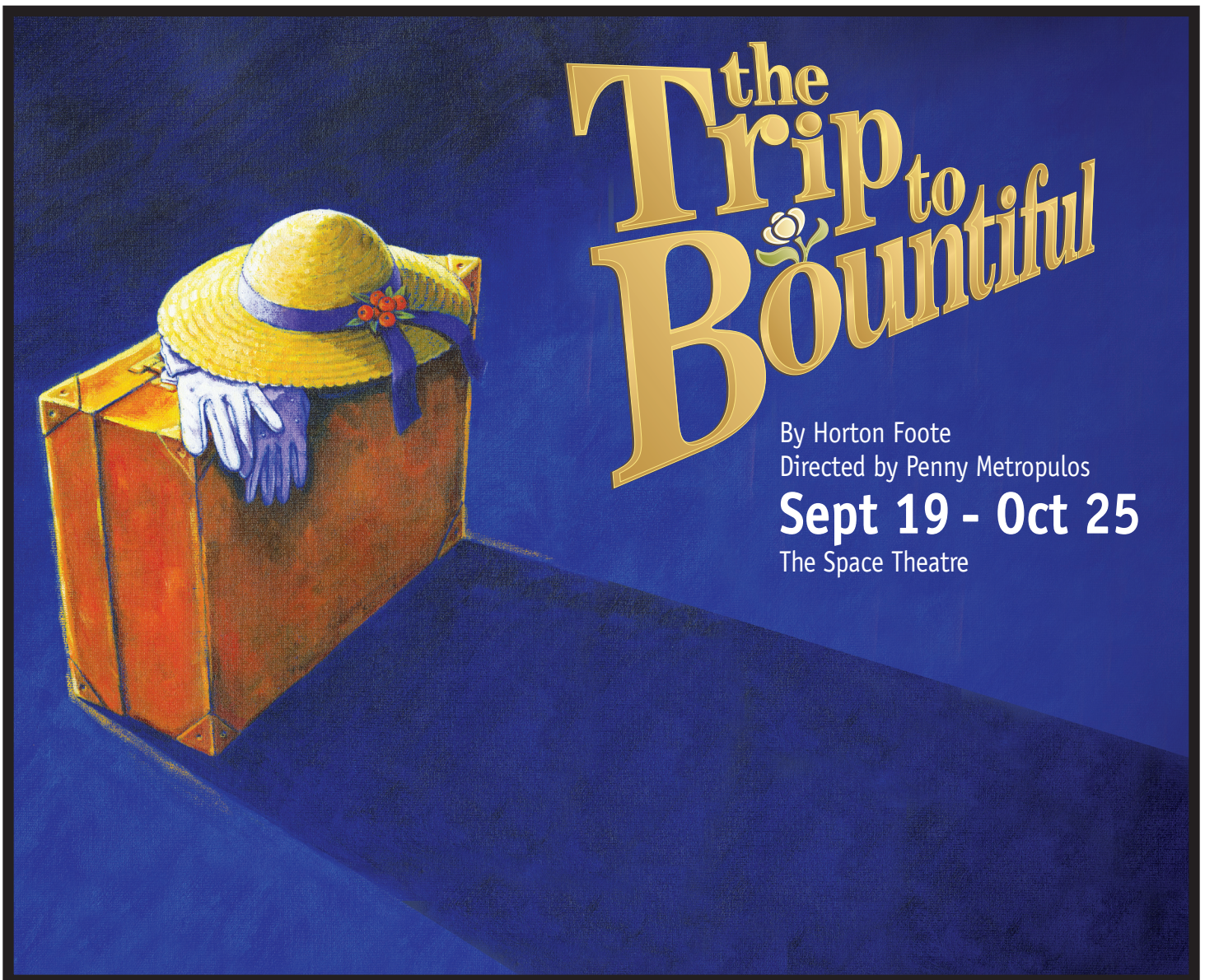


InsideOUT

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InsideOUT

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Synopsis

Mrs. Carrie Watts lives in a cramped apartment in Houston with her son Ludie and daughter-in-law Jessie Mae, who have been married 15 years. Ludie has been ill and just recently returned to work after a two-year absence. Jessie Mae's favorite pastime is to sit in a drugstore sipping cold Coca-Colas. Mrs. Watts is elderly and has a weak heart; her dearest wish is to return to her home in Bountiful, Texas.

After a late-night argument between the two women, Jessie Mae is rightfully suspicious at Mrs. Watts's silence the next morning; she tells Ludie she thinks his mother is going to run away again and try to go to Bountiful. When Jessie Mae leaves the apartment for the drug store and the beauty parlor, Mrs. Watts does exactly that. She takes her Social Security check, which she'd hidden from Jessie Mae, and goes to the bus station. Upon learning there's no longer a bus to Bountiful, she buys a ticket to Harrison, a nearby town. Ludie and Jessie Mae are hot on her trail, but with the help of some kind strangers sympathetic to her plight, Mrs. Watts might achieve her goal of seeing Bountiful one more time.

Horton Foote's Achievements

Horton Foote's theatrical career began 70 years ago in 1938. In 1995 he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama with *The Young Man from Atlanta*. Most of his plays take place in and around Houston and Harrison, Texas, a fictional recreation of his hometown of Wharton, Texas. These plays illuminate life in southeast Texas from the Civil War to the 1980s. Horton Foote won an Academy Award for his adapted screenplay for *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962), an Academy Award for his original screenplay *Tender Mercies* (1982), and was nominated for an Academy Award for his screenplay adaptation of *The Trip to Bountiful* (1985). He received the Writers Guild Laurel Award for Lifetime Achievement in 1993.

Horton Foote was honored with the William Inge Award for Lifetime Achievement in the American Theatre in 1989 and a Gold Medal for Drama from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1998. On December 20, 2000, President Bill Clinton conferred the National Medal of Arts on Horton Foote and noted that Foote's six-decade-long, award-winning career established him as the nation's most prolific writer for stage, film, and television.

The Trip to Bountiful

The Trip to Bountiful made its way through the three media by virtue of its inherent assets. In this special work, Foote dealt with three subjects that lifted it above others. It captured the mythical pattern of coming home; it utilized the jarring contrast between big-city life and a simpler way in the country, thus exploiting the assault on urban absurdity. It also stressed the human need to belong to a family, a house, or a town.

— Charles S. Watson in *Horton Foote: A Literary Biography*

The *Trip to Bountiful* has been produced on television, stage, and screen. Horton Foote discusses the story's origin: "I had an idea based on a certain situation in my family that haunted me. Originally, I had tried to start the story of *The Trip to Bountiful* on the day that Mrs. Watts was forced by her father to marry her husband—emotionally, if not physically forced—and the story just wasn't working. By that time, I knew enough to know that you can't use your well if it's not working. So I just put the work aside, and I don't know how or why—what the mechanics were—but a couple of days later, I realized I had started the story all wrong. I decided I had to start at the end of her life. When I did that, I wrote the script very quickly."

Producer Fred Coe had started the *Philco-Good-year Playhouse* and was commissioning people to write television plays, Horton Foote among them. Coe wanted another script from Foote, and so *The*

Trip to Bountiful was born. Foote revealed, "You had to go in and tell him just a few lines of the script, which I have always felt was a horrendous experience. We'd call it a pitch today. Fred Coe used to say that all I told him was something about this old lady who wanted to get back home. I don't believe that; maybe it's true. Then he used to say—he always laughed about this—'Two days later, you sent me a full script.'"

Horton Foote explained the process of television plays: "Television in those very early days had to be performed live, which meant it went out over the airways unedited, and once the performance began it couldn't be stopped. In its immediacy it was much like live theater. The plays I wrote for television were really one-act plays, and now some years later they're still being done as plays."

Of the night *The Trip to Bountiful* aired on television, Foote said, "None of us realized the power and phenomenon of the play, but that night we

began to sense it, because after the show the phones in the studio started to ring, and they rang and rang. People were calling and talking about Lillian Gish. They had seen her performance and were excited because they had not seen her for years. The response was so emotional.”

In her 1949 autobiography Lillian Gish wrote that, after Foote’s television play about a woman looking for “her lost spirit” was shown, the CBS president phoned the head of NBC to say, “Tonight television came of age.” She also pointed out that *The Trip to Bountiful* was the first television film requested for the archives of the Museum of Modern Art.

The Theatre Guild asked Horton Foote to turn his teleplay script into a full-length play, which he did. *The Trip to Bountiful* played in Westport, Connecticut, then in Wilmington and Philadelphia before arriving in New York for its Broadway premiere on November 3, 1953. Foote revealed, “The out-of-town notices had been just stunning, but the New York notices were disappointing—okay, but not what we’d hoped. Then we had a newspaper strike, and it was rough. But the play had great partisans, even then. People would come to it three times to see it. People who liked the play liked it a lot.” Brooks Atkinson in his *New York Times* review of November 4, 1953, called Lillian Gish’s performance a masterpiece, but was dismissive of the play itself.

Of *The Trip to Bountiful*’s journey to the silver screen, Horton Foote said, “Over the years, I had many movie offers, but I kept turning them down because I wanted Lillian, very badly, to play the part; and in those days, Hollywood felt she wasn’t bankable. People tried to talk me into all kinds of actresses they felt were bankable – like Katharine Hepburn – all very interesting women. But I just said, ‘No, this role belongs to Lillian Gish.’ When she hit 90, I realized it was a losing cause, and I couldn’t do anything about it any longer.” Soon thereafter, director Peter Masterson (the playwright’s cousin) contacted Horton Foote about making a movie of *The Trip to Bountiful*. Masterson suggested Lillian Gish for the role, but Foote told him, “I think she’s too old now. The whole

point of Mrs. Watts is that she isn’t really a very old woman – they have put her into that category. And secondly, I don’t think, physically, she can take the job. If you ask her, she’ll say yes; so don’t dare ask her.” Foote admits, “I never saw Lillian after that. I hope she forgave me, but she knew how loyal I had been up until that time. It must have been hard on her, because she loved the part.”

Horton Foote and Peter Masterson selected Geraldine Page for the role of Mrs. Carrie Watts. Comparing the two actresses, Foote said, “Lillian had certain qualities that seemed ethereal, and at moments, she had great spirituality, but she was as tough as a pine knot. She really was strong and had as much strength as Geraldine Page. Geraldine didn’t play it quite as purposefully belligerent; she played it more slyly than Lillian. But they were both wonderful.” Foote also praised the performance of Ellen Burstyn in the mid-1990s revival of the play: “I’ve now seen three extraordinary actresses do *Bountiful*: Lillian Gish, Geraldine Page and Ellen Burstyn. You can’t find three more different actresses. They’re each wonderful in the same part. It’s like three virtuoso violinists playing the same concerto.”

Foote declared of his play, “I never tire of watching it.”

While Horton Foote was generally pleased with the movie version of *The Trip to Bountiful*, he did disagree with director Peter Masterson on some choices. One of their differences involved the music Masterson used at the beginning of the film: a beautiful soprano version of the hymn “Jesus Is Calling Me Home.” Foote complained “That’s terrible. Mrs. Watts would never have sung like that.” Masterson countered with “She thinks she did.”

*There is a house that is no more a house
Upon a farm that is no more a farm
And in a town that is no more a town*
—from “Directive” by Robert Frost

Wharton, Texas

I have heard tales of the beginnings of Wharton from the earliest years of my life.

—Horton Foote

Horton Foote's childhood (and current) home is Wharton, Texas, present population just over 9,000. Wharton, elevation 101 feet, is 55 miles southwest of Houston and 45 miles from the Gulf of Mexico. The Wharton of Foote's childhood had a population of about three thousand, nearly half African American. He often spent time with Walter and Eliza, black siblings who worked for his grandparents, Tom and Daisy Brooks, and who each had a one-room house in the Brooks' backyard. When Horton was a junior in high school, his cousin Robert Abell, a freshman at the University of Texas, asked him to write a short story. Robert was failing English class but had been told he might pass if he turned in a good story; he chose his cousin Horton because he was always reading (as a sophomore, age 12, he'd joined both the Book-of-the-Month Club and the Literary Guild), so Robert assumed he could write. Horton had never written before, but turned out a short story called "A Pinch of Salt" based on tales told him by Walter and Eliza. Robert passed his English course, but Horton Foote would not return to writing for another ten years.

The Wharton school system was segregated, as were all schools in the South. Horton Foote attended the New Wharton Independent School Building, built a few years before he was enrolled in first grade at age five. One Mexican student also attended, but a few years later an all-Mexican school was formed in the old schoolhouse where Horton's mother had gone as a girl. Schoolteachers were unmarried and often fresh out of college.

If a teacher married, he or she was allowed to finish out the school term, but not to continue teach-

ing. Horton revealed, "The teachers were watched like hawks for any moral lapses. If they smoked it had to be in secret, and they were expected to attend church regularly. I remember one teacher telling us that the North was right during the Civil War. One of the students reported it to her parents and soon it was all over town. The teacher was called before the school board and instructed to tell her class that the South was right or else she would be fired."

In the 1920s oil and sulfur were discovered around Wharton, Texas. Boom towns blossomed nearby, and many families signed oil leases on their farms. Few became rich, but many benefited from the oil income that supplemented their farm earnings. In 1933, Horton Foote's father sold some rental land in order to get the \$1500 needed for Horton's tuition to the dramatic school at the Pasadena Playhouse. At that time, a close friend, Louie Worthing, offered Mr. Foote, Sr. a chance to invest that \$1500 in an oil pool that he was relatively sure had good potential. Foote carefully considered the investment but decided against risking Horton's tuition money. There was oil on the land and Worthing and the other investors ended up making a great deal of money.

Horton Foote called his mother "a natural-born letter writer." After he left home at age 16, "My mother wrote me every day, long letters full of news of our family, friends, and the town, and nearly always included the menu they'd had for supper, which was our big meal since my father couldn't get home at noon." Even after Foote's marriage his mother wrote three or four times a week. These letters kept Foote in touch with the happenings of his family and his hometown of Wharton, Texas.

1953 In Context

Entertainment:

- Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and Herman Wouk's *The Caine Mutiny Court-Martial* opened on Broadway.
- On January 19, 68% of all television sets in the United States tuned in to *I Love Lucy* to watch Lucy give birth. Later that year the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) approved color television sets, the first of which went on sale December 30 for about \$1,175.
- The Disney animated-film *Peter Pan* premiered in New York City. At the 25th Annual Academy Awards, Oscar-winning movies included *The Greatest Show on Earth*, *The Quiet Man*, *High Noon* and *Come Back, Little Sheba*.
- Ian Fleming published his first James Bond novel *Casino Royale*. Hugh Hefner published the first issue of *Playboy* magazine, featuring a photo of Marilyn Monroe on the cover; 54,175 copies sold at 50 cents each.

Politics:

- Dwight D. Eisenhower was inaugurated President of the United States, replacing Harry S. Truman; the next month Eisenhower refused the clemency appeal for Ethel and Julius Rosenberg.
- On March 5, Joseph Stalin died after ruling the Soviet Union for 26 years.
- The coronation of Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom took place in London's Westminster Abbey on June 2.
- On September 5, the United Nations did not accept the Soviet Union's suggestion to accept China as a member.

World Events:

- Sir Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay performed the first successful ascent to the summit of Mount Everest on May 29.
- The Korean War ended when an armistice was signed by the United States, the People's Republic of China, North Korea and South Korea.
- On December 10, Albert Schweitzer was given the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his work at his hospital at Lambaréné in tropical Africa; with the \$33,000 prize money he started Lambaréné's leprosarium.

Nuclear Threat:

- On January 7, President Harry S. Truman announced that the United States had a hydrogen bomb.
- On August 8, Soviet Prime Minister Georgy Malenkov announced that the Soviet Union had a hydrogen bomb.
- Dwight D. Eisenhower on October 30 formally approved the top secret document of the United States National Security Council NSC 162.2, which stated that the United States' arsenal of nuclear weapons must be maintained and expanded to counter the communist threat. On December 8, Eisenhower delivered his Atoms for Peace address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York City.

Science and Technology:

- On February 28, James D. Watson and Francis Crick announced the discovery of the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule. The next month, Jonas Salk announced his polio vaccine. The Kinsey reports are issued August 18.
- The first Chevrolet Corvette was built June 30 at Flint, Michigan. In October, the UNIVAC 1103 is the first computer to use random access memory.

1953 In Context

Natural Disasters:

- On May 11, an F5 tornado hit downtown Waco, Texas, killing 114. On June 8, a tornado in Flint, Michigan, killed 115 people; the next day the same storm produced a tornado in Worcester, Massachusetts, and killed 94.
- In Turkey, an earthquake killed 250 people on March 18. Greece experienced its worst natural disaster in centuries when a magnitude 7.2 earthquake devastated most of the Ionian Sea islands. A September 25 hurricane killed more than 1,000 people in Southeast Asia.

Popular Music:

- “That’s Amore,” Dean Martin; “Your Cheatin’ Heart,” Hank Williams; “Don’t Let the Stars Get in Your Eyes,” Perry Como; “The Doggie in the Window,” Pattie Page; “Stranger in Paradise,” Tony Bennett; “I’ve Got the World on a String,” Frank Sinatra.

Cost of Living:

Gallon of milk \$0.94; loaf of bread \$0.16; dozen eggs \$0.72; postage stamp \$0.03; minimum wage per hour \$0.75; gallon of gas \$0.22; new car \$1,850; new home \$17,400; average income \$4,011

Houston, Texas

In 1836, Texas won its independence from Mexico; that same year Houston was founded and named after General Sam Houston, who had led the Texan army to victory and became the first president of the Republic of Texas. Houston was the republic’s capital until 1839, when the government moved to Austin. In 1846, Texas became the United States of America’s 28th state.

Houston reached a population of 5,000 by 1860. When Texas seceded from the Union in 1861, Sam Houston resigned as governor after refusing to take the Confederate oath of allegiance. The Houston chapter of the Ku Klux Klan was established in 1920; a ceremony in 1921 initiated 2,051 Houston residents into the Klan. In 1923 Houston’s Mayor Oscar Holcombe was banished from the Klan for defying their mandates.

In 1948, Houston annexed six suburbs, doubling its size to 216 square miles. The Port of Houston that year ranked second nationally in total tonnage.

Houston’s population reached 596,000 in 1950. Houston’s weather is generally hot and humid, with average high temperatures in the 60s in the winter and 90s in the summer with humidity to match. Houston typically sees at least 3 inches of rain per month, with June averaging over 6 inches. Second National Bank had become Houston’s first air-conditioned building in 1923; by 1953 Houston was the most air-conditioned city in the country. Also in 1953, KLEE-TV broadcasted Houston’s first commercial television program.

Horton Foote's Family

Horton Foote grew up in Wharton, Texas, surrounded by members of the Horton, Foote, and Brooks (his maternal grandparents) families extending to great-uncles and third cousins. Horton Foote was the fourth generation of Hortons to be born in Wharton. Many in his family were born storytellers, especially his paternal great-aunt Loula, from whom Horton as a child loved to hear the family stories repeated. He heard and remembered many stories from his family members about the town's beginnings and the family's colorful history; many of these stories later inspired his writing.

At age 12, Albert Horton Foote (the playwright's father) went with his uncle Albert Horton to work in a plantation store. His uncle soon missed his gambling friends and returned to town, but young Albert remained at the store and lived with a black couple named Martha and Douglas; he later reported life at the plantation was one of the happiest times in his life. When he attended business school in Houston, he rented a room near his mother's home; she agreed to feed him breakfast each morning if he came by the house after his stepfather Pete Cleveland had left. After school, Albert worked as a traveling salesman in East Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Years later when his mother came to Wharton to visit her sisters, he often managed to stay at the men's clothing store he owned and ran until after she'd left his home.

Horton Foote's mother, Hallie Gautier, began seeing Albert Foote in 1914 and continued to meet him in secret even after forbidden to do so by her father, who declared Albert a dissipated, impoverished ne'er-do-well. The young pair eloped on Valentine's Day 1915, marrying at a friend's home. The Methodist preacher had refused to marry them, so the Baptist minister agreed to perform the ceremony, but only after Hallie called her father to inform him what she was doing. Tom Brooks begged his daughter not to marry Albert Foote, but she did anyway, and they had a long and happy marriage. Hallie's parents would not speak to her after her marriage for an entire year – until they heard she was pregnant. At that point, her father offered to build a house for the young married couple and give them some land adjacent to his own; Albert insisted that the land and home be in Hallie's name so no one would say Albert had married Hallie for her father's money. The new house was built directly behind Tom Brooks' home. As with many homes in southeast Texas, both homes were elevated to prevent flood water from entering the house; Horton Foote remembered walking upright underneath the houses until about age ten.

Childhood

Playwright Albert Horton Foote, Junior, was born in 1916. His brothers Tom Brooks and John Speed followed in 1921 and 1923. "Because of the difference in our ages, I had little in common with my brothers, and tried to ignore them as much as possible, but one afternoon after seeing *Beau Geste* with Gary Cooper, a story about the devotion of three brothers to each other, I left the theater and ran home through the cotton fields as fast as I could, filled with a newfound love for my own brothers and swearing to myself that I would always be as devoted to them as Gary Cooper was to his brothers in the film. I found my brothers playing at Tinkertoys and I grabbed and hugged both. They looked at me like I was crazy and went back to their Tinkertoys." As an adult, Tom followed Horton to New York to study acting but was drafted into the army early in World War II; he died when his plane was shot down over Germany in 1944. (Horton Foote had been rejected by the military in 1942 when at his physical "it was discovered I had a hernia, which I knew nothing about.")

Horton Foote grew up surrounded by his Brooks relatives. Family discussions often included speculation on why Tom Brooks hadn't wanted any of his daughters to marry or what would ever become of the Brooks boys – his uncles Thomas Harry, John Speed and William Smith. Brother, Speed and Billy were always searching fruitlessly for jobs, wasting their opportunities and gambling off what little money they came by.

Not knowing what to do, Daisy Brooks repeatedly rescued her sons and supported them financially, but the stress took a toll on her health. Brother had been sent to Texas A&M University, but was expelled after getting a local girl pregnant. After Tom Brooks' death, Brother was appointed to take over some of his father's duties, but the experiment was a financial disaster and his mother had to purchase the land he'd mortgaged and lost. Speed was twice arrested and imprisoned in California for heroin possession. Billy took night classes to become a lawyer and his mother set him up in an office, but after two days without clients Billy got drunk and declared he'd never go back to the office. When Horton was 13, his father began employing him as a clerk in his men's clothing store.

"I think my father brought me into the store at such an early age so he could keep a watchful eye on me, and teach me, as he said, the value of a dollar, and I'm sure to try in any way that he could to keep me from becoming like the Brooks boys."

Horton Foote's grandfather Tom Brooks died when the playwright was nine years old. Tom Brooks had been a respected community leader; he had leased his land to many tenant farmers and lent money at fair rates to those in need. However, all his business arrangements were sealed with a handshake rather than written contracts. Despite the townspeople's insistence at Tom Brooks' death that he was a great man and would never be forgotten, Horton saw his grandfather's good legacy disappearing within months as families in debt claimed they'd already paid him and the town government cut down the old native pecan tree on the land he'd

given them with the verbal agreement that the tree would never be destroyed.

As a young boy, Horton Foote once met an elderly black man who revealed he'd been born a slave on Horton's great-great-grandfather Lieutenant Governor Albert Clinton Horton's plantation.

"I have never forgotten the impact that made on me. Slavery, up until that time, had been an abstract statistic in other people's stories. But as I looked into that man's tired, sorrowful face, I was shocked to realize that this abstraction, spoken of so lightly, was a living, suffering human being. The tales of the past bore a new reality after that."

Some summers Horton Foote visited Houston and his paternal grandmother, whom he called Big Mama. She worshipped her daughter Lily, who had musical aspirations but no outlet for what talent she had. As Horton grew older, his aunt Lily told him how unhappy she was and that her husband and son did not understand her artistic nature. Her husband Will prospered in the grocery business and even during the Depression enjoyed bragging how much he'd spent on his latest acquisitions, from Lily's shoes to his new Packard automobile. Horton revealed, "Uncle Will came to a sad end. His beloved wholesale grocery company fired him when he was in his early sixties, and he soon after suffered a heart attack. Two years earlier their son, Bill, 37, who worked for an electronics company in Georgia, went to a lake in Florida one afternoon, and though he couldn't swim, walked into the deep water until he drowned."

Actor Training

Horton Foote explained his early determination to become an actor: “When I was about nine or ten, there was this gray-haired, dignified man we would see walking along the sidewalk. My parents would tell me, in awed tones, after he passed us, that Mr. Armstrong had been working in the cotton fields of Mississippi, when he felt a call to come to Texas to preach. And I really was fascinated by that call. My mother told me that he was a Baptist minister, but Methodists and Episcopalians could also get calls. My father, who wasn’t very religious, told me that preachers didn’t make much money. I think he was afraid I might get the call to preach. Then, when I was 11 years old, I got a call just as distinct as Mr. Armstrong’s, but my call was to be an actor. And I never veered from that, until I began writing and only then did I stop acting.”

When Horton Foote graduated high school in 1932 at age 16; his father asked him to delay going to dramatic school for a year due to the Depression. Foote wanted to go to New York to study acting, but his parents felt he was too young. Instead he went to California to study at the Pasadena Playhouse for two years. He had relatives—a great-aunt and second cousins—nearby in Los Angeles; for a time during his schooling his grandmother moved from Wharton, Texas, to California and he left his student lodging to live with her.

After two years studying at the Pasadena Playhouse, Horton Foote had a summer job acting in repertory plays at Martha’s Vineyard; that autumn he moved to New York City to look for work in the theatre. After a time of hit-or-miss searching for auditions around the city, he ended up in drama school again. When questioned about his time studying at the Tamara Daykarhanova School for the Stage in New York City, Horton Foote revealed, “A very well-known actress of the 1930s, Rosamond Pinchot, met me on the street in New York and told me she would pay me to be her scene partner, working with Tamara.” Pinchot paid Foote’s first-year tuition to the Daykarhanova School, even

after she left New York to film a movie in Hollywood. The following year Daykarhanova kept Foote in the school on scholarship; he worked in the office to pay his tuition.

Daykarhanova and her husband Sergius Vassiliev had had to leave Russia due to trouble with the interim government before the Communist government; Daykarhanova first worked with Maria Ouspenskaya, a Method teacher who had started the American Laboratory Theatre. When Ouspenskaya left for Hollywood, Daykarhanova started her own school and brought in Andrius Jilinsky and Vera Soloviova from the Moscow Art Theatre and Michael Chekhov’s company. Horton Foote declared, “They taught the Stanislavski system, which I am very indebted to because it taught me a great deal about play structure. It applied to me wonderfully as a writer, because in my work as an actor, I would break a play down so that, without really knowing it, I was studying its structure in the sense of what it was the characters wanted. That’s really much more important than the result of the character: what do they want, what causes the conflict between them, what is the structure of the scene, what is the overall through-line of the play, what is the spine, what does everything kind of hold on to.”

After about two years with the Daykarhanova School, Foote and other students formed the American Actors Company in 1938. Shortly thereafter, Foote turned from acting to writing.

I loved acting, but I wasn’t happy acting like I am happy writing.

—Horton Foote

Early Playwriting Career

Horton Foote declared, “To be a promising young playwright is a fate worse than death. Everybody’s expecting great things from you. And since I’d had so little experience as a writer, I really had to learn how to write with people watching me.” Foote’s first play to reach Broadway was *Only the Heart*, which opened at the Bijou Theatre April 4, 1944. Foote had written the play while working the night shift running an elevator in a Park Avenue residential building. The original 1942 production was performed in Provincetown by the American Actors Theatre. Foote initially titled the play *Mamie Borden* after the strong central character, but the actress Hilda Vaughn feared audiences would confuse the title with the murder case of Lizzie Borden. Vaughn suggested the title *Only the Heart* from a poem by Heinrich Heine: “They flourish and flourish from year to year / And only the heart is withered and sere.” Foote felt the new title “much too flowery” but agreed to it because he wanted Vaughn to play the part. *Only the Heart*’s six-week Broadway run received harsh criticism from reviewers. Only two of the six reviews on April 5, 1944, were at all favorable. Neither was Foote himself thrilled with the revisions imposed on the play between its 1942 Provincetown run and its 1944 Broadway premiere: “Whatever raw power it originally had was diluted.” However, playwright Horton Foote’s Broadway career had begun, and it continued for decades.

In 1945 Horton Foote and his new wife Lillian Vallish moved to Washington, D.C., where Foote taught at the King-Smith School, forming its theatre department and directing plays, including some of his own one-acts. In 1949 they returned to New York City and Foote resumed his professional career on Broadway.

Horton Foote’s *The Chase* opened on Broadway April 15, 1952, at the Playhouse Theatre. *The Chase* explores how a heartless society can crush the emotional life of its members. In it, Sheriff Hawes is chasing the fugitive Bubber Reeves, but Hawes wants merely to return Reeves to jail, not kill him as the townspeople are eager to see happen. Instead of glorifying violence, Foote’s play investigates the origins of criminals like Reeves and sees them as a product of their unfeeling society. Although critical acclaim was not universal, *The Chase* achieved more success than *Only the Heart* and ran for 31 performances.

Keeping an unpublished manuscript in a drawer and not sharing it with an audience, even if it is a small audience of friends and acquaintances is a mistake.

—Horton Foote

Horton Foote in Hollywood

Gregory Peck, Robert Duvall, and Geraldine Page all won Academy Awards for their performances in films written by Horton Foote. Those same movies—*To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Tender Mercies*, and *The Trip to Bountiful*—all earned Horton Foote an Academy Award nomination for Best Screenplay; he took home the Oscar for the first two. Nonetheless, Foote's true loyalty was always to the theatre.

All of Horton Foote's screenplays except *Tender Mercies* are adaptations from his own previous playscripts or from other authors' novels. Even so, Foote said, "I don't like to adapt, to begin with. It's a very painful process – a big responsibility – particularly if you like something, which I usually have to do." He refers to the work as "assignments.... It isn't something that comes from inside. I try to take assignments very seriously, but they aren't something coming organically from me."

Horton Foote's first screenwriting job in Hollywood was *Storm Fear*, released in 1956 and based on Clinton Seeley's 1954 book of the same name. Later asked if he had had any particular impression of Hollywood at that time, Foote responded, "Not too much, except to save my money and get out of there quickly. I just didn't feel that it was a place for writers to be, and I still don't think so."

Horton Foote at first resisted the offer to adapt *To Kill a Mockingbird* for the screen, but his wife influenced him to read the book and consider the job. Producer Alan Pakula and director Robert Mulligan had at first asked Harper Lee to adapt her own novel into a screenplay, but she'd turned down the offer. Upon Foote's agreement to write the script, the producers brought Lee to Foote's home to meet him and discuss the project. They became friends and Foote found Lee's insights helpful as he adapted her novel. Later Foote was on the set for all of the casting for the movie: "I did some of the screen tests. I played Gregory Peck's part in some of the screen tests with the kids." Foote also revealed that the contract with Universal Pictures

stipulated that the film's final cut would be made by Pakula and Mulligan, not by the studio: "Universal did not like the picture very much, and if they had got their hands on it, God knows what they would have done, but they couldn't." The movie was released in 1962 and earned Horton Foote his first Academy Award, for Adapted Screenplay.

Horton Foote worked with Robert Duvall several times. They met when Duvall was in Sanford Meisner's acting class performing Foote's play *The Midnight Caller*. Meisner called Foote, saying, "Get on down here and see this young man in your play, because I think you'll be very pleased." Foote revealed that later, "When we were casting *Mockingbird* and thinking about who could play Boo Radley, my wife said, 'What about the young man we saw?' Fortunately, director Robert Mulligan had seen him also and said, 'Yeah, you're perfectly right. Let's use him.'" Horton Foote and Robert Duvall later worked together on *The Chase*, *Tomorrow*, *Tender Mercies* and *Convicts*.

Tender Mercies is Horton Foote's only original screenplay. In the 1970s he was living in New Hampshire working on his *Orphans' Home Cycle* plays and his agent Lucy Kroll told him, "They like you out in Hollywood. You're so peculiar--you won't pitch – but if you would just give me a few lines about something, I could get you some money to write it and finish these other projects." At the time, Foote's nephew was in a country-western band playing gigs at local bars and other venues, and Foote saw parallels in this experience to his own time as an actor. Hollywood suggested adding an older character, and this suggestion developed into the character of Mac Sledge, played by Robert Duvall, who co-produced the movie with Foote. The 1983 release earned Horton Foote his second Academy Award, for Original Screenplay.

When offered the task of adapting John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, Horton Foote again hesitated: "My great resistance there was it had been done so much—what in the world could anybody ever say that was different? I had spent my young manhood pretending I was Lenny.

Everybody was doing Lenny in those days. But then I reread the novella, and I was struck by how fresh it seemed, particularly how it related to today, with the rootlessness and the hopelessness and the migratory conditions. I felt quite taken with it.” Foote and actor/director Gary Sinise agreed on a way to approach the work, and Foote agreed to take the job. Gary Sinise directed and starred alongside John Malkovich in *Of Mice and Men*, released in 1992.

After a few learning experiences with his screenplays’ development into movies, Horton Foote came to feel strongly that the writer should be involved in the filming process and have a say in the final product. He achieved this in “different ways. You can go in the back door. On *Tender Mercies*, I was a co-producer. Same with *The Trip to Bountiful*. I also had final say on the cut. I make great sacrifices to do that. I take much less money in order to get that, because I think it’s important. On other films, like *Of Mice and Men*, I didn’t have the final cut. But I trusted Gary Sinise and John Malkovich.”

With his other screenplays, Horton Foote had varying levels of involvement in the filming

process and satisfaction with the final works. He reveals, “*The Chase* is simply based on my novel. But the film is so far away from my original work that I never thought it had much to do with me. I only saw it once. I’m not fond of it at all.” However, “*Baby, the Rain Must Fall* I’m very proud of. I worked very closely with Alan Pakula and Bob Mulligan on that, and they shot it here in my home in Texas. I was very much involved and on the set during the filming.” Of *Hurry Sundown*, released in 1966 crediting Foote as co-writer, he said, “Not a word of it is mine. I got along very well with director Otto Preminger, but we just didn’t agree on how it should be done. We parted amicably, and he got another writer and had a whole new script written that I’ve never read or seen. But Otto called me afterwards and asked if, as a favor to him, I would lie and put my name on the script. Since he’d paid me so much money, I felt I couldn’t turn him down; so I said yes.” But Foote had another positive experience with 1972’s *Tomorrow*, based on William Faulkner’s short story: “There again, I felt very necessary and wanted. I was on the set and in the editing room, and that’s how I felt it should be with a writer.”

Orphan’s Home Cycle

Horton Foote retreated from the theatre scene in the late 1960s. He explained, “There was a period in the early 70s when I went to the New Hampshire woods to re-evaluate my work, but I wrote a great deal while I was there. I was discouraged because I didn’t really have much in common with what I felt was going on in the 60s in the theatre. I wasn’t terribly interested in taking off my clothes or the kind of profanity that people felt was very liberating. I’ve been through so many different fashions now in theatre and writing.”

In the late 1970s Horton Foote wrote his nine-play *Orphans’ Home Cycle*, based on his father Albert Horton Foote’s life from 1902 to 1925, including his coming of age and search for a home, his courtship and marriage to Foote’s mother Hallie Brooks, and “the world of the town that had surrounded them from birth to death.”

Horton Foote explained, “The time of the plays

is a harsh time. They begin in 1902, a time of far-reaching social and economic change in Texas. The aftermath of Reconstruction and its passions had brought about a white man’s union to prevent blacks from voting in local and state elections. But in spite of political and social acts to hold on to the past, a way of life was over, and the practical, the pragmatic were scrambling to form a new economic order.”

The cycle’s name comes from the epigraph from Marianne Moore’s poem “In Distrust of Merits”: “The world’s an orphan’s home.” Foote designed and wrote the series shortly following the death of his mother in 1974 and father in 1975, “in the very room and on the bed my brothers had been born in.” Story lines are fictionalized, but all are based on events of Foote’s parents’ lives in and around Wharton, Texas (called Harrison in the plays). “But I don’t really write to honor the past,” Foote explained. “I write to investigate, to try to figure

out what happened and why it happened, knowing I'll never really know."

In *Roots in a Parched Ground*, the first play chronologically in the series, the young boy Horace Robedaux (based on Foote's father) experiences the separation of his parents Paul Horace Robedaux and Corella Thornton Robedaux (later Davenport), the Thornton and Robedaux families' antagonism, and the death of his father at age 32.

In *Convicts*, teenaged Horace works in a plantation store for owner Soll Gautier, a former Confederate soldier who rents convicts from the state to work his land. The setting is 1904 in Floyd's Lane, a community near Harrison, consisting of a store, a blacksmith shop and nearly one dozen families. *Convicts* was released on film in 1991 starring Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones.

In the series' third play, *Lily Dale*, Horace is 20 years old and tries to find a home with his mother in Houston in 1910. Horace's sister Lily Dale idolizes their stepfather Pete Davenport, who rejects Horace entirely. *Lily Dale* premiered Off-Broadway at the Samuel Beckett Theatre in 1986 and starred Molly Ringwald and later Mary Stuart Masterson as Lily Dale. A 1996 Hallmark movie version featured Masterson along with Sam Shepard as Pete Davenport and Stockard Channing as Corella.

The cycle's next play, *The Widow Claire*, follows Horace's fortunes as he returns to Harrison in 1912 and goes courting for the first time. In a town full of saloons, Horace decides to give up drinking and gambling and attend business school in Houston. He becomes friends with the attractive Widow Claire and takes a fatherly interest in her two young children. Claire decides to marry a salesman from Galveston; she and Horace part amicably as he leaves for Houston. Opening soon after *Lily Dale*, *The Widow Claire* played at New York's Circle in the Square Theatre December 17, 1986 through April 26, 1987, starring Horton Foote's daughter Hallie Foote as Claire, Matthew Broderick as Horace, and Foote's son Horton as Horace's friend.

With *Courtship*, the focus shifts from Horace Robedaux to Elizabeth Vaughn (based on Foote's mother Hallie Brooks). The events take place in 1915 Harrison as Elizabeth defies the strict Victorian standards of her family and plans to marry the man she chooses, Horace Robedaux. *Courtship* premiered in Kentucky at the Actors Theatre of Louisville on March 29, 1984.

The sixth play in the cycle, *Valentine's Day*, reveals the couple several months after their elopement on February 14, 1916. At first they rent a room in a boardinghouse, but Mr. Vaughn, now reconciled with his daughter and son-in-law, offers them money to build a house behind his. Horace insists the new house be in Elizabeth's name. We also see Elizabeth's brother Brother Vaughn, whom Horton Foote declared "a composite of my own uncles I knew and observed growing up," descend into sloth and gambling, the opposite of Elizabeth and Horace's settling into responsible family life.

1918 follows Foote's characters through World War I and the flu epidemic that devastated the town, taking Elizabeth's baby daughter and Horace's young uncle. The play has a definite anti-war inclination. Brother Vaughn continues to get into trouble, flunking out of Texas A&M and getting a girl pregnant. At the end of the play, Elizabeth Vaughn gives birth to Horace Junior, based on Horton Foote himself. *Courtship*, *Valentine's Day* and *1918* were filmed for television and aired together on *American Playhouse* in 1987 starring Hallie Foote as Elizabeth Vaughn Robedaux and Matthew Broderick as Brother Vaughn.

Cousins shows the dispersion of the Thornton cousins in 1925 when many leave for Houston and family ties are undervalued. Much of the play takes place in Horace's dry goods store, modeled after Horton Foote's father's Wharton haberdashery.

The ninth and final play, *The Death of Papa*, shows the family after the death of the patriarch Mr. Vaughn, based on Foote's maternal grandfather Tom Brooks, and focusing on Brother Vaughn's failed attempts to live up to his father's standards. Horton Foote said of this time in the life of his family, "My grandfather, who was a very distinguished man and the universe of this family, passed away very early. I don't know that the family ever recovered, but they did make adjustments. There was growth on some people's part, and for others it seemed to be a shattering experience. Change is necessary." *The Death of Papa* premiered in 1997 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, starring Matthew Broderick and Hallie Foote.

The Pulitzer Prize

In 1994 and 1995, the Signature Theater in New York City's East Village presented a season of four new plays by Horton Foote. One of those plays, *The Young Man from Atlanta*, won Horton Foote the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in April 1995 and went on to successful runs in Chicago and ultimately Broadway (1997).

The Young Man from Atlanta takes place in 1950 in the big city of Houston, Texas. It is a sequel to *Roots in a Parched Ground*, *Lily Dale* and *Cousins*, plays of the Orphans' Home Cycle. In the play, Will Kidder and his wife Lily Dale (loosely based on Horton Foote's uncle and aunt) live an affluent life in Houston but must deal with Will's loss of his job at age sixty-four, and they must also come to terms with the death of their adult son Bill, who committed suicide by drowning himself in a Florida pond. The cause was a homosexual liaison with Randy Carter, Bill's former roommate in Atlanta, Georgia. Randy is often talked about but never appears onstage. Randy blackmailed Bill for one hundred thousand dollars, lying that he needed the money to care for his sister's nonexistent children. Bill's father Will Kidder examines his own relationship with his son and comes to terms with his loss.

Will comes to acknowledge that his son's death was suicide and he assumes responsibility: "I failed him, Lily Dale. Some way I failed him." Lily Dale insists on seeing the death as an accident; she becomes attached to Randy as a substitute son. At Randy's lie that Bill became religious and prayed loudly in the Atlanta boardinghouse, Lily Dale becomes overtly religious. Because Lily Dale gives Randy money from her husband Will's savings, Will does not have the money he needs to start his own business after losing his job.

The Signature Theater production in New York, directed by Horton Foote's cousin Pete Masterson, and starred Carlin Gynne and Ralph Waite as Lily Dale and Will Kidder. A transfer to Broadway was postponed in favor of a trial run in Chicago, where Rip Torn and Shirley Knight starred. *The Young Man from Atlanta* opened on Broadway March 27, 2007, at the Longacre Theatre. Clive Barnes of the *New York Post* declared the play "brings luster to Broadway," while Ben Brantley of the *Times* deemed it "a short story with the soul of tragedy." The production was nominated for three Tony Awards, including Best Play.

Foote on Foote

You have to watch out with my plays. They're like yeast. You think they're one thing, then all of a sudden subtext gets to working. —Horton Foote

Horton Foote has repeatedly insisted that he did not choose his themes or subject matter, but that the place Harrison and the characters who fill it chose him, and he felt compelled to write about them. "I felt I was a storyteller, and that I wanted to write plays simply and directly. And I thought of Treplev's speech in the last scene of *The Sea Gull*: 'I'm coming more and more to the conclusion that it's a matter not of old forms and not of new forms, but that a man writes, not thinking at all of what form to choose, writes because it comes pouring out from his soul.'"

Foote reiterated: "I just sometimes don't think I'm alive unless I'm writing." His plays, he said, are about "dislocation, sibling rivalries, elopements, family estrangements, family reconciliations, and all the minutiae that make family life at once so interesting and yet at times so burdening." He writes for the theatre because "My inclination is always to tell things through dialogue; it's the most natural form for me. And though I was a reader and read novels, I just have never been as interested in, let's say, describing the room or the scenery outside the room as I have been in what goes on between people. That's really what interests me as a writer."

Foote considered his writing investigative: "I've known people—people I grew up with—who've had terrible things happen and been destroyed by them; and I've known people who haven't been destroyed by them. I guess part of what I'm trying to figure out as a writer is why do some people survive and some not?"

I guess I finally, deeply inside myself, do feel that in spite of all the chaos around us, there's an awful lot to celebrate in human beings.

—Horton Foote

Questions and Activities

Study Questions

- 1) How would you describe the characters found in *A Trip to Bountiful*? Pick one or two characters and write a brief description of each one.
- 2) How would you describe the characters' relationships to each other? Do the Watts get along or do they seem to always fight?
- 3) What do the Watts need physically and emotionally from each other?
- 4) Why do you think Mrs. Watts desperately wants to get back to Bountiful. From the text or the performance, pick a couple of her reasons and which one you believe to be the reason and explain.
- 5) Why is Jessie Mae so infatuated with movies and movie stars?
- 6) What purpose does the character Thelma serve in the play?
- 7) Describe the different locations in the play. From the performance, how did each place have a different feel to them? What qualities does each setting have that is different than the others?
- 8) What is the difference between Houston and Bountiful? How does Foote let us know that we are in the different locations?
- 9) How does Mrs. Watts react to the house in Bountiful? How does Ludie and Jessie Mae's reactions to the house in Bountiful differ?

Activities

1) Interview

Part I

- a. Interview a parent or a grandparent about the house or apartment where they grew up. Ask them to describe what they remember physically about the house (i.e. the floor plan or a description of a room) and then what they remember emotionally about the house (i.e. specific moments that took place in the house).
- b. Then ask them to describe the town or city where they grew up. Ask them to pay particular attention to anything that may have changed over the years.
- c. Write a paragraph or two that describes the place and incorporate all of the information that you gathered from the interview.
- d. Draw a picture of what the house or one of the rooms of the house would look like if it were to become the set for a play.

Part II

- a. Write a paragraph or two describing a room in your house or apartment. Describe the floor plan and pay attention to the details of the room.
- b. Draw a picture of what the house or one of the rooms of the house would look like if it were to become the set for a play.

CO Model Content Standards

History 2.2: Students know how to interpret and evaluate primary and secondary sources of historical information.

Reading and Writing 6: Students read and recognize literature as a record of human experience.

Visual Arts 2: Students know and apply elements of art, principles of design, and sensory and expressive features of visual art.

2) Family Portrait

Goal: Study archetypes and power structures of various social, economic, cultural groups

- 1) Divide the large group into smaller groups of 4 or 6. Each group is assigned a particular family based on their geography or culture. You may choose to focus on the world or be more specific.
- 2) Each group has a few minutes to gather and discuss ideas of what their family group would look like when seated for dinner or gathering for a portrait. Their ideas may be based on factual information, stereotypes or their imaginations.
- 3) Each group must then present a frozen portrait of their family.
- 4) Discussion Questions: How many people sit at the table? What type of food or utensils do they use? Are there any other activities beyond eating that occur? Is your portrait based on fact or stereotype?

CO Model Content Standards

History 3.2: Students understand the history and social organization in various societies.

Theatre 1: Students develop interpersonal skills and problem-solving capabilities through group interaction and artistic collaboration.

3) Where We Are

Goal: Create environments as a group

- 1) Two students stand in the playing space.
- 2) The leader gives the students where the location of the activity will take place (i.e. a restaurant, a zoo, a haunted house, a bus station, etc).
- 3) Without speaking, they begin to do the actions that take place in their space and embody the characters in the space.
- 4) The group will watch for a few moments and then anyone from the group may join the playing space and start a new action.
- 5) Let the action continue until half of the group is up.
- 6) If anyone is doing an action that does not belong in the space, the leader may freeze the action.
- 7) Raising the Bar: Although this activity starts as a mimed activity, you may allow the actors to speak.
- 8) Discussion Questions: How do you discover the location and the action? What helps in the telling of this information? What other characters may inhabit this place?

CO Model Content Standards

Geography 2.3: Students know how culture and experience influence people's perception of places and regions.

Theatre 1: Students develop interpersonal skills and problem-solving capabilities through group interaction and artistic collaboration.