

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

STUDY GUIDE



Music by Alan Menken | Lyrics by Howard Ashman

Directed by Rick Dildine

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ASF is committed to supporting educators in the classroom. By engaging with this play and all others in our regular season, teachers will be able to address several standards in the state and national curriculum. It is our hope that all study materials and lesson activities are useful for classroom educators, though not exhaustive. Viewing a performance at Alabama Shakespeare Festival and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for positive classroom discourse, detailed and specific writing, and rich individual student exploration. Below you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to National Core Arts and Common Core literacy standards.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6 Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS *cont.*

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.1-3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.RL.11-12.7 Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem (e.g., recorded or live production of a play or recorded novel or poetry), evaluating how each version interprets the source text (Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist).

NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

PLOT

The musical opens with a booming, ominous voice describing a deadly threat to the existence of humanity. Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon (the Urchins) enter to warn the audience to beware of the Little Shop of Horrors, which happens to be Mr. Mushnik's rundown flower shop on Skid Row. After a strange total eclipse, Seymour Krelborn, a shy and dejected florist's assistant to Mr. Mushnik, happens upon a mysterious plant. He affectionately names the plant "Audrey II" after his secret crush, Audrey, a fellow employee at the shop.

As time goes on, Audrey II comes to life and develops an unquenchable thirst for human blood. As it grows bigger and meaner, the carnivorous plant promises limitless fame and fortune to Seymour, as long as he continues providing a fresh supply of blood.

The once failing flower shop begins to thrive as Audrey II attracts national attention. Unable to quench its appetite, Seymour feeds Orin, Audrey's boyfriend, to the plant after his accidental death. This leads down a path of no return. Just when it's too late, Seymour discovers Audrey II's extraterrestrial origins and sinister plan for total world domination.

Think about it: Seymour discovers Audrey II after a total eclipse, which occurs when the sun's surface is completely covered by Earth's moon. Why do you think the authors chose to have the plant's appearance follow this rare astronomical occurrence? What does it foreshadow?

CHARACTERS

Seymour Krelborn - A genuine, well-meaning florist's clerk and amateur botanist who is taken for granted because of his clumsy ways and poor social skills.

Audrey - Amateur floral designer and secret love of Seymour's life. She has poor self-worth but is incredibly sweet and vulnerable.

Mr. Mushnik - Owner of Mushnik's Flower Shop. Seymour and Audrey's nosy, profit-driven, greedy, and manipulative boss.

The Urchins: Crystal, Ronnette, and Chiffon - Young, hip, and smart, these girls are the only ones who have a grip on reality — acting as the occasional Greek Chorus.

Orin Scrivello - An egotistical dentist and Audrey's abusive boyfriend, who is targeted by Seymour.

Audrey II (the plant) - An anthropomorphic cross between a venus fly trap and an avocado. It has an appetite for human flesh that is appeased by Seymour. The plant is operated by a puppeteer.

Other Characters:

Mr. Bernstein, Mrs. Luce, Skip Snip, Patrick Martin, Customer, Radio Announcer



Michelle Weeks, Tisha Campbell, and Tichina Arnold as the Urchins in the 1986 Movie Musical.

SETTING

Little Shop of Horrors is set in an urban town in the early 1960s in a rundown neighborhood known to the community as "Skid Row."

Think about it: Residence on Skid Row evokes imagery of someone who was slipping down in society — 'on the skids.' What foreshadowing might this provide for audiences as they see the play?



ABOUT HOWARD ASHMAN (BOOK AND LYRICS)

May 17, 1950 – March 14, 1991

Howard Ashman was one of the most notable lyricists for the Disney Renaissance era of animated musicals. In addition to his work with Alan Menken on *Little Shop of Horrors*, the pair also worked together to produce the music and lyrics for Disney hits like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*. In addition to writing the book and lyrics to *Little Shop of Horrors*, he also directed the 1982 Off-Broadway premiere. In 1991, Ashman passed away tragically from complications of the AIDS virus. The dedication to his memory in the 1991 film *Beauty and the Beast* reads: "To our friend Howard, who gave a mermaid her voice and a beast his soul. He will be forever missed."

ABOUT ALAN MENKEN (MUSIC)

July 22, 1949 -

Little Shop of Horrors was a break-through hit for Alan Menken. Its premiere proved to be the highest grossing Off-Broadway show of all time and remains one of the most-produced musicals for high schools in the United States. His work with Disney musicals spans the stage and screen with hits like *The Little Mermaid* (1989 film and 2008 musical), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991 film and 2017 live action film), *Aladdin* (1992 film, 2014 musical, and 2019 live action film), *Pocahontas*, *Hunchback of Notre Dame*, *Enchanted*, and *Tangled*. Menken is also known for other Broadway hits like *Sister Act* the musical and *Newsies*. Alan Menken has won eight Academy Awards, seven Golden Globe awards, and a Tony Award over the span of his 50-year long career.



ORIGINS & ADAPTATIONS OF THE STORY

"The Flowering of the Strange Orchid"

This science-fiction short story was written by H.G. Wells. It's a cautionary tale about humans vs. nature. He believed that despite its immense beauty, nature can be dangerous and deadly.

1894

"Green Thoughts"

"Green Thoughts" was a short story written by John Collier. The plot focuses on a man-eating plant and is believed to have inspired *Little Shop of Horrors*.

1932

"The Reluctant Orchid"

The Reluctant Orchid was a science fiction short story about a man who happens upon a carnivorous man-eating orchid that nearly kills him after a failed attempt to feed his estranged aunt to the plant.

1956

1.

SHOWBILL



Off-Broadway Musical

The show opened at the Orpheum Theater to rave reviews. *Little Shop* never transferred to Broadway because the creative team believed it belonged in a smaller venue. It played Off-Broadway for more than 2,000 performances.

1982

The Original Non-Musical Cult Classic Film

The original film was directed by Roger Corman and starred Johnathan Hayes as Seymour. Corman is said to have shot the film in only two days. He was well-known for producing hundreds of low budget films.

1960

Movie Musical

The live action musical adaptation was directed by Frank Oz. The film remains one of the most notable roles for actor Rick Moranis. There's a large fandom and controversy surrounding the film's vastly different alternate endings.

1986

Off-Broadway Revival

The revival opened at the Westside Theater in October 2019. After closing abruptly due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the show made its Off-Broadway return starring Jeremy Jordan as Seymour.

2019



2.

Think about it: Many authors take inspiration from others when creating their own works. Why do you think this story has been retold so often in recent history?

1. 1982 *Little Shop of Horrors* original Playbill

2. Jeremy Jordan, Tammy Blanchard, Tom Alan Robbins, and Christian Borle in the 2019 Off-Broadway Revival.

AN INTERVIEW WITH J. SCOTT GRINSTEAD

Audrey II Puppeteer

Can you talk a little bit about how you began the work of puppeteering and how you master the art? What makes a good puppeteer?

I was introduced to puppeteering at the age of three. That's the first time I was around puppeteers performing live. I actually began regularly practicing and puppeteering when I was 14. So I've been doing it now for over 25 years. Still I don't know if someone "masters" the art. Like any good art, you're constantly studying to become better. And this art form continually makes new advances. There are still ancient forms of puppetry being performed, but there are also new methods like digital puppetry being performed.

That being said, there are many basic concepts of puppetry you can master. I think a good puppeteer has studied those. But I also think a good puppeteer is someone who studies people, movement, expression, and rhythm. And I have found that good puppeteers are, largely, very relaxed when puppeteering. Not always comfortable, but all the more reason to relax. Puppets are hard to perform naturally when you're tense.

There are several iterations of Audrey II. He grows from a small house plant into a huge man-eating monster. Do you operate all of the versions of the plant? Is there anything you have to do differently for each one?

I operate three of the four iterations of Audrey II. The second version of Twoey is carried around by Seymour and so the actor has to manipulate it. But Kelly is an experienced puppeteer as well and brings lots of life to that version. Kelly and I have also worked closely together on keeping the character the same throughout.

Each puppet is VERY different and requires incredibly different techniques to manipulate. The smallest pod is very much like a normal hand puppet, but has to be worked from beneath the counter blindly. Pod 3 requires me to manipulate the plant's roots and tentacles with my legs while wearing the pod over the top half of my body and manipulating the mouth with my whole arms. Pod 4 I have to stand inside and carry the weight of the puppet with my left arm, while manipulating the lower jaw with my right. And of course, when the plant eats people, it requires a whole new set of controls.

While you manipulate the movement, Michael Shepperd performs the voice of Audrey II. What has it been like working with another actor to bring the plant to life? Did you work closely together?

This is one of the hardest parts of puppeteering Audrey II. Shep [Michael Shepperd] and I have worked incredibly close with one another to find his vocal rhythm on lines and the punctuation of certain phrases or words. We've spent a lot of time trying to get that right so that I can anticipate him and make the puppet seem very much alive. We're constantly working on it.

What has been the most rewarding part of the rehearsal process for you in this production? What do you hope audiences will take from this production?

It's always rewarding to get to work as a puppeteer. But it has been really rewarding to be a part of this particular cast. And to work at ASF. It's been a lot of fun working with this group of people.

I suppose I hope audiences realize the importance of choices. It's a highly stylized, fantastical show, but it's easy to see how someone in certain circumstances can make decisions with major repercussions. From relationship decisions to how we handle our problems or what we might do for/with success, it's important what choices we make along the way.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Little Shop of Horrors* is a cautionary tale about the price of success and fame. Do you believe success always comes at a cost? Why or why not?
2. At the beginning of the play, a voice “not unlike the voice of God” describes an extraterrestrial threat to the existence of humanity. Do you believe in the existence of life outside of Earth? Are there any environmental occurrences that might pose a threat to humanity in real life today? Explain.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Urchins seem to act as a Greek Chorus, often speaking directly to the audience. How did this make you feel as an audience member? What do you think the writers were attempting to convey to the audience?
2. Audrey II is a mutant cross between an avocado and a venus fly trap, both of which exist in real life. If you were in Seymour’s shoes, and you knew you could become famous for the discovery, would you destroy the man-eating plant or save it? Why or why not?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. At your desk: The 1986 movie musical has two alternate endings. One that is happy and ends with Audrey and Seymour getting married, and one that ends in total destruction. After seeing the show, think about your own alternate ending to the story. Write it down and share with the class!

Variation: Students may adapt their alternate endings into a script and perform them with their peers in class, or maybe write a whole new adaptation of the story to produce as a class!

2. On your feet: Audrey II is an anthropomorphic hybrid plant, which means it has human-like characteristics. Split into groups and research real life hybrid plants. Explore ways the plant could become anthropomorphic. Work as a group using your bodies to give your plant a voice, movement, and special abilities. Does it speak actual words? Does it eat people? Demonstrate your new creation for your classmates! Have fun!

Teachers: You will find additional classroom activity sheets attached below! Use them however you like. Please let us know if you find these helpful or have other ideas for additional resources.



Rick Moranis and Ellen Greene as Seymour and Audrey in the 1986 Movie Musical

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Anticipation Activity

Responding to Live Theatre: Critical Response

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

Alan Menken Biography

<https://www.alanmenken.com/>

Howard Ashman Biography

<https://www.howardashman.com/>

History of the Work - *Little Shop of Horrors*

<https://aquariusjen.wordpress.com/history-of-the-work/>

1986 Movie Musical Alternate Ending (Content warning: Contains violence, machine guns)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RjFvcw6ToQ>

National Wildlife Federation: Venus Fly Traps

<https://www.nwf.org/Educational-Resources/Wildlife-Guide/Plants-and-Fungi/Venus-Flytrap>

Before you see the show, respond to the following statements as honestly as possible by circling your response; then explain your answer with an example.

SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, SD – Strongly Disagree, D – Disagree

STATEMENT #1: Seeking fame and fortune is dangerous.			
SA	A	SD	D
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #2: Doing a bad thing is sometimes justified for a good cause.			
SA	A	SD	D
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #3: It is sometimes okay to judge a book by its cover.			
SA	A	SD	D
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #4: You should always tell the truth no matter the cost.			
SA	A	SD	D
Explain your answer with an example:			

Teachers: A variation of this activity: "Four Corners." Make signs with the SA, A, SD, and D labels. Then, ask the students to stand in the middle of the classroom. Repeat each question aloud (or create new ones) and allow them to move to the corner of the room that best represents their opinion. Discuss.

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS: CRITICAL REVIEW

Directions: Imagine you are the theatre critic for this production at ASF! For each area of the production, give thoughtful and honest feedback. Be specific and answer each prompt using complete sentences. Use the back of the page if necessary.

I. Playwright/Story

Use the space below to discuss elements of the story. What worked well? Did anything strike you negatively?

II. Performance/Acting

Use the space to give constructive feedback about the actors' performances in the production. Was there a performer that you particularly enjoyed?

III. Directing

Use the space below to discuss the overall direction and interpretation of this production. Remember, nothing happens by accident.

IV. Technical Elements

Use the space below to discuss the lighting, sound, scenery, and costumes for this production. Were you transported to a different time/place? Did these elements effectively serve the story?