

STUDY GUIDE

GOOD PEOPLE

by David Lindsay-Abaire



COMPANY OF FOOLS

A PROUD PART OF SUN VALLEY CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Company of Fools
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The information and classroom activities in this study guide support Idaho State Department of Education Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy for grades 3-8.

WELCOME TO THE LIBERTY

Dear Educator,

We're delighted to welcome you and your students to Company of Fools' (now a proud part of the Sun Valley Center for the Arts) production of **Good People**. Working with local schools is a fundamental part of Company of Fools' and The Sun Valley Center for the Arts' mission.

We hope this study guide will serve as a useful resource for you as educators and parents. It is designed to enhance student learning both before and after the performance, to support your classroom lesson plans and deepen the educational value of your students' experience. The information and classroom activities in this study guide support Idaho State Department of Education Common Core Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy for grades 3-8.

Thank you for the sharing the magic of performing arts with your students!

- Company of Fools



HOW TO BE A GREAT AUDIENCE

Live theatre productions are exciting and vibrant. Actors, audience, and backstage technicians are all part of the experience. As audience members, your students will play an important role in the overall atmosphere of the performance.

To ensure that everyone has a great time at the theatre, please share the following expectations with your students:

- Please remain seated throughout the entire performance.
- Try not to rock back and forth in your seats. They can—and sometimes do—break.
- Restroom visits are best made before leaving school. The theatre's restroom facilities are very limited. **Good People** is 2 hours and 25 minutes in length with a 10 minute intermission (a 10-minute Q&A session will follow).
- Lights Out = Quiet Time! When the lights in the theatre dim to blackout, this is the signal that the performance is about to begin.
- Please do not talk or whisper during the performance. You might think whispering during the show is okay. But if everyone in the audience whispers, it will be disruptive to the performers.
- Do not drink, eat, or chew gum during the performance.
- Turn cell phones to the "silent" setting. And absolutely no texting.
- Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

We hope you and your students will enjoy your visit to the Liberty Theatre!

Teacher Tip: Spark conversation with your students by asking them to remember a time when they were in an audience. Was it a great audience or were there distractions? Have students make their own criteria for what a GREAT audience is and have them share their thoughts.

PLAY SYNOPSIS

Like many Americans, Margie Walsh's life is hanging by a thread. Then she loses her job at the dollar store because of her chronic lateness, and she is closer to disaster. She can't pay her rent and has an adult, disabled daughter to care for.

Her landlady, unreliable babysitter and "friend," Dottie, is ready to kick her out. Margie's other friend, Jean, is convinced that Margie's issue is that she is just too nice. Jean tells Margie that their old high school friend, Mike, is now in town. She pressures Margie to go ask Mike if he knows about a job – especially since he "did good," got out of their neighborhood ("Southie") and became a doctor.

Times are desperate. So Margie takes a gamble to see if Mike still has that "Southie-pride" and is willing to help out an old friend. When Margie barges into Mike's office, worlds collide. Though they both grew up in the projects of Boston, their lives have become very different. What determines our fate? Regardless of where you start or end up, what does it mean to be "good people"?



THE PLAYWRIGHT

DAVID LINDSAY-ABAIRE

"If I hadn't gotten lucky, I could certainly have ended up the manager at a Dollar Store – or maybe not even the manager, maybe the cashier...A lot of people I grew up with are in jail, died of drug overdoses, or committed suicide. They weren't bad people, they weren't troublemakers. They just didn't have the breaks and the opportunities that I did."

– The Boston Globe

American playwright and lyricist David Lindsay-Abair was born on November 30, 1969 to a working class family of five in a rough South Boston neighborhood. His father sold fruit out of a truck in Boston's Chelsea Fruit Market and his mother worked on a circuit-board assembly line. The young David attended Boston public schools until the seventh grade, when he received a six-year scholarship to the Milton Academy, a small, private New England boarding school. Known to his classmates as the "funny one," he wrote what he called "terrible, terrible plays" as a result of the school's tradition of presenting original student work. He went on to study acting and writing at Sarah Lawrence College where he met actor Christine Lindsay. They married on April 9, 1994. From 1996-1998 he attended the prestigious Lila Acheson Wallace American Playwrights Program at the Juilliard School on fellowship, where he studied with playwrights Marsha Norman and Christopher Durang and began writing his first off-Broadway hit, *Fuddy Meers*.

Other successful plays quickly followed. *Wonder of the World* (2000); *Kimberly Akimbo* (2001), which received the L.A. Drama Circle Award for Playwriting, three Garland Awards, and the Kesselring Prize; and *Rabbit Hole* (2006). For the latter Pulitzer prize-winning drama about the loss of a child he also wrote the screenplay for the 2010 film of *Rabbit Hole* starring Nicole Kidman. In film, his writing credits include the movie *Robots* (2006) and the screenplay for *Inkheart* (2007). He also wrote the book for the musical *High Fidelity*, and the book and lyrics for *Shrek the Musical*.

His play *Good People* had its official opening on Broadway on March 3, 2011, with Frances McDormand and Tate Donovan in the lead roles. Presently, Lindsay-Abair lives in Brooklyn with his wife Christine and their two children.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

Margaret
Stevie
Dottie
Jean
Mike
Kate

Denise Simone*
Chris Carweithen
Jana Arnold*
Jennifer Jacoby Rush
Joel Vilinsky
Nylda Mark*

PRODUCTION STAFF

Direction
Stage Management
Set Design
Costume Design
Light Design
Sound Design

Danielle Kennedy
K.O. Ogilvie*
Joe Lavigne
John Glenn
Hugh Coleman
Ted Macklin



THE PLAYWRIGHT ON SOUTH BOSTON

South Boston is a neighborhood separated from downtown Boston by the Fort Point Channel. It's well known for its Irish-American population and is the setting for many movies, including *Good Will Hunting* and *The Departed*.

The Gillette factory (think razors) is located in South Boston, along with the harbor and many local businesses. The neighborhood is known for being fiercely loyal and extremely family- and community-centered. Though mostly working class, it has some of the oldest low-income housing projects in the country.

I'm obviously not a historian, but I was always told that South Boston came to be when the Irish immigrants came and were shunned in most quarters because they were thought to be filthy, dirty, lowlifes, and nobody wanted them in their neighborhood. So, the immigrants were like, "What about this little patch of mud," and they went over to this uninhabited isthmus and they formed a community. Because they were so ostracized, they turned to each other for comfort and protection, and became a segregated community in every sense of the word. They took care of each other, and learned to be suspicious of outsiders, often for good reason. — David Lindsay-Abaire, playwright



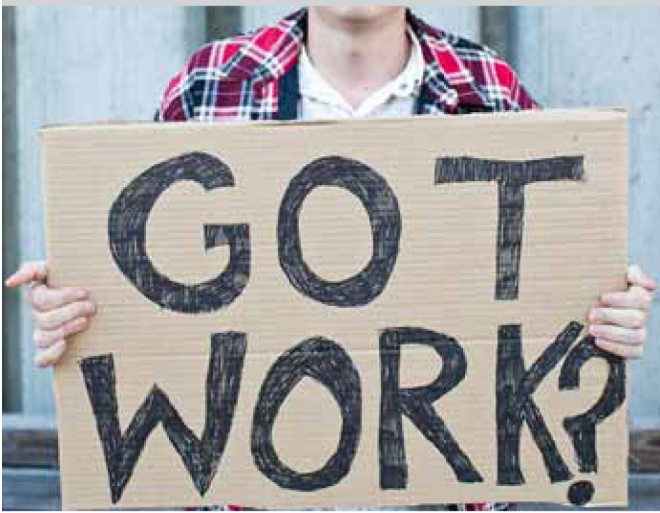
QUESTIONS

AFTER YOU SEE THE PLAY

Consider asking your students the following questions for discussion:

*Huntington Theatre Company's Curriculum Guide for **Good People** provides an excellent additional resource for stimulating discussion of **Good People**. Huntingtontheatre.org/education*

1. Why do you think Mike didn't give Margaret the babysitting job? Would you have given it to her in his situation?
2. When discussing his past with his wife, Mike changed some of the facts to appear more like a victim or make the situation more dramatic. Why do you think he did this? Do you think he was ashamed of his past?
3. Why do you think Margaret didn't tell Mike about his child? Do you think Mike knew it was his? Was Margaret's silence to help Mike or to protect her pride?
4. Why do you think Margaret went to Mike for a job after 30 years of not contacting him? Was she swallowing her pride or simply desperate?
5. What does it mean to be "good people"?
6. How much does your parents' or grandparents' wealth or poverty impact your social mobility?
7. What starts the cycle of poverty in the first place? How can the cycle be broken?
8. What role do choices play in determining socio-economic status?
9. In the final scene of the play we assume that the check that Dottie receives in the mail to cover Margaret's rent is from Mike or Kate. When we discover that it was indeed Stevie's generosity, due to his recent luck at bingo, what final message does it seem Lindsay-Abaire wants to give? What does Stevie's action say about the Southie community and community in general?



UNEMPLOYMENT IN AMERICA TODAY

In the last presidential election, the “99 percent” and the “1 percent” were buzz words. News stations are regularly reporting the national unemployment figures. *Good People* is set

in the midst of these issues.

Here are some of the employment statistics from the United States Department of Labor for Dec. 2012:

TYPES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

	Percentage	Number of Persons	Description
National Unemployment Rate	7.8% of eligible workers	12.2 million	Unemployment has been at or near this rate since Sept.
Long-Term Unemployment	39.1% of unemployed persons	4.8 million	Those jobless for 27 weeks or more
Involuntary Part-Time Workers	5% of eligible workers	7.9 million	Those working part time b/c hours have been cut or they cannot find full-time jobs
Marginally Attached	1.6% of eligible workers	2.6 million	Those able and willing to work but had not searched for a job in the last 4 weeks b/c of family or education circumstances
Discouraged Workers	42% of marginally attached persons	1.1 million	Those who have not looked for work b/s they believe no jobs are available

Good People shows us our current economy as a person (Margie) and a story, not just a statistic. ●

“Last time I got fired it took me seven months to find something, and that was when things weren’t so bad. Now? Forget it. I won’t be able to find anything.” –Margaret



ACTIVITY: Imagine you were to lose your job today. Look through the job listings in the newspaper and online. What positions are available? Which fields have the most job openings? How many positions are full time versus part time? For what jobs would you apply? What would you do if you didn’t get the job?



GLOSSARY

Aunt Clara: A character in the 1964 television show *Bewitched*. She is known for her well-intentioned spells backfiring.

Biddies: Elderly women who are usually looked at as annoying.

Djembe: An African drum.

Granny cart: A shopping cart that contains a homeless person's belongings.

Humboldt Frog: A brand of expensive cheese. It can cost as much as \$140.

Lace Curtain Irish: A wealthy and arrogant Irish-American.

Lactose Intolerant: Inability to digest milk and milk products

Minimum Wage: The lowest wage permitted by law or by a special agreement (such as one with a labor union).

Passive-aggressive: Type of behavior or personality characterized by indirect resistance to the demands of others and an avoidance of direct confrontation, as in procrastinating, pouting, or misplacing important materials.

Reproductive Endocrinologist: A doctor who treats infertility.

Tara: A plantation house in *Gone with the Wind*.

Upton Sinclair: A famous twentieth Century writer who wrote investigative books like *The Jungle*.

VFW: Veterans of Foreign War

Welly Cheese: Free cheese given by the government.

Wensleydale Cheese: A crumbling cheese that is usually combined with cranberries.

ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you were to lose your job today. Look through the job listings in the newspaper and on line. What positions are available? Which fields have the most job openings? For what jobs would you apply?
2. Write a speech or essay describing your neighborhood. Consider its stereotypes. How accurate are they? What don't people understand about your neighborhood? What would surprise them?
3. Margaret loses her job, and must apply for a new one. With a partner, write a cover letter that we imagine she might write. What would it say? What would the tone and overall style of her writing look and sound like? Students should imagine a fictional job or find an actual job posting online or from a newspaper.
4. Dottie says that her "real" job is making rabbit flowerpots. Based on the description of them in the play, attempt to re-create this craft project. Do you think you could sell yours for \$5 and make a profit?
5. Free-write for five minutes on morality. Consider the following questions as you write: What does it mean to be moral? What defines morality? Do you have to be actively good to be considered moral, or is it enough to refrain from harming others? Is morality a learned behavior? And finally, are Margie and Mike moral people?

SCREENPLAYS BY DAVID LINDSAY-ABAIRE

Robots
Inkheart
Rabbit Hole
Rise of the Guardians

LEARN MORE ONLINE!

Bureau of Labor Statistics:

www.bls.gov/cps/

CNN Money Jobs:

money.cnn.com/news/specials/jobs

Interviews with David Lindsay-Abaire:

[http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/articles/Good-People/
An-Interview-with-David-Lindsay-Abaire/](http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/articles/Good-People/An-Interview-with-David-Lindsay-Abaire/)

[http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/theater/06abaire.
html?pagewanted=all&_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/06/theater/06abaire.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

[http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/arti-
cles/2011/03/08/david_lindsay_abaire_returns_to_south_
boston_with_his_new_broadway_play_good_people/](http://www.boston.com/ae/theater_arts/articles/2011/03/08/david_lindsay_abaire_returns_to_south_boston_with_his_new_broadway_play_good_people/)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

LITERATURE

Plays by David Lindsay-Abaire:

Fuddy Meers
Wonder of the World
Rabbit Hole
Kimberly Akimbo
Dotting and Dashing
Snow Angel
The L'il Plays
A Devil Inside
Shrek the Musical (book and lyrics)
High Fidelity (book)

Related Non-Fiction Work

All Souls: A family Story from Southie
by Michael Patrick MacDonald (1999)

FILMS

Good Will Hunting (1997)
The Boondock Saints (1999)
Southie (1999)
Mystic River (2003)
The Departed (2006)
Gone Baby Gone (2007)
The Fighter (2010)

THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

"If I write about the old neighborhood, the subject of class will inevitably bubble to the surface because it's so present to the community."

—David Lindsay-Abaire, playwright

Margie believes she never had a chance to get out of South Boston. Why does she feel trapped? Mike suggests her choices sealed her fate. She bristles at this idea, claiming that he was just "lucky." Who is right? Was Margie's life predestined or does Mike's success debunk this notion of the "cycle of poverty"? Consider the idea that there may also be a "cycle of wealth." If your parents are rich, does that make it more likely that you will be too? How much does your parents' or grandparents' wealth or poverty impact your social mobility? What role do choices play in determining socio-economic status?



What starts the cycle of poverty in the first place? How can the cycle be broken?

WRITE A REVIEW OF GOOD PEOPLE

1. Include your name, grade and school.
2. What remains in your memory from the play that you saw?
3. How did the designers make the performance more exciting? (think about the set, lights, sounds, costumes and props)
4. Who were your favorite characters and why?
5. Compare and contrast the themes of the play to an adventure movie or the short story.
6. Give your review a headline.

Send your review of GOOD PEOPLE to:

Company of Fools
P.O. Box 656
Sun Valley, Idaho 83353



TEACHER FEEDBACK: GOOD PEOPLE

1. Did using the Study Guide add to your theatre experience?
 - a. YES
 - b. SOME
 - c. NO
2. How much of the Study Guide did you read?
 - a. Didn't have time
 - b. About a quarter
 - c. All
3. What do you think of what you read?
(Mark as many as apply)
 - a. Useful
 - b. Nothing New
 - c. Enjoyable
 - d. Not for my students because _____
4. Did you get the Study Guide in time to prepare your students to see the play?
 - a. YES
 - b. NO
5. What sections of the Study Guide did you find most important? _____

6. How did the experience of preparing for and then seeing the play impact your students? _____

7. Did you spend more time working with the material BEFORE or AFTER you saw the play?
8. Comments: _____

PLEASE FAX THIS TO 788-1053
or Mail to Company of Fools,
P. O. Box 656, Sun Valley, Idaho 83353

