. Maggie counters that this play's themes of patriotism, sacrifice and victory are just what the audience needs. Ellsworth remains unconvinced—until his beloved wife—the timid and inexperienced Winifred expresses an interest in being in the cast.

The auditions however, are sparsely attended with only two new cast members, June and Grace, on board. With the assistance of Ida, who handles costumes, and stage manager Stuart, Maggie begins rehearsals with the small and enthusiastic, though novice, cast. As they make their way through rehearsals, they gain a few unexpected cast members but lose—and eventually regain—their star over "artistic differences." The women make their way through rehearsals, incorporating clever tips to help their strides become more masculine, and finding ways to make dear Winifred funny. All the while, they miss their husbands and long for word from the front. Other injustices of the outside world—most notably, blatant racism—also make their way into the lives of the cast.

The cast pushes forward—finding strength in each other and their common goal. Together they find the courage to go boldly "into the breeches!"

*Originally published by Trinity Repertory Company in their Into the Breeches study guide.*

## **Character Descriptions**

### ***Maggie Dalton***

woman in her mid-40's; the talented, if untested, Director finds her own values and independence, plays The Chorus

### ***Celeste Fielding***

woman in her 50's; the diva, ringleader of the group – the glue that holds them all together, plays Henry Fifth and Fourth.

### ***Ellsworth Snow***

man in his 60's; the conservative Board President of the Oberon Play House; prickly on the outside, but a doting husband

### ***Winifred Snow***

woman in her 50's; unexperienced but enthusiastic socialite who finds her own wit and humor, plays Falstaff

### ***Stuart Lasker***

man in his 40's; the quip-ready Stage Manager finally shows the world the best side of himself, plays Mistress Quickly

### ***Ida Green***

woman in her 30's; the imaginative costume designer and the visionary for pushing the show into a modern perspective in more ways than one, plays Hotspur

### ***June Bennet***

woman in her late teens/early 20's; the ingénue full of curiosity and optimism, plays the Kates

### ***Grace Richards***

woman in her late 20's/early 30's; a raw talent who finds the power to lead, plays Henry Fourth and Fifth

## **Setting**

ASF's production of *Into the Breeches* takes place in Montgomery, AL in 1942. During this time, the United States was engaged in overseas efforts, sending men of combat-age to far-flung locations in Europe and the Pacific Islands. As men reported for duty, women were required to work in spheres traditionally operated by men. Documentation from the time shows women working in factories, playing baseball, and even taking the lead on stage as you'll see in our production.

Right in Montgomery, AL, the Maxwell Air Force Base served as an important training ground for US aviators. If you listen closely throughout the show, you might hear the characters mention some historic Montgomery locations, such as Peacock Track, the Sylacauga Children's Theater, and the Prattville Progress.

Though set in the South at ASF, *Into the Breeches* tells a story of patriotism universal to wartime America.

## **Talk of the Times: Vocabulary of the 1940's**

### ***Tread the Boards***

To appear on stage as an actor. This idiom uses boards in the sense of "a theatrical stage," a usage dating from the mid-1700s. It dates from the mid-1800s but was preceded by the idiom tread the stage, first recorded in 1691.

### ***Footlights***

In theatre, a row of lights set at floor level at the front of a stage, used to provide a part of the general illumination and to soften the heavy shadows produced by overhead lighting.

### ***Long in the tooth***

Rather old. Originates from horse's teeth; unlike humans', horse's teeth continue to grow with age. They also wear down with use, but the changes in the characteristics of the teeth over time make it possible to make a rough estimate of a horse's age by examining them.

### ***Victory socks***

As during World War I, the need for socks was paramount. Cold, wet, sore feet were the enemy as surely as German or Japanese troops. The push was knitting for "The Boys," the men on active duty.

### ***The Allies***

The big four Allied powers of World War II were England (Great Britain, the United Kingdom), the United States of America, the Soviet Union (U.S.S.R., Russia), and France.

### ***Victory Roll***

A hairstyle that became popular in the 1940's. Making such hairstyle means creating large and voluminous curls either on top of your head or around the face. The rolls got their name from an aerobatic maneuver used during World War II.

*Originally published by Trinity Repertory Company in their Into the Breeches study guide.*

## Pre-Show Questions

- Much of *Into the Breeches* centers around forming community in times of crisis. What communities are important in your life? Your school, sports team, neighborhood?
- *Into the Breeches* takes place during WWII. What's happening in the US and abroad during this time period?

## Post-Show Questions

- When were moments in the show you saw characters making difficult decisions? Have you ever been asked to make a decision that goes against the beliefs of your community?
- You've been asked to think about different communities in your life. How do you form community? What values are important in your community?