


**Ken Ludwig's**  
**DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE**  
**STUDY GUIDE**



Directed by Risa Brainin



*Dear Educators,*

**Welcome to Season 53 at Alabama Shakespeare Festival!** We are thrilled you are joining us for this production, and we hope your visit to the State Theatre of Alabama will prove to be transformational for you and your students. Please also check out our companion guide, as you'll find additional helpful information there as you're planning your trip to visit us!

The amount of effort it takes to coordinate a trip from the classroom to the theater is not lost on us. Thank you for recognizing the value of live theatre for your students! We at ASF believe in the transformative power of the arts and its ability to educate, entertain, and inspire.

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. We 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 Alabama Course of Study literacy standards.

See you at the theater!

ASF Education Team



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## ALABAMA COURSE OF STUDY:

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS

[ELA21.W.6.1] Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

[ELA22.W.6.2] Write informative or explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

[ELA15.RI.6.5] Analyze how a particular sentence, paragraph, chapter, or section fits into the overall structure of a text and contributes to the development of the ideas.

[ELA16.RI.6.6] Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and explain how it is conveyed in the text.

[ELA12.RI.9-10.3] Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.

[ELA4.RL.11-12.4] Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS *cont.*

[ELA5.RL.11-12.5] Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

[ELA7.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.

Copyediting by **Leigh Owen**  
**Senior Marketing Manager**

## PLOT

With the events surrounding World War II providing a unique backdrop, the true tale of two strangers who meet and ultimately fall in love unfolds through letters from across the miles. Captain Jack Ludwig is a U.S. Army doctor initially stationed in Medford, Oregon, and Louise Rabiner is a spirited aspiring actress living in New York City. Louise receives a letter from Jack, whom she's never met, at the suggestion of their parents, who were old friends. As the weeks and months drag on, their witty and deeply heartfelt letters begin to reveal their growing affection for one another, sharing the challenges of life as a doctor on a military base and the ups and downs of a young woman auditioning for Broadway.

The pair's plans to meet are continually thwarted by the trials of the developing war and emergency deployments to treat the incoming wounded. The exchanges take place over three whirlwind years, and by the end of the play, the audience is left with an inkling that the Army doctor and the New York actress will end up together at last, despite challenges that question the strength of their relationship.

**Think about it:** Jack and Louise spent the first few years of their relationship never having met in person. What do you think might have kept them engaged or interested in writing to one another? Could a story like this happen today? Can you truly get to know a person without meeting them face to face? Explain.

## CHARACTERS

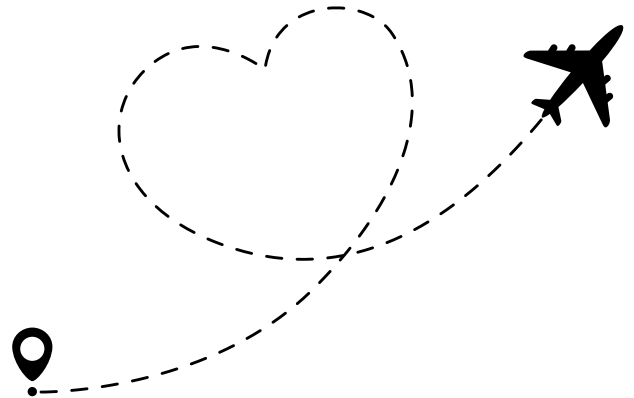
**Captain Jacob S. Ludwig (Jack)** - A U.S. Army doctor stationed in Oregon.

**Louise R. Rabiner** - An aspiring actress and dancer living in New York City.

## SETTING

Across the continental U.S. and Europe.

June 1942 - May 1945



**Think about it:** The play takes place over a period of three years, and the characters communicate from thousands of miles apart. How might the creative team address these challenges in a clever and unique way on stage? Explain.

**Avante-garde** — Innovative or experimental ideas, especially in art or culture, that push the boundaries of the conventional.

**Battalion** — A large military unit consisting of several companies, typically commanded by a lieutenant colonel.

**Boarding House** — A house where individuals rent rooms and receive meals.

**Borscht** — A sour soup commonly made with beetroot and often served hot or cold, originating from Eastern Europe.

**Candle in the Italian Opera** — Refers to a dramatic or crucial element in Italian opera performances, symbolizing something significant or pivotal.

**Chemical Warfare** — The use of chemical substances as weapons to cause harm or death in warfare.

**D-Day** — The term used for June 6, 1944, when Allied forces landed on the beaches of Normandy, France, in World War II.

**Fort Sam Houston** — A historic U.S. Army post located in San Antonio, Texas, known for its military significance and medical facilities.

**GI Bill** — The newly formed GI bill provided college education benefits to soldiers.

**Menorah** — A seven-branched candelabra used in Jewish worship and a nine-branched one used during Hanukkah.

**Missing in Action (MIA)** — A status designation for military personnel whose whereabouts are unknown and who have not been confirmed dead or captured.

**Platoon** — A military unit typically consisting of two or more squads or sections, commanded by a lieutenant.

**Red Cross** — An international humanitarian organization providing emergency assistance, disaster relief, and education in various fields.

**Stage Door Canteen** — A network of clubs established during World War II to provide entertainment, refreshments, and social interaction for service members.

**The Ziegfeld Follies** — A series of elaborate Broadway theatrical revues created by Florenz Ziegfeld, known for its glamorous performances and showgirls.

**Threepenny Opera** — A 1928 musical play by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill, known for its critical portrayal of capitalist society.

**U.S.O. (United Service Organization)** — An organization providing programs, services, and live entertainment to U.S. service members and their families.

**V.E. Day (Victory in Europe Day)** — May 8, 1945, the day marking the Allied victory in Europe during World War II.

**Western Union Telegram** — A telegraphic message sent via Western Union's service, historically used for long-distance communication.





Ken Ludwig has had six shows on Broadway, seven in London’s West End, and many of his works have become a standard part of the American repertoire. His 32 plays and musicals have been performed in over 30 countries in more than 20 languages and are produced throughout the United States every night of the year. *Lend Me a Tenor* won two Tony Awards and was called “one of the classic comedies of the 20th century” by *The Washington Post*. *Crazy For You* was on Broadway for five years and won the Tony and Olivier Awards for Best Musical.

In addition, he has won the Edgar Award for Best Mystery of the Year, two Laurence Olivier Awards, two Helen Hayes Awards, and the Edwin Forrest Award for Contributions to the American Theater. His plays have starred, among others, Alec Baldwin, Carol Burnett, Tony Shaloub, Joan Collins, and Hal Holbrook. His stage version of *Murder on the Orient Express* was written expressly at the request of the Agatha Christie Estate and had its European premiere at the Chichester Festival Theatre in June of 2022. His play, *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*, won the 2020 Charles MacArthur Award for Best New Play of the Year.

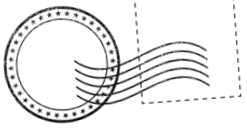


His newest plays include *Lend Me A Soprano*, premiering at the Alley Theatre in fall 2022; *Moriarty*, opening at Cleveland Playhouse in spring 2023; *Pride and Prejudice, Part 2: Napoleon at Pemberley*; and *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard*. His book *How To Teach Your Children Shakespeare*, published by Penguin Random House, won the Falstaff Award for Best Shakespeare Book of the Year, and his essays are published in the *Yale Review*. He is a graduate of Harvard and Cambridge and is a frequent guest speaker for groups as varied as the Oxford-Cambridge Society, the Jane Austen Society of North America, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and the Baker Street Irregulars.

For more information, visit his website at [www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com).

## Did you know?

The iconic red and blue stripes around U.S. airmail was used to make international mail (sent heavily during WWII) stand out against the nation’s internal mail? Identifying these precious letters quickly during sorting meant our men and women in uniform could better communicate with their loved ones from overseas.



June, 1942

Louise R. Rabiner, Private Citizen

New York, NY 10036

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Playwright Ken Ludwig's mother, Louise Rabiner

**“As for my parents, it never occurred to me that they had never been young.”**

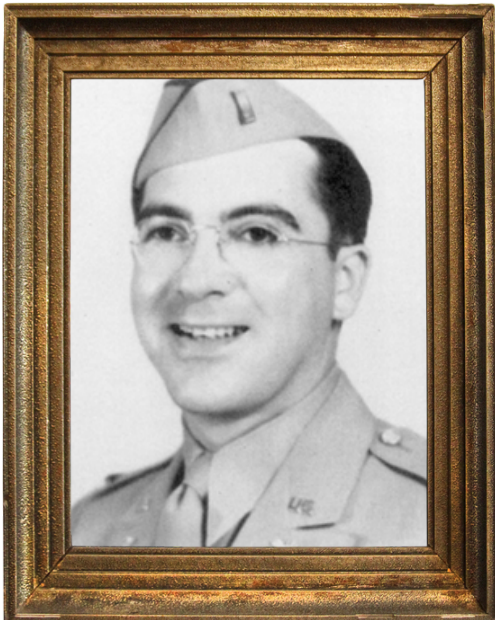
**– Ken Ludwig**

Jack Ludwig and Louise Rabiner were the parents of playwright Ken Ludwig. *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* is based on his parents' WWII courtship by mail. The piece is Ludwig's most personal work to date.

**Notes from the script:** My parents were married for over fifty years. They lived most of their lives in York, Pennsylvania where they raised my brother Gene and me. York is about fifty miles west of Coatesville. At least once a year we would visit our grandparents in Brooklyn and then go into New York to see a Broadway show.

I wrote *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* because of my love and admiration for my parents. They were both heroes at a time when heroism was needed. And they did write letters to each other, frequently, both before they met in person and whenever they were separated. As the play quite accurately describes, they met through letters, and finally, my father proposed by letter. So a series of letters written during World War II seemed like one truthful way to express their unique and wonderful relationship.

“He was a modest doctor from Pennsylvania farm country; she was a Brooklyn showgirl. I miss them, and *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* is meant to honor them.” — Ken Ludwig



Playwright Ken Ludwig's father, Jack Ludwig

**Think about it:** This play is based on two *real* people's lives. The playwright expresses his intention to honor his parents with this work. What might be challenging for actors to portray these characters with the living playwright still around?

The 1940s were largely defined by **World War II**, one of the most consequential conflicts of the 20th century that involved virtually every part of the world. Not only was WWII one of the bloodiest wars in modern history (with millions of casualties), but it also shifted the reins of power in the world away from the states of western Europe and toward the United States and the Soviet Union.

American women played important roles during this period, both at home and in uniform. Not only did they give their sons, husbands, fathers, and brothers to the war effort, they gave their time, energy, and some even gave their lives by enlisting themselves. By 1943, women made up more than thirty percent of the U.S. workforce during the war, working in factories building ships, tanks, and bombs, as well as joining other sectors of the workforce such as education, retail, hospitals, offices, etc. These women were dubbed **“Rosie the Riveter.”** Their work helped to stabilize the U.S. economy, pulling the country out of **The Great Depression**.



J. Howard Miller's "We Can Do It" poster. 1943.

**Think about it:** Women joined the workforce in overwhelming numbers during WWII. Considering what you know about the workforce today, what long-term effect did this shift have on gender roles in the workplace? Explain.

## NOTABLE PEOPLE IN POLITICS:

**Eleanor Roosevelt** — During the 1940s, Eleanor Roosevelt emerged as a pivotal figure in American public life, wielding considerable influence and transforming the role of First Lady of the United States during Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency and beyond. She continued writing her daily syndicated newspaper column, "My Day," during the war. She used the column to support the war effort and guide the nation. She championed civil rights, advocated for women's roles in the workforce, and played a crucial part in the formation of the United Nations.

**Winston Churchill** — Winston Churchill was one of the most famous leaders of the 20th century. As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, his strategic acumen and determination were crucial in rallying the British public during the darkest days of WWII. Churchill's alliance with the United States and his leadership in the strategic planning of key military operations, such as the D-Day invasion, were instrumental in securing victory for the Allies and shaping the post-war world order.



U.S. Army men and women celebrating peace and an end to war. c1945. Courtesy National Archives and Records Administration.

**Think about it:** Think about civic and social life in the United States during this time period. The war effort required support both at home and abroad. What elements do you think helped unify the U.S. during this time? Research your answer. Discuss.



## COSTUME & SCENIC ELEMENTS FOR *DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE*



Scenic rendering of ASF's production of *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*. Scenic Design by Sara Ryung Clement



Dress One

**Think about it:** Take a look at the scenic and costume renderings for *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*. Knowing that the purpose of these design elements is to add meaning while fulfilling the needs of the story, what specific details or choices do you notice here that serve the play?

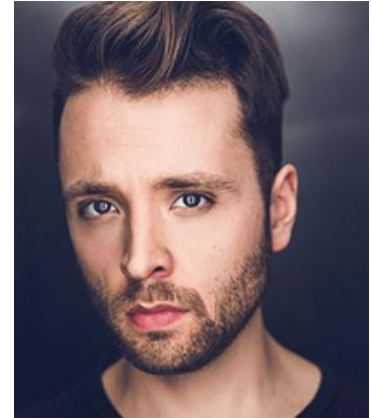
Costume renderings of ASF's production of *Dear Jack, Dear Louise*. Costume Design by Val Winkelman.

# AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DRAMATURG: MATT LYTLE

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**ASF: How do you begin your approach to curating and compiling research for a production? Does any method remain true, or is the process ever the same?**

ML: Well, first off, my main goal as a dramaturg is to compile information that inspires and ignites creativity! Of course, I want to provide historically accurate information, but I also want to provide research that helps propel fantastic storytelling. The method stays relatively the same. My first step is to provide a general historical context. The “when” in the “who, what, when, where, why.” This way, the entire creative team can get rooted in the same period and, therefore, the same story. That being said, every director/creative team is unique, and I love adapting the individual needs of each production.



**ASF: What was it like juggling your duties as assistant director and dramaturg with this creative team? Did you find anything about this experience especially rewarding or challenging?**

ML: It is such a gift to tackle both roles. Being the dramaturg made me a better assistant director. Having done all of the research for the dramaturgy side, made me better equipped as the assistant director to support the actors' and director's needs. I could act as a link between the “bookwork” and the “stagework” Both roles certainly required a lot of work hours, but when you love what you do, you are excited to dive in. A big thank you to our director, Risa Brainin, for trusting me to take on both jobs.

**ASF: This is a play based on the lives of two real people, but the accounts of their personal exchanges during this time period are highly stylized by the playwright — also, the piece has already had a life before now. How did this knowledge impact or affect your research for the play?**

ML: Yes, because this play deals with real people, one of my jobs is to honor their memory through accurate storytelling. Big shout-out to our stage manager, Mollie Heil, who used her genealogy knowledge to help us find amazing information on the Ludwig/Rabiner family tree. She even dug up birth certificates, immigration records, and Jack Ludwig's actual draft card! All of these details help the actors personalize their performances and honor the lives of these two incredible people. This work, combined with the lovely stylized writing of Ken Ludwig (in my opinion) makes for one great piece of theatre! In terms of previous productions, it is always a gift to see what other artists have generated. This helps inspire your own take on the story. It was especially helpful to read interviews with the playwright to get a window into the lives of his parents and what inspires his writing.

**ASF: How do you know when you've done enough research to fully support a production? Essentially, how do you know when to stop researching? Is your work ever truly conclusive?**

ML: Ah, very good question. The work never ends! Sometimes the night before opening a designer might ask “Hey! Is that chair historically accurate?” And I jump back down the rabbit hole to find the answer. A dramaturg's work does wind down a little once the actors start working on their feet and running through the whole show. At that stage, we have already empowered them with the knowledge/research, and now it is their job to tell that exciting story onstage.

**ASF: Thank you for sharing these insights with us. Anything particularly notable about the time period or the play that you'd like to share with our audience — particularly our young audiences — as they're preparing to see this production?**

ML: Remember, people during this time didn't know how the war was going to end. They anxiously read the paper every day for updates on the war. Many folks on the home front rationed food and donated what they could spare to the war effort. They were anxious and uncertain as to how this major global conflict would resolve. How would the world be forever changed? I encourage audiences (especially young audiences) to put themselves in the character's shoes. What would it be like to turn 18 years old and then suddenly be drafted and sent abroad? What would it be like to wait (sometimes months) for letters from a loved one overseas? Maybe you've already had some experiences in your life that feel like that. While these characters live in a different time period, their emotional lives are just like ours.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Today we have so many different modes of communication that are immediate (FaceTime, texting, email, etc.). What do you think might be more challenging today about getting to know someone solely by exchanging letters through the mail versus the 1940s? Explain.
2. In your opinion, what might be challenging for actors sharing this story with a live audience, especially considering they are never in the same place and much of the dialogue is an exchange of handwritten letters? How do you think the production team will address these challenges?

### POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Jack and Louise's story (two virtual strangers falling in love before ever meeting in person) could happen today? Why or why not?
2. How does *Dear Jack, Dear Louise* explore the impact of World War II on personal relationships, and what does it reveal about the challenges of maintaining a friendship during wartime?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

**I. On your feet:** In groups of 3 to 4 students, investigate an aspect of life for Americans during WWII when innovations in technology and industrial production were booming. Choose one of these four research topics: the economy (price of goods), politics/government, civil rights, or entertainment. Find a creative way to present your research to the class. You could write a paper or poem, make a collage or poster, make a digital presentation, or bring in vintage items from that time period to share and discuss. Get creative; make your discoveries interesting for your classmates! Make your presentation unique!

**Variation:** Teachers, you may choose to have your students pair up for this activity, but please caution the class about sensitive subject matter from this time in history. You may want to guide discussions closely and create guidelines for presentations and structured class responses before you begin. This should be an enlightening experience for your students.

**II. At your desk:** Consider writing a formal letter to a distant relative or family friend who lives out of town. You might share some exciting news or just a simple life update. In your closing, invite them to write you back! Maybe include a photo for them to keep. Forgo any prior notice or warning via modern communication mediums. After you've mailed your letter and gotten a response (you may need to ask an adult person for their address), share their reaction with your classmates!

**Variation:** This activity would likely take multiple days to complete. You may want to begin by covering formal letter writing (or the art of pen palling) with your students before they begin, then offer guidance for writing their letters. You may also instruct your students to let their relative know the project is for class in order to elicit faster responses. You may have students share their responses as they are mailed in or wait until everyone has received a response!

**Teachers:** You will find additional 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 Activity pg. 13**

**Responding to Live Theatre: Critical Response pg. 14**

## ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESOURCES

*About Ken Ludwig*

[www.kenludwig.com](http://www.kenludwig.com)

*American Theatre: Ken Ludwig's Love Letter to His Pen-Pal Parents*

<https://www.americantheatre.org/2019/12/16/ken-ludwigs-love-letter-to-his-pen-pal-parents/>

*National World War II Museum*

<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/the-war>

*Library of Congress: World War II*

<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/great-depression-and-world-war-ii-1929-1945/world-war-ii/>



# ANTICIPATION ACTIVITY: AGREE or DISAGREE (MIDDLE SCHOOL, HIGH SCHOOL)

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 impossible to truly know someone you’ve never met.**

**SA            |            A            |            D            |            SD**

Explain your answer with an example:

**STATEMENT #2: Fate has ultimate authority over destiny.**

**SA            |            A            |            D            |            SD**

Explain your answer with an example:

**STATEMENT #3: Times change, but people never change.**

**SA            |            A            |            D            |            SD**

Explain your answer with an example:

**A variation of this activity:** “Four Corners.” Make signs with the SA, A, D, and SD 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.

## *DEAR JACK, DEAR LOUISE*

### CRITICAL REVIEW

**Directions:** Imagine you are the official 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 whom 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.