

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A LIVE RADIO PLAY

STUDY GUIDE



Adapted by Joe Landry

Directed by Kate Bergstrom

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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 ANCHOR 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

A company of actors gather in studio A at WBFR in Manhattan, New York, for a special holiday radio presentation of the American classic, *It's A Wonderful Life*, to be performed in front of a live studio audience. These five actors perform the dozens of characters in the radio play as well as produce authentic sound effects to travel over the airways.

The story within the story —

It's A Wonderful Life tells the story of George Bailey, who lives in a small town in upstate New York called Bedford Falls. Though he has committed himself to a life of good deeds and serving others, George finds himself overwhelmed by family and community obligations. As he ages, he sees his youth and dreams fading, and he eventually finds himself in grave financial trouble. As he contemplates ending his life on Christmas Eve, George meets his guardian angel, Clarence Odbody, who drops down from the sky to help him (hoping he will earn his wings with this venture). His guardian angel shows him what Bedford Falls would have been like if he had never been born, truly proving the value of life and how much he meant to those who loved him most — his friends and family.

“Everytime a bell rings, an Angel gets his wings.”

Think about it: George Bailey is largely regarded as an everyman character. The term “everyman” originated from a 15th-century morality play of the same name. It generally refers to a typical or ordinary person within whom we could all see the image of ourselves. Does George Bailey fit that description in your opinion? Has the idea of an “everyman” faded or become outdated? Why or why not?

CHARACTERS

The characters listed below are part of a company of only five actors who take on the roles of the entire cast in *It's a Wonderful Life* as they perform live in the radio studio.

Stage Manager - An offstage voice that sometimes comes over the house speakers to address the company of actors and keep the show rolling along.

Freddie Filmore - A distinguished radio announcer who is the emcee of the evening's live presentation. He takes on the roles of Joseph, Mr. Gower, Henry F. Potter, Uncle Billy Bailey, Ernie, Pete Bailey (child), Mr. Bailey, Old Man Collins, Ed, Man, Giuseppe Martini, Nick, Bridge Keeper, and Binky.

Jake Laurents - He's the underdog we all want to root for. He's had a few recent successes: *Chick Carter*, *Boy Detective*, and *Cowpoke Romance*. He takes on the roles of George Bailey and Young George in this presentation.

Harry “Jazzbo” Heywood - Harry is a former vaudevillian actor and rising star of radio and the silver screen. He takes on the roles of Harry Bailey/Young Harry, Bert the Cop, Clarence Odbody, Sam Wainwright, Lawyer, Dr. Campbell, Randall, Tom, Man 2, Charlie, Carter, Horace the Bank Teller, Tommy Bailey (Child), and Mr. Welch.

Sally Applewhite - Miss Ohio 1943. Sally has just arrived in New York from Los Angeles, and she's here to make her break in the Big Apple. Once she falls in love, it's forever. Quite similar to her character, Mary Hatch Bailey. Sally also plays Young Mary.

Lana Sherwood - A local radio star who's no stranger to the WBFR Playhouse of the Air. Lana plays Violet Bick/Young Violet, Matilda, Ruth Dakin Bailey, Rose Bailey, Mrs. Hatch, Passerby at Run on Bank, Mrs. Thompson, Mrs. Davis, Schultz, Janie Bailey (Child), and Zuzu Bailey (Child).

It's A Wonderful Life Major Characters

George Bailey - The story's protagonist. He's known as the “everyman” of Bedford Falls.

Mary Hatch Bailey - George's adoring and supportive wife.

Clarence Odbody - George's guardian angel. An AS-2 (Angel Second Class) who hasn't yet earned his wings.

Mr. Potter - The story's antagonist. A conniving banker who owns practically everything in the town.

Uncle Billy - George's uncle turned business partner.

Harry Bailey - George's younger brother.

SETTING

Time: Christmas Eve, 1946. Place: The stage and auditorium of Studio A at WBFR in Manhattan, New York.

JOE LANDRY

PLAYWRIGHT

At age 12, Joe's first job was in the film department at the library in his hometown of Fairfield, Connecticut. This was back in the days of 16mm and before the dawn of home video, and their permanent collection included *It's a Wonderful Life*, *The Lady Vanishes*, and other early Alfred Hitchcock films. Joe's other main interest was the theatre. Encouraged by his parents, Joe was introduced to various theatres that he came to call home, including Playwrights Horizons and Roundabout Theatre Company in New York, Westport Country Playhouse, and others. In 1995, Joe founded Second Guess Theatre Company, which produced over two dozen new plays, adaptations, and revivals to critical acclaim. In 1997, *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* premiered in Stamford, Connecticut, and has since enjoyed productions around the country. Joe's other plays include *Vintage Hitchcock: A Live Radio Play* and an adaptation of the cult classic *Reefer Madness*. Other projects include *Mothers and Sons*, a musical co-written with Kevin Connors and *Lifeboat, Dahling!* with Bert Bernardi. www.joelandry.com

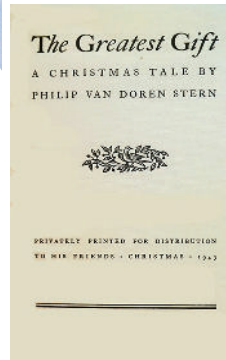


ORIGINS OF THE STORY



**A
Christmas Carol,**
a Charles Dickens' novella that recounts the tale of Ebenezer Scrooge, a grouch who learns the errors of his ways one fateful Christmas Eve.

1843



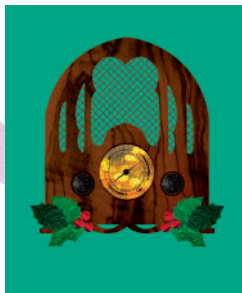
The Greatest Gift,
a short story written by Philip Van Doren Stern, loosely based on Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*.

1943



It's A Wonderful Life,
a major motion picture adaptation of Stern's short story produced and directed by Frank Capra.

1946



**It's A Wonderful
Life: A Live
Radio Play,**
a straight-play adaptation of the classic film written by Joe Landry, premieres in Connecticut.

1997

**It's A
Wonderful Life:
The Musical,**
an adaptation for the stage penned by Keith Ferguson and Bruce Greer.

2000



1.

Think about it: Knowing *It's a Wonderful Life* was loosely based on Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, are there any parallels between the main character Ebenezer Scrooge and what you know so far about George Bailey? Explain.

1. *It's A Wonderful Life, The musical.*
Photo by Stephen J. Krogh

THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO:

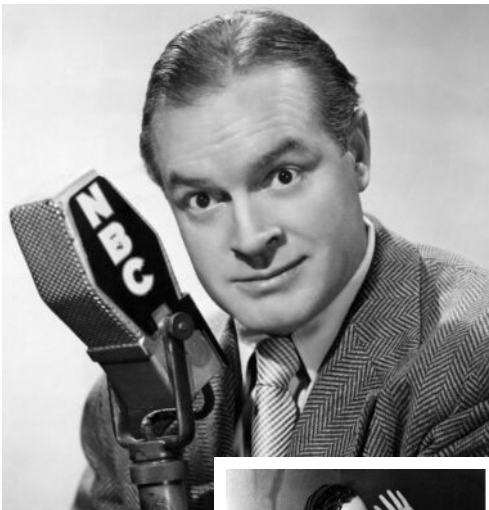
The Boom of the American Radio Industry

There once was a time (specifically in the 1930s and '40s) when American families would gather around the radio in anticipation of their favorite entertainment and news programming. The radio broadcast industry began to boom in the 1930s despite the impact of the Great Depression and impending doom of a looming second World War.

Politicians used their influence to push war propaganda. Brands and advertising agencies dominated the airways with their cheeky programming and built-in product placement. No need to go door to door for your "Bremel Hair Tonic" to fly off the shelves!



Spring 1942. Provincetown, Massachusetts. Family of a Portuguese dory fisherman.
Photo by John Collier for the Office of War Information.



Bob Hope, Getty Images

President Franklin D. Roosevelt would soon use the influence of this medium to address the American public directly with his famous "Fireside Chats," which were a series of evening radio addresses about the positions and actions taken by the U.S. government to ease the growing fears of the American people and build their confidence.

Holiday and variety specials were particularly popular among American households. *The Pepsodent Show* (starring Bob Hope), *Abbott and Costello*, *Amos 'n Andy*, *The Burns and Allen Show* (starring George Burns and Gracie Allen), and many others proved to be very popular throughout radio's "Golden Age."



Impact of the infamous radio show, The War of Worlds

The New York Times.

NEW YORK, MONDAY, OCTOBER 31, 1938.
**Radio Listeners in Panic,
Taking War Drama as Fact**
Many Flee Homes to Escape 'Gas Raid From
Mars'—Phone Calls Swamp Police at
Broadcast of Wells Fantasy

A wave of mass hysteria spread throughout the nation last night when a broadcast of a dramatization of H. G. Wells's science-fiction novel "The War of the Worlds" led thousands to believe that an interplanetary conflict had started with invading Martians spreading with death and destruction in New Jersey and New York.



Disney's Sound Effects Production Room 1930s, Getty Images

Think about it: What might be the advantage of seeing a *live* radio performance in person as opposed to solely an auditory experience? Do you think this idea draws audiences to this story in a new way? Why or why not?

Protecting Your Mental Health During the Holidays...

By Doreen Marshall, Ph.D., AFSP Vice President of Mission Engagement

Concerned about the impact of the holiday season on your mental health? You are not alone.

In a recent survey, nearly 88% of adults referred to the holiday season (or the period beginning in November and lasting until the New Year) as the most stressful time of the year. And while some stress is inevitable, too much stress, especially if we already have mental health challenges, can challenge our ability to cope.

The good news? There are things you can do that can help during this stressful time.

Get outside during daylight hours.

Fewer hours of daylight during the season can have a negative impact on your mood, especially during the months of November and December, and especially if you struggle with depression. Try to find 30 minutes to get outside during daytime hours. Walk somewhere instead of driving, invite a friend or neighbor to take a daily walk, sit outside every day, or watch a sunrise.



Take a risk and connect if you feel lonely.

Chances are pretty good that you are not the only one feeling lonely this season. Reach out to someone who may also feel that way. Sharing how you feel may empower them to do the same. Talk about ways you can stay connected and support each other this season. A regular call, text, or note to check in with each other may help both of you.

Remove something from your holiday “to-do” list.

If you find yourself overextended this holiday season, let go of something that adds to your stress level. Not in the mood to send holiday cards? Don't. Want to avoid awkward gift exchanges? Tell others early that you won't be exchanging gifts this year during the holiday season. If they insist, request to exchange notes with a personal wish for each other instead.



Take breaks.

Schedule “downtime” following stressful holiday events. Plan time off work if you can, or schedule some time off following the holiday season. Be mindful about your consumption of news or social media. (In fact, this season is a great time for a social media “break” if you need one.) Take a deep-breathing break; there are lots of guided breathing activities on YouTube that can help.

COPING WITH HOLIDAY BLUES:

A Resource for Parents and Teachers cont.

Do at least one thing to improve your sleep this season.

Keeping consistent sleep hours (and getting enough sleep) can help you better navigate the stressful months of the season. Pick one thing you will do to improve your sleep and do it as consistently as you can. Go to bed 30 minutes earlier, leave your phone in another room, make the room completely dark (or use an eye mask or dark curtains), or keep the thermostat lower, since we often sleep better in cooler temperatures.



Find a balance between being with others and being alone.

You may have decided you don't have the energy or desire to attend a large gathering this year. That's okay, but it's also important not to isolate yourself completely. Rather than being totally alone, invite a couple of people to join you in a low-pressure activity, like a nature hike. If you are alone, consider planning something that you can do alone while also being around others, like going to a movie, hearing live music, visiting a local tourist site, or volunteering.

Find the choices within the obligations (assuming you can't avoid them entirely).

If you find yourself having to attend events you would prefer to avoid, at least do it in a way that gives you as much choice as possible. Avoid contentious conversations by taking a walk after dinner, excusing yourself to use the restroom, or leaving early (especially if you anticipate that others are consuming too much alcohol and may not exercise restraint.) Have a buddy you can call during tense moments to debrief.

You can also rehearse a few phrases to help you set appropriate boundaries with others:

- "I'd rather not discuss that today/here."
- "I don't know how to respond to that."
- "That is not okay with me."
- "I'm sorry, I can't."
- "I'll have to think about that and get back to you."
- "I'm more comfortable this way."
- "No, thank you."

Remember: You don't have to attend every argument you are invited to.

Prioritize activities that support your mental health.

This is the season to focus on doing things that you already know help your mental health. Keep therapy appointments; reach out to the therapist you stopped seeing (we are usually delighted to hear from you!); or find a new therapist if you need one. Limit or avoid alcohol consumption, which can take a toll on our mental health. Take medication on time and as prescribed, and plan for needed refills. Come January, you will be glad you made your mental health a priority this season.

If you or someone you know is feeling hopeless this holiday season and having thoughts of suicide, don't wait to contact a helpline such as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. No one has to struggle alone; help is always available.

Call or text 988 or chat: <https://988lifeline.org/>

Special thanks to the Alabama Chapter of the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention for graciously sharing this article to include in our guide. For more information about AFSP Alabama, visit: www.afsp.org/Alabama

"Strange, isn't it? Each man's life touches so many other lives. When he isn't around, he leaves an awful hole, doesn't he?"

Take a moment: Imagine the world without you having ever been born. What might be different? How many lives have you changed, inspired, saved, without knowing it? Without you, I guarantee, much would be lost.

Don't believe me? I'll speak for myself. Take today: in this room today, you are a crucial participant. Your being here changes our lives, gives opportunity to create and invite this experience into the world together: the building of a story, a movement toward strengthening our invaluable spirits and empowering our priceless, essential hearts.

As a man stands on the precipice of a corrupt world ready to jump, a final selfless act forces him to reckon with a living more valuable than all the coinage in the universe. In an attempt to protect their deepest joy — one another against the onslaught of continued greed-fueled dehumanization — an ensemble of players conjure up a radio story to reinvigorate hope for the holidays. Celebrating beloved community, *It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play* also celebrates the capacity in us all to be one another's greatest gifts — the architects of a world worth saving.

What could be more glamorous than being an architect? George Bailey wants to be an architect, and in a metaphysical way, he already is. In this radio world, when we then take away the physical architecture of the town, the building materials of a community come running. As we listen with one another more closely, building this community becomes pleasurable, empowering, and full of surprises — just like making a live radio play.

George Bailey wants to build things. Skyscrapers, you name it, he says. And yet, what he is unable to hold, without the help of his friends, is that he's been building — as we all have — something more powerful than skyscrapers his whole existence. He's been building a wonderful life — a wonderful life that can only be truly wonderful in with the lives that hold and surround it.

Your laughter, applause, sniffles, candy wrappers — you are all collectively responsible for the architecture of this wonderful life and so is your vast untethered Bailey-like imagination. Just as we, the audience, are confronted with turning a mountain of crunching cereal into breaking ice with our minds, so George is confronted with shifting his perspective to the unlikely: an angel, without wings, coming to earth to save his life. Like George, we must shift our perspectives and listen for the possibility of the divine that we cannot readily see.

As we are all participants in building and listening with one another in this wonderful-life world, may we bring, with humility, a deeper recognition to one another as the spectacular, sublime and spiritual architects we are. May our capacity to be heart forward, to recognize and care for one another, in turn, reveal our best selves in the process.

With gratitude for your loud hearts and silent cell phones,

Kate Bergstrom

Director: *It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play*



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. With an uptick in American interest in pop culture in the 21st Century, various radio platforms have become increasingly popular. Think about how radio has evolved as an essential method of communication. Why do you think it has endured so long? Explain.
2. In your opinion, is it better to prioritize the needs of others and give completely of yourself for those you love or to put yourself first? How do you balance the two? Explain.

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think the playwright chose this unique presentation style of a “radio play” to re-tell this classic holiday story? What does it say about the time period? Do you think this choice was effective? Explain.
2. In *It's A Wonderful Life*, Clarence is assigned to help George rediscover the “greatest gift.” What is the greatest gift? What does Clarence do in order to teach George that his life has meaning? Write a short statement about the meaning of life as you see it.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

1. On your feet: The reproduction of everyday sound effects in a studio for radio and film is known as Foley art, named after the man who pioneered the artform, Jack Foley. In the play, you’ll notice the use of different objects and instruments to create live realistic sound effects to support the storytelling. Work with your classmates to find objects around the classroom that could mimic another everyday sound. Ex. Crumpling newspaper = Walking through the grass.

Teachers: There’s a worksheet attached below with examples from the script to assist with this activity! Have a look!

Variation: Ask the students to create a sound effect at home, record it, and share their foley creation with the class. Have the class write a short story that highlights the use of that sound effect. Share.

2. At your desk: Write a radio commercial ad! Think about a problem plaguing family homes that could be solved with a unique invention. Begin your ad by highlighting the problem in a way that hooks your audience! Then, share how your invention could solve the problem. Use examples of customer satisfaction, humor, and Golden Age charm! Keep it brief. Your ad should be 20 seconds or less. Create a poster for your product! Get creative! 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.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Anticipation Guide

SFX: Foley Art Activity Sheet

Responding to Live Theatre: Critical Response

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

The Magic of Making Sound

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N_PRlgX0&t=5s

It's A Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play

<http://wonderfulliferadio.com/about.htm>

Learn More About the Playwright

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

Learn More About the Classic Film

<https://www.tcm.com/tcmdb/title/79566/its-a-wonderful-life#overview>

The Golden Age of Radio

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Golden-Age-of-American-radio>

Old Radio Archives

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

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, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree

STATEMENT #1: It is selfish to put your needs before others.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #2: You should never burden others with your problems.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #3: Your life is more valuable if you are famous or wealthy.			
SA	A	D	SD
Explain your answer with an example:			

STATEMENT #4: Making a decision without consulting anyone is always wrong.			
SA	A	D	SD
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.

CREATING REALISTIC SOUND EFFECTS: AN INTRODUCTION TO FOLEY ART (MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL)

From the Script: In the era of “Radio,” sound effects (SFX) were created live in a studio using a wide array of objects, instruments, and tools. Although recorded effects were first introduced in the early 1920s, the sounds heard across the airways were usually created live by sound effect technicians now known as foley artists.



Think about it: Because radio is an auditory experience, these sounds helped create the mood and add details to radio productions! The sounds must be believable!



Part I Directions: Review the list of sound effects used in the play. Fill in the empty blanks with objects you think could recreate that sound! Then, try them out!

Sound Effect	Suggestion
Ice cracking	Corn Flakes crushed on a baking sheet
Water splashing	Bucket of water in basin of water
Capsules falling to the floor	Jellybeans dropped onto baking sheet
Door opens and shuts	Door on frame
Opening a telegram	_____
Glass breaking	_____

Part II Directions: Be a real foley artist! Pick a 30 second clip from your favorite movie or old cartoon and jot down five actions you could replicate on the cue sheet below. Then, practice creating those sounds. Be sure to write down the objects you used on the cue sheet. Have fun!

Sound Effects Cue Sheet

Action (SFX)	Created With...

Variation: Have students record their creations at home and share them with the class! Students could also write original stories with inspiration from one or more of the sound effects.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE: A LIVE RADIO PLAY

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 below to give constructive feedback about the actors' performances in the production. Was there a performer that you particularly enjoyed? What could have been better?

III. Directing

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

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? Explain.