

Michael D. Mitchell, *Artistic Director*

Aaron Young, *Managing Director*

# STUDY GUIDE

for



**by William Inge**

**Directed by Michael D. Mitchell**  
**Set Design by Robert Klingelhofer**  
**Costume Design by Beth Dunkelberger**  
**Lighting Design by Bill Simmons**  
**Stage Management by Djuana M. Strauch**

**January 24 – February 10, 2008**

**07-08 Season Co-Sponsors:**

**Fulton Bank**  
LISTENING.



**Bus Stop Co-Sponsors:**



# INTRODUCTION



William Inge

When William Inge's play, *Bus Stop*, opened on Broadway March 2, 1955, it was an immediate commercial and critical success. Based on the playwright's earlier one-act play, *People In The Wind*, the new piece involved a pair of young lovers and their struggles to find love in the modern world. Unlike Inge's earlier two plays, *Come Back, Little Sheba* and *Picnic*, this work was not an in-depth study of relationships, but rather a romantic comedy. That said, Inge's hope is that *Bus Stop*, through its cast of characters, would portray the full spectrum of romantic relationships, from positive to negative. The play takes place in 1953 at a street corner restaurant that serves as a stopover for buses in a small town west of Kansas City. Here, a group of colorful characters is stranded by a winter snowstorm.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES & DISCUSSION IDEAS

1. Ideally, your class can read the play before coming to see it.
2. As noted in the INTRODUCTION, the play takes place in a small Kansas town in the 1950s.



Famous button, worn by supporters of the Presidential candidate Ike Eisenhower

- a. Have your class explore this time period. Ask students to research the era and present their findings to their classmates. There are many subjects, such as: "I like Ike," Sputnik, hula hoops, James Dean, 3-D movies, Elvis Presley, Milton Berle, fallout shelters, McCarthyism, and the Cold War.

- b. Based on their research, examine the differences and similarities between the world of the fifties and that of 2008.



50s Fashion icon,  
Audrey Hepburn

c. Invite a grandparent or older teacher into the classroom to discuss their personal memories of the 1950s. Students might be particularly interested in school, clothing, music, and dating.

d. Find yearbooks from your school from the 1950s. Use them as a basis for discussion on language, activities, fashions and hairstyles of the period.

e. Bring music from the 1950s to class to listen to and discuss. Make sure to provide a range of contrasting styles. For example, compare “How Much Is That Doggie In The Window?” to “You Ain’t Nothin’ But A Hound Dog.”

f. Find a DVD of a 1950s comedy show. Watch it in class and discuss how the world views it represents differs from that depicted in today’s television. Consider gender roles, parenting, ethics, language, topical references, music, race, etc. How does *Bus Stop* compare to 1950s TV comedy?



Sid Caesar’s Comedy Hour

3. Discuss how a playwright creates the world of a play through setting, dialogue, and character.

a. How do choices made in these regards influence our emotional response to a play? What might be difficult about setting a play in 1953 Kansas? What might be easy? How does the playwright convince us that the world on stage is “real?” What standards do we use to evaluate the “truth” of something onstage?

b. Based on your students’ research done before seeing the show, how does the play represent the real world of the 1950s? By comparison, what elements in the play represent an unreal, even idealized, mythical America?

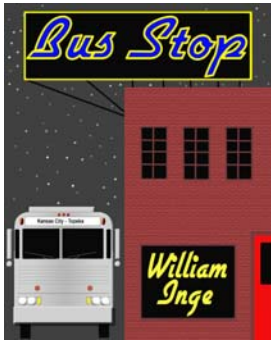
c. Which characters take risks in the course of the play and why? What is at stake for these characters?



d. Compare and contrast the female and male characters. How are their expectations, motivations, and treatment different, and what do they reveal about the world of the play? Are those differences artifacts of the 1950s or still prevalent today? Do the choices of the females anticipate the feminism of the future? If so, how?

e. Have your students determine the “destination” of each character in the play. Using the format of a map, ask them to plot the obstacles each character must overcome to reach his or her destination.

Use this map to explore the social, gender, age and class restrictions of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century America.



f. A production of a play requires the director and designers to make many decisions about how the script will be realized on the stage. If your students had the opportunity to read the play before coming to the Fulton, discuss how our production might have differed from their expectations. How does the set designer give the audience a sense of time, place, and style? How does the costume designer convey a not only these, but also a sense of each character's personality? Finally, how does the lighting and sound design shape the audience's experience of the play?

g. The speech of the character Dr. Lyman is littered with quotations, many from Shakespeare's writings. A few are noted below. Have your class use library materials and the internet to research the source of the quotations and their original context. Discuss the nature of the materials quoted. What do these words say about Dr. Lyman's character, his education and motivations?



William Shakespeare

*"This castle hath a pleasant seat."*

*"Nymph in thy orisons, be all my sins remembered."*

*"That time of year thou may'st in me behold  
When yellow leaves, or few, do hang  
Upon those boughs."*

*"Shall I compare thee to a Summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And Summer's lease hath all too short a date."*

h. Re-imagine the play in an urban 2008 setting. What changes would have to be made? What in the play remains constant and true in life today?

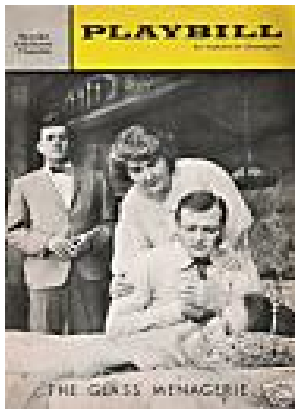
4. Your students might be interested in some background on the playwright who won the Pulitzer Prize, the Drama Critics Circle Award, the Outer Circle Award, and other such theatrical honors. The following was written by Dylan Southard, a dramaturg at Centerstage:

*William Inge was the perfect writer for his time and place. In fact, his life and the way it was reflected in his plays are perfect metaphors for the 1950s – more specifically, the Midwest of the 1950s, a setting in which the dichotomy between what was seen and what was felt was never clearer. Much like the time in which*

*he prospered, Inge projected an aura of comfortable success. His plays, appealing to critics and audiences alike, made him a respected and admired member of the theater community. He flourished financially and found success not only on the stage, but, eventually, on the silver screen as well. Underneath this façade, however, there lay secrets that Inge was forced to bury, precisely because of the time in which he was living.*

*Inge was a troubled man. His homosexuality was a badly kept secret that caused him much shame, as did the life-long struggle with alcoholism that led him in and out of Alcoholics Anonymous. These would weigh on Inge his whole life and would make him profoundly unknowable.*

*Independence is in the southeast corner of Kansas, just north of the Oklahoma state line. It was here that Inge was born on May 3, 1913; and it was in this seemingly prototypical small-town Midwest setting that his most successful works were set. Inge had a great love for Independence. He understood the intimacy that a community like his could create. As he said “I’ve always been glad that I grew up in Independence, because I feel it gave me a knowledge of people and a love of people... People who grow up in small towns get to know each other so much more clearly than they do in cities.” It is ironic, therefore, that Inge was forced to hide all of his painful truths underneath the microscope-like setting that he describes.*



The Glass Menagerie Playbill

*Inge’s career as a writer began to take shape in the 1940s. As a young man, he had dreams of becoming an actor but was forced to abandon them, much to his disappointment. Nevertheless, his interest in theater did not wane. Following stints as a news announcer and an English teacher, Inge took a job as drama and music critic for the St. Louis Star-Times in 1944. It was then that Inge met and became friendly with an up-and-comer named Tennessee Williams. The two hit it off, and Inge would eventually accompany Williams to Chicago to see a performance of **The Glass Menagerie** in its pre-Broadway run. Inge was enraptured by it, particularly its use of the writer’s own life as inspiration. Encouraged by Williams, with whom some speculate Inge carried on a brief and tumultuous affair, he began to write. It was Kansas that Inge turned to for his inspiration.*

*His 1950 Broadway debut, **Come Back, Little Sheba**, was set in “a run-down neighborhood of a Midwestern city.” **Picnic**, his next piece, takes place in a small Kansas town... as does **Bus Stop**. ...Not only was this the environment that Inge had first-hand experience with, but his characters were people he had grown up around. Inge wrote knowingly of the dynamics of neighbors, friends, and family members in these small towns, and it brought him great renown.*



Picnic Playbill

...Inge's success easily transcended to Hollywood as well, though his relationship to the film industry was decidedly love/hate. Though fascinated by Hollywood since childhood, Inge never could make peace with its hash demand that he sell all rights of ownership to the material he so painstakingly crafted. **Come Back, Little Sheba** was made into a movie in 1952 with Burt Lancaster and Oscar-winner Shirley Booth repeating her Tony-winning role. **Picnic** hit the screens in 1955, featuring a star-making turn by Kim Novak. Finally, Marilyn Monroe starred in the film version of **Bus Stop** in 1956. In addition, Inge won an Oscar in 1961 for **Splendor In The Grass** – also, not surprisingly, set in Kansas.



Unfortunately, **Splendor In The Grass** marked Inge's last commercial success, either on the stage or the screen. **A Loss of Roses** (1960), **Natural Affection** (1963), **Where's Daddy?** (1966), and **The Last Pad** (1970) were all critical and financial bombs, as Inge abandoned his trademark characters and settings in favor of more lurid, urban subject matter. After this string of commercial and critical failures, Inge's self-loathing reached a boiling point – born from the years of carrying his burdensome secrets and doubt over his own talents as a writer. As one biographer put it, Inge “ran out of reasons to think he was any good.” In 1973, at the age of 60, he committed suicide.

The most frequent criticism leveled at Inge is that he was a boring, predictable, pedestrian writer; and that his stories were too quaint, too simplistic, almost naïve. They were the literary equivalent of Kansas, perhaps. In truth, when compared with some of the other big names in theater at the time, these criticisms aren't entirely unfair. Samuel Beckett's masterpiece of existentialism, **Waiting For Godot**, was published in English in the same year as **Picnic**, and Arthur Miller's **Death of a Salesman** – still viewed today as the ultimate theatrical expression of American angst and anxiety – had come four years before. Nevertheless, to label Inge in this way is to miss the point entirely. He work showed us a side of life in the Midwest that he himself was never able to reveal: the passion and joy and fear and desperation that can lie underneath even the most quaint of environments.

5. Learn more about theater. The Fulton offers a wide variety of theater arts opportunities for students here at our National Historic Landmark building and at your very own school!

## OTHER SCHOOL-DAY MATINEES AT THE FULTON THIS SEASON



**TREASURE ISLAND.** Robert Louis Stevenson’s classic tale stands as one of the all-time great adventure stories. Now, the Fulton is honored to have been selected to stage the world premiere of *Treasure Island: A Musical Adventure*. You’ll want to be on deck for all the suspense, excitement and laughs as young Jim Hawkins ventures into a world of cutthroat pirates – including the infamous, blood-thirsty culinary wizard, Long John Silver – to find where the “X” marks the spot. **Suggested for students grades 3-12** . March 11 – SOLD OUT. March 18 - *Seating Still Available*

Contact the box office at (717) 397-7425

## AND AVAILABLE ON TOUR – WINTER/SPRING 2008

**BOCON.** This fable filled with humor, enchantment, and song, tells the story of 12-year-old Miguel who flees Central America for the United States. A natural-born storyteller and irrepressible “big mouth” or in Spanish “bocon,” Miguel loses his voice when he loses his parents and begins a metaphorical journey north to the City of Angels (Los Angeles). Along the way he meets up with an unusual traveling companion, La Llorona, the legendary “Weeping Woman” of Latin American mythology. Through their unlikely friendship, Miguel finds his voice and the courage to cross the border to a new life. Miguel’s story is relevant to refugee children from all parts of the world, and to any child who is learning the meanings of finding one’s own “voice.” **Suggested for all ages.**



**MACBETH: BLOOD-IN/BLOOD-OUT.** A lean and mean adaptation of the Shakespeare tragedy that combines modern colloquial narrative with the poetry of the original text to produce a dynamic new take on the classic, one especially designed for older children and teens. With pulsating techno-industrial music, a set of mobile red poles creating a sparse urban feel, Project Runway inspired costumes, and light and shadow, four live actors and a narrator/DJ bring to life this timeless tale of the dangers of unbridled desire and ambition unchecked. “A *street-wise adaptation*. *This modern interpretation got thumbs-up reviews from students. It really affected them in a powerful way.*” - Diane Bitting, Theatre Critic. **Suggested for ages 12 and up.**



**SOWING THE WIND.** A highly interactive theater piece that teaches about personal responsibility and good decision-making through the story of an American farm family. Farming is one of the most dangerous endeavors in America. More than a simple occupation, it is a way of life that involves workers of all ages, including kids. In *Sowing The Wind*, a father, mother, and son on a small family farm face difficult decisions regarding their health and safety. Audiences become active participants in helping these characters choose actions that will promote their well-being. “*Do not hesitate. Walk – no, run – to book a production. Your life could depend on it. Whether a young child or a family elder, all will relate to the core themes. A show that could save a life.*” – Dr. MeeCee Baker, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. **Suggested for all ages.**



Contact Aaron Young at (717) 394-7133 or [Ayoung@thefulton.org](mailto:Ayoung@thefulton.org)

ALL PLAYS INCLUDE ACCOMPANYING STUDY GUIDES

## **RESIDENCIES AND WORKSHOPS**

The Fulton Family Theatre is also on the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts “Arts-In-Education” roster. Funding is available from the PCA to support residencies in schools. We can tailor-make a residency to suit your educational needs and also offer the nationally acclaimed ***NEIGHBORHOOD BRIDGES*** program.

The Fulton was selected as the first satellite site of the Tony-Award winning Children’s Theatre Company of Minneapolis *Neighborhood Bridges* program, a critical literacy program that has been endorsed by the federal Department of Education and is now hosted in 12 satellite sites across the country, from New York to Hawaii. *Neighborhood Bridges* is a combination of storytelling, writing, and creative drama that empowers and animates young people to think critically and become the storytellers of their own lives. The Fulton’s faculty of artist/teachers has been trained in its methodology, and offer it in classrooms and for after-school programs to students from pre-school through middle school age.

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