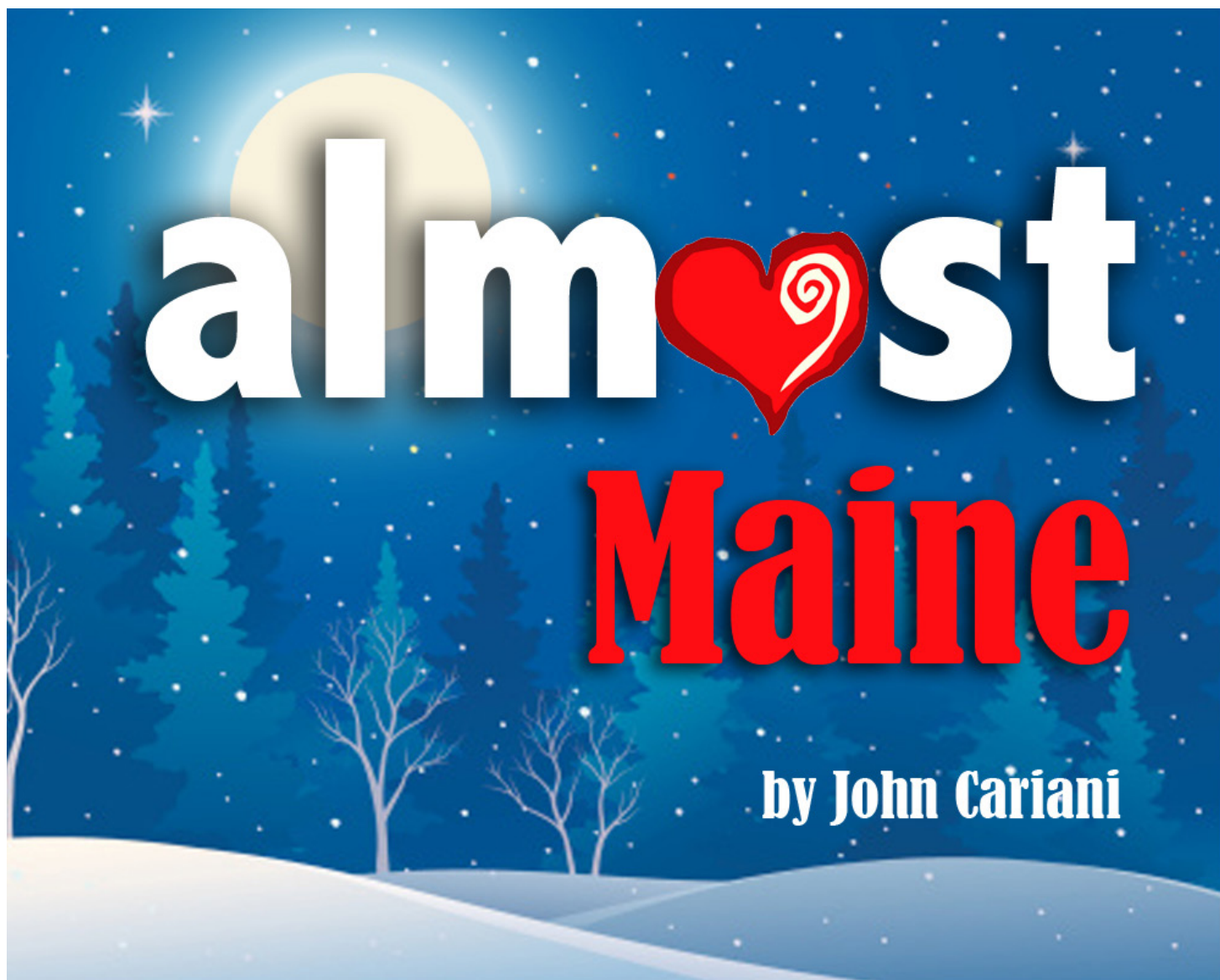


STUDY GUIDE



COMPANY OF FOOLS

Company of Fools
P.O. Box 656, Sun Valley, Idaho 83353
208.788.6520
www.companyoffools.org

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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 8-12.

WELCOME TO THE LIBERTY

Dear Educator,

We're delighted to welcome you and your students to Company of Fools' production of ***Almost, Maine***. 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.

Thank you for sharing the magic of live theatre with your students!

- Company of Fools



Matthew Mitchell and Chris Carwithen

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. **Almost, Maine** is just over 2 hours in length with one short intermission (a 10-minute Q&A session will follow the performance).
- 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

Welcome to Almost, Maine, a town that's so far north, it's almost not in the United States—it's almost in Canada. And it almost doesn't exist. Because its residents never got around to getting organized. So it's just...Almost.

One cold, clear Friday night in the middle of winter, while the northern lights hover in the sky above, Almost's residents find themselves falling in and out of love in the strangest ways. Knees are bruised. Hearts are broken. Love is lost, found, and confounded. And life for the people of Almost, Maine will never be the same.

ALMOST, MAINE: It's love. But not quite.



Sharon Barto Gouran and Chris Carwithin

THE VIGNETTES IN ALMOST, MAINE

PLACE

Various locales in Almost, Maine, a small town in northern Maine that doesn't quite exist.

TIME

The present. Everything takes place at nine o'clock on a cold, clear, moonless, slightly surreal Friday night in the middle of the deepest part of a northern Maine winter

- **Her Heart** featuring East and Glory
- **Sad and Glad** featuring Jimmy, Sandrine and a Waitress
- **This Hurts** featuring Marvalyn and Steve
- **Getting It Back** featuring Gayle and Lendall
- **They Fell** featuring Randy and Chad
- **Where It Went** featuring Phil and Marci
- **Story of Hope** featuring Hope and Daniel
- **Seeing the Thing** featuring Rhonda and Dave

HISTORY OF ALMOST, MAINE

ALMOST, MAINE was developed at the Cape Cod Theater Project (Andy Polk, Artistic Director) in 2002, and received its world premiere at Portland Stage Company, where it broke box office records and garnered critical acclaim. *ALMOST, MAINE* opened Off Broadway in the winter of 2005/2006 at the Daryl Roth Theatre (Jack Thomas/Bulldog Theatrical and Bruce Payne, Producers) and was subsequently published by Dramatists Play Service. To date, *ALMOST, MAINE* has been produced by over 2,500 theater companies in the United States (and by over a dozen companies internationally) making it one of the most frequently produced plays of the past decade.

MAINE FACTS

Here are some interesting facts that you may or may not have known about Maine:

- Maine is the eastern-most and northeaster-most state in the United States.
- Maine is about the same size as the rest of the New England states (Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island) combined, with a total area of about 35,400 square miles.
- Maine is the only state in the country that's attached to only one other state.
- With 1.3 million residents Maine is the most sparsely populated state east of the Mississippi River. It has 40 people per square mile.
- Maine has more moose per square mile than any other state.
- 90% of the nation's toothpick supply is produced in Maine.



Russell Simone Wilson and Mathew Mitchell

"It says that people from Maine are different, that they live life the way life should be..." -- Glory - *Almost, Maine*

"You're in unorganized territory. Township 13, Range 7. It's not gonna be on your map, cause it's not an actual town, technically... See, to be a town, you gotta get organized. And we never got around to getting organized, so... we're just Almost." -- East - *Almost, Maine*

THE NORTHERN LIGHTS

The northern lights, or Aurora Borealis, is one of the most beautiful natural occurrences that can be seen on Earth. Since the beginning of time it has taken place in the sky above.

Aurora Borealis is actually a collection of charged particles in the magnetosphere (a volume of space that surrounds the Earth). Earth has a magnetosphere because of its internal magnetic field. Since the sun is so hot (almost 10,000 degrees Fahrenheit on the surface), it is constantly burning off pieces of its outermost layer. Those pieces contain electrons and protons (also known as plasma) which then escape into outer space. Solar winds collide with Earth's magnetosphere and the electrons and protons are unable to penetrate it so they move along side of the magnetosphere and try to bend it. This is what causes the colors we see in the sky.

There are only three different colors that can be seen: blue, green and red. Different gases give off different colors and the Aurora Borealis is primarily made up of oxygen, red, and nitrogen, green and blue. Depending on how fast the molecules are moving and the altitude of the molecules, the three basic colors can vary in shade.

Although the Auroras may be seen anywhere on the Earth, they are mainly seen in the northern latitudes. To see it, the sky needs to be fairly dark and clear of clouds. The best time to see it is around midnight, or a few hours before or after. The moon can sometimes be very bright, so this must be taken into account when looking for Aurora. There is always at sometime an Aurora happening on earth; however, it cannot always be seen.

There is a lot of folklore behind Aurora Borealis. The Fox Indians of Wisconsin believed that the northern lights were the spirits of their slain enemies waiting to take revenge. The Algonquin Indians believed the lights came from Nanahbozho the Creator lighting a fire in the north to remind his people of his continued love.

*For night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast,
And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger;
At whose approach ghosts, wandering here and there,
Troop home to churchyards.*

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: JOHN CARIANI

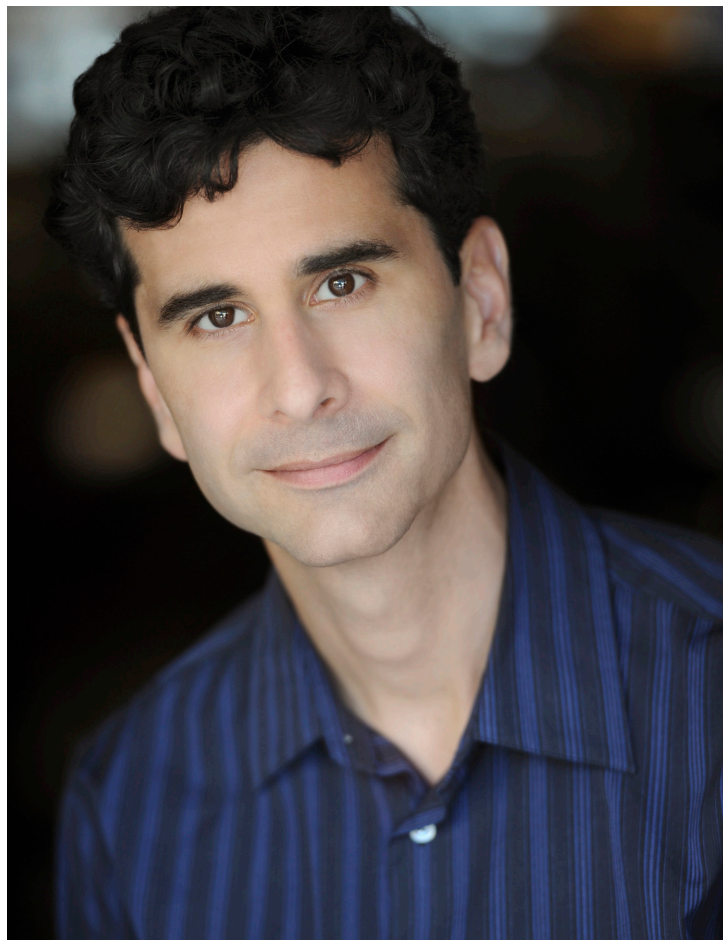
John Cariani is an actor and a playwright. He has appeared on and Off Broadway, at regional theaters across the country, and in several films and television shows. He's been nominated for a Tony Award. He's done movies with Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, Ed Asner. Most people seem to know him from *Law & Order*, where he played Forensics Tech Beck from 2002-2007.

He started writing plays when he moved to New York City in the late nineties. He and his friends became known for an offbeat comedy show they would put on from time to time at any downtown theater they could find to perform in. They started to gather a little following, and one night, up-and-coming director Gabe Barre caught one of their shows and was taken by the odd, funny, sad, romantic and anti-romantic little plays and sketches that comprised the evening. A few nights later, Gabe met with John and asked him how many of these short plays he had written, and John said, "A couple dozen," and Gabe asked if he could take a look at all of them and he did...and he noticed that many of the plays were surreal love stories, all set on a cold winter's night in a strange little non-town in far northern Maine, and he said, "There's a play here. Almost."

And the rest is history.



Chris Carwithen and Russell Simone Wilson



ARTISTS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Pete, Jimmy, Lendall, Randy, Man

Matthew Mitchell*

Ginette, Sandrine, Marvalyn, Marci

Russell Simone Wilson

East, Steve, Chad, Dave

Christopher Carwithen*

Glory, Waitress, Gayle, Hope, Rhonda

Sharon Barto Gouran

PRODUCTION STAFF

Direction	Denise Simone
Stage Management	Jana Arnold*
Set & Light Design	John Glenn
Costume Design	Coleen McDuffee
Sound Design	Russell Simone Wilson
Photographer	Kirsten Shultz

*Appearing courtesy of Actors' Equity Association –
The Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

POST SHOW QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. With your class have a discussion about love. What good can come from it? What are some bad things that can come from it? What do you think it's like to be in love? Do you think there is somebody out there for everyone?
2. Why do you think Cariani made up a town for the play? Why not set it in a real city? Do you think that there is any significance in the name Almost?
3. Just from looking at the names of the vignettes and characters involved, what do you think each scene will be about? Discuss and record your answers with a small group. After you see the show, go back to your guesses and see how accurate you were.
4. Divide into groups and do some research on the folklore behind the Aurora Borealis. What else did you find? Share your research with your class and discuss why you think these folklores exist. The vignettes are supposed to take place at the same exact time underneath the northern lights. Why do you think Cariani chose to do this? What is the significance of the northern lights? Discuss your ideas with your classmates.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

On the Web: Interviews & Information:

Interview with Playwright John Carini

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKxHe3d0-rg>

Interview with Playwright John Carini

<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2014/08/16/almost-maine-playwright-cariani-relishing-second-act/o9D3Wpk4OoJ5iNa4pCRGiN/story.html>

Official website for Almost, Maine

<http://www.almostmaine.com/>

On the Life of the Play

<http://www.fastcompany.com/3043584/my-creative-life/how-a-complete-flop-became-the-most-popular-play-in-america>



The Company of ALMOST, MAINE

WRITE A REVIEW OF ALMOST, MAINE

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 **ALMOST, MAINE** to:

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



Chris Carwithin

TEACHER FEEDBACK: ALMOST, MAINE

1. What grade do you teach?

2. Were your students engaged during the performance?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
3. Did you use this study guide as an education material for your students?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
4. What sections of the study guide were most useful to you?
 - a. Artist Background
 - b. Play Synopsis
 - c. Pre and Post Activities
 - d. Teacher Alerts
 - e. Resources
 - f. Student Activities
 - g. I did not use the study guide
 - h. Other _____
5. Did preparing for the performance and/or talking about the show after impact your students?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Unsure
6. Why did you make the choice to bring your students? _____

8. Is there a story or anecdote that describes the impact of this experience for your students? _____

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

