

**ROSE
THEATRE**

ROSE THEATRE AND WELSH NATIONAL THEATRE PRESENT

Welsh
National
Theatre



MICHAEL SHEEN
OUR TOWN
BY THORNTON WILDER
DIRECTED BY FRANCESCA GOODRIDGE

LEARNING RESOURCE PACK

WELCOME

Welcome to this learning resource pack for *Our Town*, a Rose Theatre production. Rose Theatre has one of the largest participation departments in London. Through creative and curriculum based in-school and on-site opportunities, the Rose opens its doors to surrounding communities and enables participants to join in, and take part in, exciting opportunities led by world class practitioners.

If you would like to hear more about our activities please contact: participate@rosetheatre.org or visit our dedicated schools website here: <https://www.rosetheatre.org/schools-rhr7>

This pack is designed to support students and teachers watching the production.
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Our Town is a Rose Theatre and Welsh National Theatre production

Written By **Thornton Wilder**

Directed by **Francesca Goodridge**

Creative Associate **Russell T Davies**

Grover's Corner is a quiet little town, full of ordinary folk, living everyday lives. They work, they laugh, they sing, they fall in love, raise their children, and grow old.

But within those moments of ordinary, everyday life, there are truths that reach out to us all. A passionate demand to cherish every moment, right now, while we still can.

Our Town is American playwright Thornton Wilder's masterpiece, and this new production — starring internationally celebrated actor Michael Sheen — moves the setting to Wales, bringing new life and vivid resonance for modern audiences.

CAST

Stage Manager

Howie Newsome

George Gibbs

Wally Webb

Rebecca Gibbs

Joe and Si Crowell

Mr Webb

Mrs Soanes

Emily Webb

Constable Warren

Mrs Gibbs

Mrs Webb

Sam Craig

Professor Willard
and Joe Stoddard

Dr. Gibbs

Simon Stimpson

Micheal Sheen

Rithvik Andugla

Peter Devlinas

Aisha-May Hunte

Rebecca Killick

Alfie Llewellyn

Rhodri Meilir

Christina Modestou

Yasemin Özdemir

Glyn Pritchard

Sian Reese-Williams

Nia Roberts

Kingdom Sibanda

Gareth Snook

Matthew Trevannion

Rhys Warrington

Additional roles played by members of the company

Designer	Hayley Grindle
Movement Director	Jess Williams
Lighting Designer	Ryan Joseph Strafford
Composer, Sound Designer, Musical Director	Dyfan Jones
Casting Director	Sam Jones CDG
Assistant Director	Dena Davies

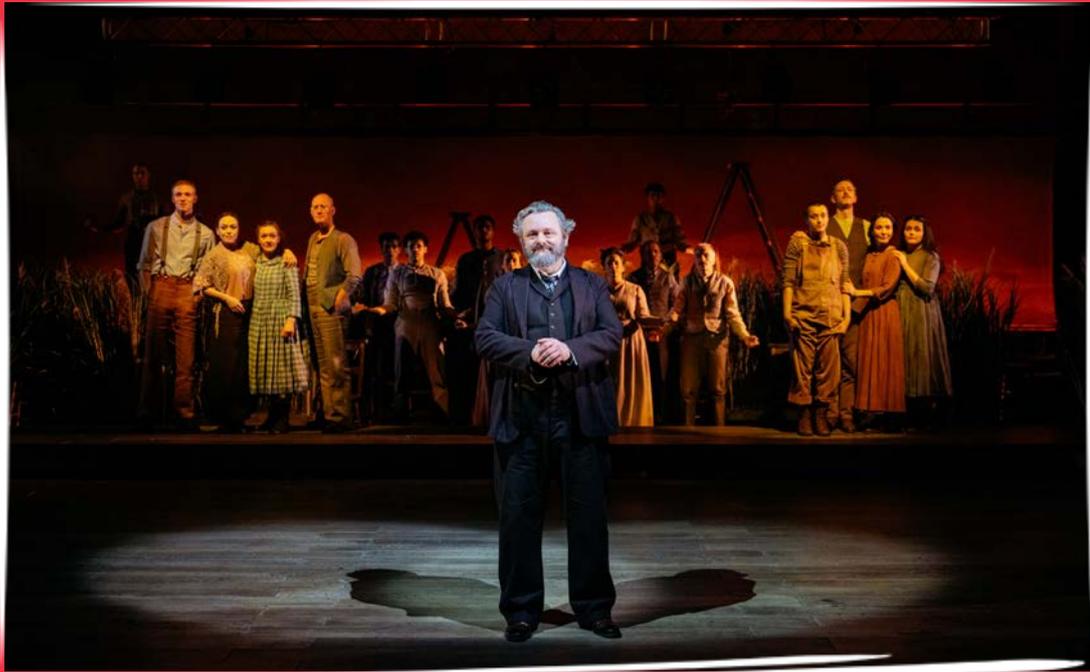


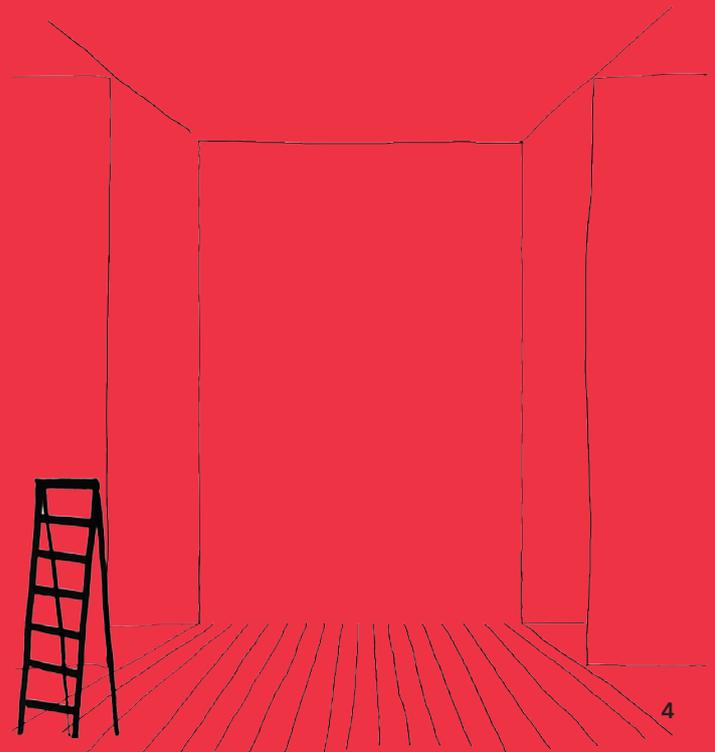
Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray

For the Rose Theatre

Chief Executive **Robert O'Dowd**

Artistic Director **Christopher Haydon**

Executive Producer **David Sloan**



THORNTON WILDER

Thornton Niven Wilder - Chronology

1897 Born in Madison, Wisconsin (April 17)

1906-10 Emerson Public School in Berkeley

1912-13
Thacher School, Ojai, CA (one year).
First play known to be produced: The Russian Princess

1912-13
Oberlin College; published regularly

1920-21
American Academy in Rome (8-month residency)

1924
First visit to the MacDowell Colony, Peterborough, New Hampshire

1927
The Bridge of San Luis Rey (novel-Pulitzer Prize)

1906 Moves to Hong Kong in May and to Berkeley, California in October

1910-11
China Inland Mission School, Chefoo, China (one year)

1915
Graduates from Berkeley High School; active in school dramatics

1920
B.A. Yale College (3-month service in 1918 with U.S. Army in 1918); many publications

1920s
French teacher at Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

1926
M.A. in French literature, Princeton University
The Trumpet Shall Sound produced off-Broadway (American Laboratory Theatre)
The Cabala (first novel)



1930s

Part-time faculty, University of Chicago (comparative literature and composition); lectures across the country; first Hollywood screen-writing assignment (1934); extensive foreign travel

The Woman of Andros (novel)

Completion of home for his family and himself in Hamden, Connecticut

1932

Lucrece opens on Broadway starring Katharine Cornell (translation of André Obey's *Le Viol de Lucrece*)

1937

A Doll's House (adaptation/ trans.) opens on Broadway with Ruth Gordon

1942

The Skin of Our Teeth opens on Broadway (Pulitzer Prize)

Screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock's *The Shadow of a Doubt*

1948

The Ides of March (novel); performing in his plays in summer stock in this period

The Victors opens off-Broadway (translation of Sartre's *Morts sans sépulture*)

1951-52

Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry at Harvard

1928

The Angel That Troubled The Waters (first published collection of drama—playlets)

1931

The Long Christmas Dinner and Other Plays (six one-act plays)

1935

Heaven's My Destination (novel)

1938

Our Town (Pulitzer Prize) and *The Merchant of Yonkers* open on Broadway

1942-45

Service with Army Air Force in North Africa and Italy (Lieut. Col. at discharge – Bronze Star and O.B.E.)

1949

Major role in *Goethe Convocation in Aspen*; lectures widely.



1952

Gold Medal for Fiction, American Academy of Arts and Letters

1955

The Matchmaker opens on Broadway starring Ruth Gordon

The Alcestiad produced at Edinburgh Festival with Irene Worth (as A Life in the Sun)

1961

Libretto for The Long Christmas Dinner (music by Paul Hindemith—premieres in Mannheim, West Germany)

1963

Presidential Medal of Freedom

1965

National Book Committee's Medal for Literature

1973

Theophilus North (novel)

1953

Cover of Time Magazine (January 12)

1957

German Peace Prize

1962

"Plays for Bleecker Street" (Someone from Assisi, Infancy, and Childhood) premiere at NYC's Circle in the Square

Libretto for The Alcestiad (music by Louise Talma—premieres in Frankfurt, West Germany)

1964

Hello, Dolly! starring Carol Channing opens on Broadway

1967

The Eighth Day (National Book Award for Fiction)

1975

Dies in sleep in Hamden, CT on December 7.

Buried at Mt. Carmel Cemetery, Hamden, Connecticut

For more information visit
www.thorntonwilder.com
and www.thorntonwildersociety.org.



SYNOPSIS

ACT I: DAILY LIFE

In Act 1, we meet the Stage Manager, who serves as our narrator and guide through the play. He welcomes the audience to Grover's Corners, a small town in New Hampshire, and describes its geography, history, and the people who live there. The date is May 7th, 1901.

We see the town wake up to a new day: Joe Crowell Jr. delivers newspapers to Doc Gibbs, while Howie Newsome makes his rounds Across town, Mr. and Mrs. Webb send their children, Emily and Wally, off to school.

The Stage Manager then introduces Professor Willard, who gives a factual report on Grover's Corners — describing its social class, economy, politics, and religion. He also mentions that the town doesn't have much in the way of art or culture, which hints at the play's focus on everyday life.

We meet more of the townspeople, including choir director Simon Stimson, who is known to struggle with alcoholism. Mrs. Soames gossips about him to Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb, and although most people in town ignore his problems, Doc Gibbs quietly worries about how Simon's story might end.

The act closes on a peaceful note, with George and Rebecca Gibbs looking out their bedroom window, while Emily Webb does the same across the way — a simple moment that captures the quiet beauty of small-town life.

Finally, the Stage Manager breaks the fourth wall once again, ending the act by telling the audience, "That's the end of Act I, folks. You can go and smoke now. Those that smoke."

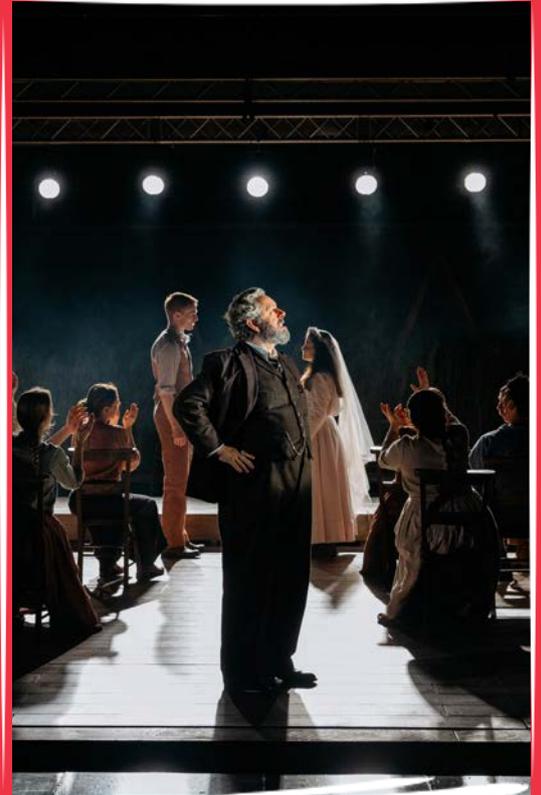


Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray

ACT II: LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Act 2 opens with the Stage Manager setting the scene once again. He tells us that three years have passed since Act 1, and describes how life in Grover's Corners has moved on.

We learn that George Gibbs and Emily Webb are about to get married. Howie Newsome is still delivering milk — this time in the pouring rain — and Joe Crowell's younger brother, Si Crowell, now delivers the morning papers. Life continues in its familiar rhythm, even as the younger generation grows up and takes on new roles.

Before the wedding, George visits Emily's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Webb, in an awkward and slightly tense scene. The Stage Manager then steps in to pause the moment and takes the audience back in time to the year before.

We're brought to a milkshake parlor, where a younger George and Emily share an important conversation. Emily gently scolds George for becoming too proud and self-centered since he became a baseball star. This honest talk brings them closer together — they realize their feelings for each other and begin to imagine a shared future. George decides not to go to college, choosing instead to work on his uncle's farm, with hopes of eventually running it himself.

Returning to the present, the wedding day has arrived. Both George and Emily confess their nervousness and fear about getting married — George to his mother, and Emily to her father. Their parents comfort them, and soon they stand together before the townspeople to say their vows.

The act ends with Mrs. Soames, joyfully saying:



Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray

SYNOPSIS

“I’m sure they’ll be happy. I always say: happiness, that’s the great thing! The important thing is to be happy.”

ACT III: DEATH AND ETERNITY

Act 3 begins nine years after the events of Act 2. The Stage Manager sets the scene in a cemetery just outside Grover’s Corners, which dates back to 1670. He tells us about the townspeople who have died since George and Emily’s wedding. Among them are Mrs. Gibbs, who passed away from pneumonia while traveling; Wally Webb, who died from a burst appendix while camping; Simon Stimson, who took his own life; and Mrs. Soames, the cheerful gossip from the earlier acts.

We meet Joe Stoddard, the undertaker, and Sam Craig, who has returned to Grover’s Corners for the funeral of his cousin, Emily Webb. We learn that Emily has died during childbirth with her and George’s second child.

As the funeral takes place, Emily’s spirit joins the others who have already passed on. Though welcomed by the dead, Emily struggles to let go of her life. She asks Mrs. Gibbs if it’s possible to return to the world of the living, even for a short time. Mrs. Gibbs and the others warn her that doing so will only bring pain — that the living rarely notice or appreciate the beauty of life while they have it. Despite their warnings, Emily decides to go back and relive her 12th birthday.

At first, she watches her family with happiness and nostalgia, but her joy soon turns to sorrow as she realizes that people rush through their days without noticing how precious each moment is. Overwhelmed, Emily begs to return to the cemetery, understanding now how fleeting and extraordinary life truly is.

Before leaving, Emily asks the Stage Manager whether anyone truly realizes life while they live it. He replies:

“No. The saints and poets, maybe—they do some.”

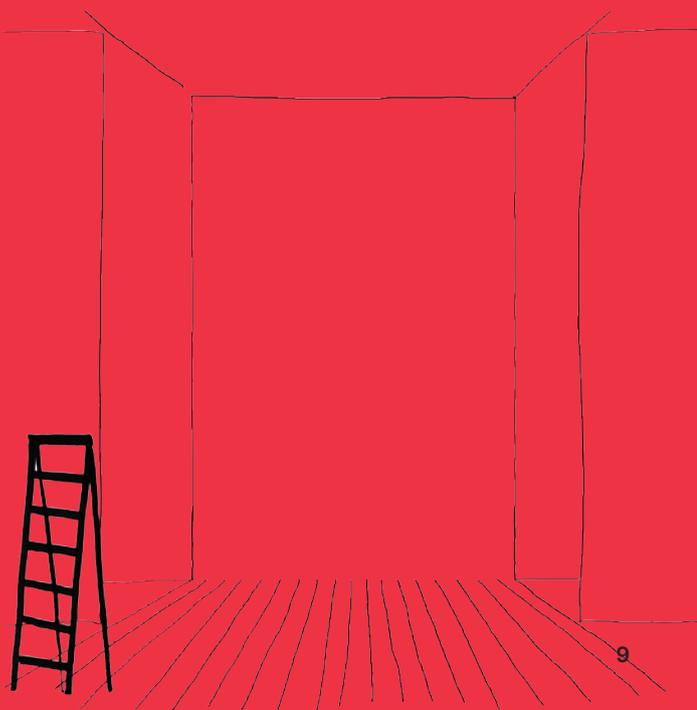
Emily quietly returns to her grave beside Mrs. Gibbs. In the final moments, George kneels weeping at her grave while the town sleeps. The Stage Manager closes the play with a gentle farewell, wishing the audience a good night.



Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray



Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray



CHARACTERS

THE STAGE MANAGER

The narrator and commentator. He guides the audience through the play and on occasion takes on roles in the play.

EMILY WEBB

A girl/young woman of Grovner's corner. The audience follows Emily's journey from girl, to married woman to her untimely death in child birth.

GEORGE GIBBS

Emily's neighbour, boyfriend and eventually her husband.

FRANK GIBBS

A Doctor and George's father.

JULIA GIBBS

George's mother and Frank's Wife.

CHARLES WEBB

Editor of the Grover's Corners Sentinel and father of Emily and Wally.

MYRTLE WEBB

Mother of Emily and Wally and wife of Charles.

JOE AND SI CROWELL

Local paperboys and brothers.

SIMON STIMSON

The choir director and church organist. Simon is the topic of much town gossip due to his alcoholism. The audience eventually learns he committed suicide.



CHARACTERS

HOWIE NEWSOME

The milkman.

REBECCA GIBBS

George's younger sister.

WALLACE "WALLY" WEBB

Emily's younger brother.

PROFESSOR WILLARD

A lecturer.

MRS. LOUELLA SOAMES

A member of the town choir and town gossip.

CONSTABLE BILL WARREN

A town policeman.

JOE STODDARD

The undertaker.

SAM CRAIG

A nephew of Mrs Gibbs who left town to seek his fortune. He returns for Emily's funeral.



Photo: Rehearsals, Helen Murray



Photo: Rehearsals, Helen Murray



ARTISTIC DIRECTOR NOTE

BY MICHAEL SHEEN
Artistic Director of Welsh National Theatre

We're all incredibly excited to share this extraordinary story with you and I am personally so happy to be a part of this brilliant Welsh company of actors and creative team. It also gives me immense pleasure to be working alongside our Rose Theatre

This play - Thornton Wilder's masterpiece *Our Town* - works a very special kind of magic. No other play I've read or seen performed has ever affected me in quite the same way. It always leaves me with a burning need to find everyone I love and just, well... look at them! Let them know how very, very special they are to me and to make the most of every precious moment I have with them. The pressures of everyday life eventually somehow make me forget this basic and simple truth and so I can't really think of anything more important to come out of a theatre feeling or a play more worth performing right out of the gate for a fledgling company like us. It's a play about family, about community and about the big moments that make up a life, and how achingly brief the time is that we get to hold this heart bursting gift in a universe quite as busy as this one.

In the light of which I am incredibly grateful that you have chosen to come and join us here in this beautiful theatre that we might share a few of those achingly brief moments together.

Michael Sheen
Artistic Director of Welsh National Theatre

Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray



DIRECTOR NOTE

BY FRANCESCA GOODRIDGE

You might wonder: why relocate *Our Town*, this quintessentially American story, to a Welsh town? It's a question the creative team has returned to again and again. After many conversations, thoughts, emails, and messages, one word keeps coming back: community.

Wales has faced its share of loss - industry, resources - but community has always filled the space. Whatever we have faced, it is the strength of our communities that has kept us here.

When I read *Our Town*, I think of Wales, and I think of home. Wilder is writing about a community I know in my heart. His play captures the universal heartbeat of community: the care, the connection, the ordinary miracles that shape our lives. In Welsh towns, these truths are alive in every greeting, every song, every shared moment. It's in the hellos on a walk, bumping into friends at the shop, the gossip over the fence to your neighbour, the ways we celebrate, mourn, and sing together. Our identity is rooted in belonging, to people, to place, to story. Wilder understood communities where every voice matters, and where the smallest gestures carry weight. Here, community is not an abstract idea; it is our reality.

What strikes me every time I return to this play is the sheer humanity of its characters. They are not heightened, theatrical figures; they are the people we live alongside every day- ordinary, familiar, recognisable. And because of that, they become extraordinary. Wilder's genius lies in showing how the routines we rush through, the gestures we barely notice, are in fact the very fabric of our lives. In a world so often obsessed with spectacle and ambition, Wilder invites us to pause, to see the smallest details as miracles.

Each time I finish reading the play, I text my mum a simple "I love you." Wilder's words pull me into the present, reminding me how vital the people in my life are, often more than I ever tell them. Of course, life's noise inevitably returns, and I slip back into the whirlwind of tasks and distractions. But each return to *Our Town* resets something in me. It slows me down. It makes me look up. It makes me grateful. It changes my life for a brief moment.

This production is, in many ways, a love letter: to the communities that raise us, protect us, and know us; to our small towns; to our families; to our neighbours;

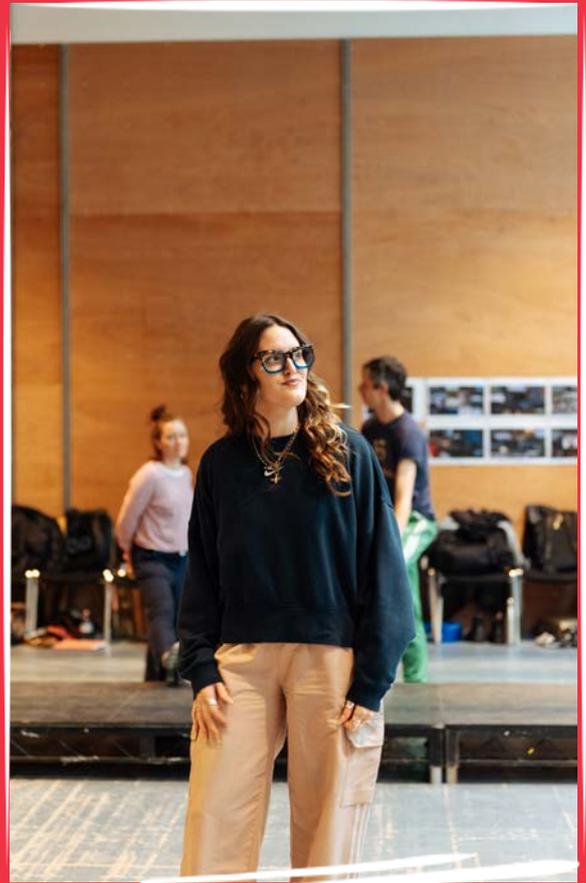


Photo: Rehearsals, Helen Murray

to the landscapes that hold our memories. Performing *Our Town* in Wales feels deeply right because it celebrates what we know so well: that the strength of a place lies in its people and the everyday gestures that bind us. I hope audiences from outside Wales can see their own communities in Grover's Corners and recognise the same care, connection, and ordinary miracles in their lives.

So if, after watching this play, you feel the urge to reach for your phone, or to turn to the person beside you and say something kind, honest, or heartfelt, I hope you follow that instinct. Maybe it's a whispered word, a hand gently squeezed, or a simple message typed before stepping back into the world. To say, simply: "I love you." If this play helps you see your life more vividly, or notice a moment you might otherwise have missed, it has done exactly what Wilder intended.

Francesca Goodridge
Director of *Our Town*



MOVEMENT DIRECTOR NOTE

BY JESS WILLIAMS

Right from the very beginnings of our conversations around this play, we knew that we wanted movement to be at the heart of *Our Town*, not as decoration but as the quiet engine that pushes the life of the town forwards. Searching for the beauty in simplicity - functional, unforced action born out of the rhythms of everyday life. Echoing the warmth and rhythm you find in the play's language.

We were interested in how the people of this town shape the community they live in. Constantly shifting, reforming, and rebuilding. People work, pass by one another, build small pieces of meaning and then move on again. Life, like the town, keeps going.

The materials we use, especially the planks of wood, are a big part of this. Connecting to the natural landscape, there's something very Welsh about them, solid, familiar, a bit rough around the edges. They feel like the tools of builders and farmers, makers and doers.

Using the planks along with chairs and ladders we conjure simple images; a street, a kitchen table, a doorway. Not perfect pictures, but small practical gestures leaving the audience to colour in the image with their own lives, their own homes and the streets that they grew up in. Uniquely personal and universal.

In the creation and the performance of the movement for *Our Town* the ensemble works as a community, just like the town itself. Everything is created collectively, sharing responsibility, relying on everyone to do their bit. The performers move together with a generosity and collective energy that is the heart of this community.

My hope is that the movement in the play invites you to experience *Grover's Corners* not only as a place, but as a living rhythm, one that moves, builds, breathes, and finally rests.

Jess Williams
Movement Director of Our Town



Photo: Production, *Our Town*, Helen Murray



1. INVISIBLE PROPS & MINIMALIST MOVEMENT

Purpose: Understand Wilder’s use of minimal staging

Activity:

- Students act out a daily-life scene (breakfast, homework, walking to school) using no props.
- Emphasize precise movement and gesture.
- Afterward, connect this to *Our Town*:
 - How does the lack of props change focus?
 - Why might Wilder want the audience to imagine rather than see?

Extension: Look at the following scenes in pairs and prepare it using no props and paying close attention to the specificity of the movement in the piece.

SCENE 1: JOE AND DR. GIBBS

JOE Mornin', Doc! (Tosses paper onto a neighbor's veranda)

DR. GIBBS Mornin', Joe!

JOE Want your paper now?

DR. GIBBS Yes, I'll take it. (JOE hands to DR. GIBBS, who opens it, starts reading it)

JOE: Anybody been sick, Doc?

DR. GIBBS No. Some twins over in Polish Town—Joe, I see your teacher Miss Foster is goin' to get married.

JOE Yes, sir, to a feller over in Concord.

DR. GIBBS I declare. Well, how do you boys feel about that?

JOE Well, of course it ain't none of my business—but I think if a person starts out to be a teacher she ought to stay one. (Starts L throwing papers.)

DR. GIBBS How's your knee, Joe?

JOE Fine, Doc, I never think about it at all. Only like you said, it always tells me when it's going to rain.

DR. GIBBS What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain? JOE: No sir.

DR. GIBBS Sure?

JOE Yes sir.

DR. GIBBS Knee ever make a mistake?

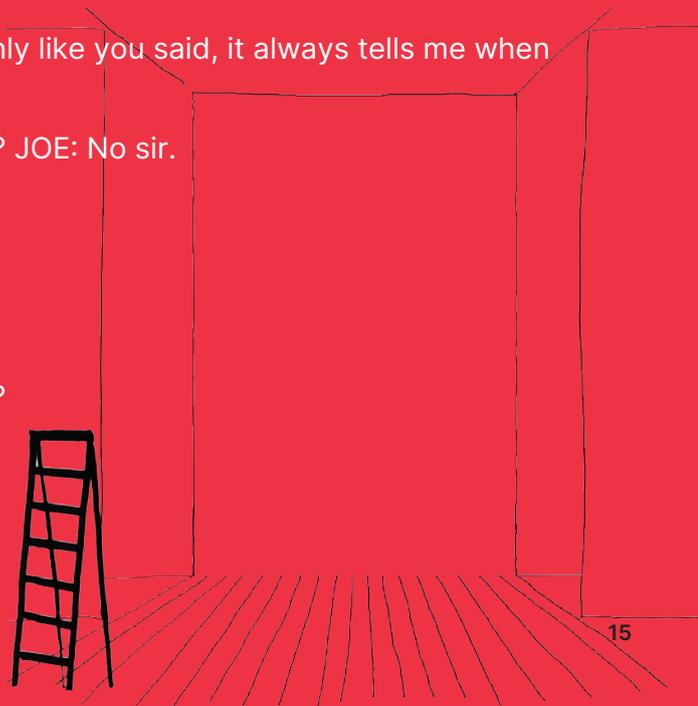
JOE No sir.

DR. GIBBS What's it telling you today? Goin' to rain?

JOE: No sir.

DR. GIBBS Sure?

JOE Yes sir.



DR. GIBBS Knee ever make a mistake?

JOE No sir.

SCENE 2: MRS WEBB AND MRS GIBBS

MRS. GIBBS Now, Myrtle, I've got to tell you something, because if I don't tell somebody, I'll burst.

MRS. WEBB Why, Julia Gibbs!

MRS. GIBBS Myrtle, did one of those second-hand furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

MRS. WEBB (Reaches for a bean, snapping ends off and putting in a bowl between them.)
No-o.

MRS. GIBBS Well, he called on me. First I thought he was a patient wantin' to see Doctor Gibbs. He wormed his way into my parlor, and he offered me \$350 for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

MRS. WEBB Why, Julia Gibbs! (Continues to work on the beans)

MRS. GIBBS (Continues work) He did! That old thing! Why, it was so big I didn't know where to put it and I almost gave it to Cousin Hester Wilcox.

MRS. WEBB: Well, you're going to take it, aren't you?

MRS. GIBBS I don't know.

MRS. WEBB You don't know!—Three hundred and fifty dollars? What's come over you?

MRS. GIBBS Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away some place on a trip I'd sell it like that. (Stops work) Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. (Glances slyly at MRS WEBB, who is shocked, then laughs, hand to face.) Oh, I don't know. It sounds crazy, I supposed,

MRS. WEBB How's the Doctor feel about it?

MRS. GIBBS Well, I did beat about the bush a little bit and said that if I got a legacy—that's the way I put it—I'd make him take me.

MRS. WEBB M-m-m—What did he say? (Reaches for beans)

MRS. GIBBS You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him, since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and

MRS. WEBB Well, Mr. Webb just admires the way Doctor Gibbs knows everything about the Civil War. Mr. Webb's a good mind to give up Napoleon and move over to the Civil War, only Doctor Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.

MRS. GIBBS That's a fact, Doctor Gibbs is never so happy as when he's at Antietam or Gettysburg. The times I've walked over those hills, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we were going to buy it.

MRS. WEBB Well, if that second-hand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you sell it. And then you'll get to see Paris, all right. Just keep droppin' hints from time to time—that's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know.

MRS. GIBBS Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in your life before you die, you ought to see a country where they don't talk in English and don't even want to.



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

2. THE STAGE MANAGER STEPS IN

Purpose: Explore narration and breaking the fourth wall

Activity: One student plays the Stage Manager.

- Other students freeze in a tableau of Grover's Corners.
- The Stage Manager walks through the scene, describing:
 - What people are doing
 - What they are thinking but not saying
- Rotate Stage Managers.

Reflection Question:

How does the Stage Manager shape how we understand the town and its people?

This can also be done with other text or with an improvised scene.



Photo: Rehearsals, Helen Murray

3. TIMELINE WALK

Purpose: Examine time as a theme

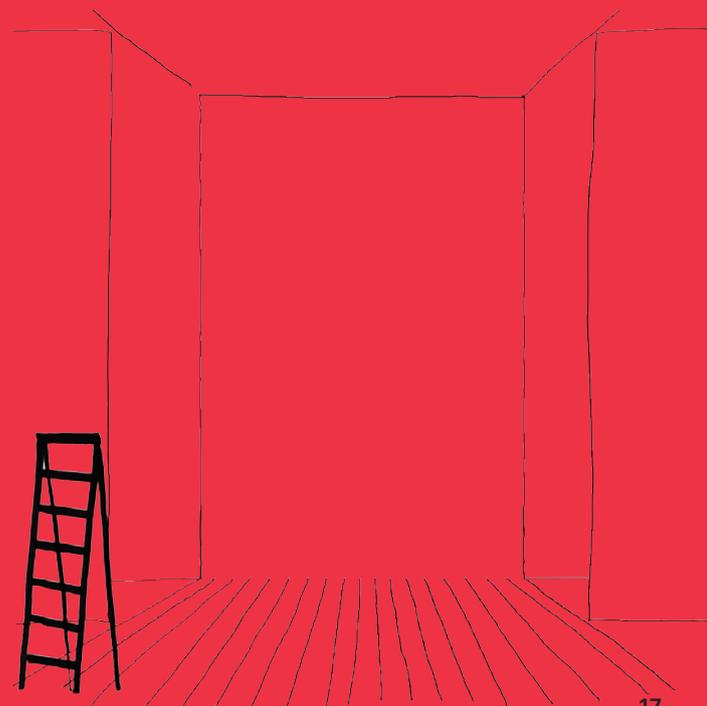
Activity:

Create a physical timeline across the room:

- Birth → Childhood → Marriage → Death
- Students step into moments from the play and speak one line or thought that fits that stage of life.

Question:

How does *Our Town* suggest we should think about time?



Welsh National Theatre A / AND **ROSE THEATRE**
CYD-GYNHYRCHIAD / CO-PRODUCTION

OUR TOWN

GAN /
BY **THORNTON WILDER**

Gyda / Starring
MICHAEL SHEEN



Cyfarwyddwyd gan / Directed by
FRANCESCA GOODRIDGE

Cyswllt Creadigol / Creative Associate
RUSSELL T DAVIES

CREDITS

Credits

Editor: Lucy Dennis-Morrell

Design: Sarah Heather

Photos: Helen Murray

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Movement Director (Jess Williams)

Sarah Chipperfield (Schools and Participation Coordinator)



Photo: Rehearsals, Helen Murray