

Stage TMNOTES

A FIELD GUIDE FOR TEACHERS



The Addams Family

A NEW MUSICAL

THE ADDAMS FAMILY



Joan Marcus

Adam Riegler, Jackie Hoffman, Bebe Neuwirth, Nathan Lane, Kevin Chamberlin, Krysta Rodriugez and Zachary James in *The Addams Family*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Using the Field Guide	1
Synopsis of the musical <i>The Addams Family</i>	2
OVERTURE TO THE ARTS	8
❧ Charles Addams: The Man Behind the Macabre	
OVERTURE TO HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES	12
❧ <i>The Addams Family</i> —A Cultural Phenomenon	
❧ Cartoonists of <i>The New Yorker</i>	
OVERTURE TO LANGUAGE ARTS	18
❧ The Comics on Broadway: Adapting Cartoons to the Stage	
OVERTURE TO BEHAVIORAL STUDIES	22
❧ Charles Addams: Facing Fear Through Art	
❧ “Honesty is the Best Policy”	
OVERTURE TO LIFE SKILLS	24
❧ The Addams Family: Define Normal	
Sources	29

USING THE FIELD GUIDE



Camp Broadway is pleased to bring you this edition of **StageNOTES™** written for *The Addams Family*.

By using **StageNOTES™**, you will understand how *The Addams Family* raises questions about current social conditions (**Social Studies**), expands our visual and verbal vocabulary (**Language Arts**), encourages creative thinking and expression (**The Arts**), illuminates the human condition (**Behavioral Studies**), and aids in our own self-exploration (**Life Skills**).

The Camp Broadway creative team, consisting of theater educators, scholars, researchers, and theater professionals, has developed a series of lesson plans that are inspired by and themed around the musical *The Addams Family*. To assist you in preparing your presentation of each lesson, we have included a **discussion topic**; a **writing assignment**; and an **exploration activity** that encourages students to research and investigate on their own.

The curriculum categories offered in *The Addams Family* study guide have been informed by the basic standards of education detailed in *Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education, 2nd Edition*, written by John S. Kendall and Robert J. Marzano (1997). This definitive compilation was published by Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory, Inc. (McREL) and the Association for Supervision and Curricular Development (ASDC) after a systematic collection, review, and analysis of noteworthy national and state curricular documents in all subjects.

The study guide for *The Addams Family* is for you, the educator, in response to your need for standards-compliant curriculum. We hope this study guide will help you incorporate *The Addams Family* into your classroom activities.

Rob Hartmann

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Hartmann', is written over a light gray background.

Chief Creative Officer
Camp Broadway

SYNOPSIS OF

The Addams Family

A NEW MUSICAL



Nathan Lane
as
Gomez Addams



Hundreds of years ago, the Addams family ancestors came from the old country and settled on a plot of land in what is now New York's Central Park. This was, of course, long before it was a park, when it was still wilderness and garbage. The family flourished for many generations, and eventually, a huge house was built where a great Spanish oak, the Addams Family Tree, had been planted to protect the ancestral graves from such annoyances as sunlight and tourists.

As the curtain rises, the last dead leaf of autumn falls from the Family Tree, and all is right with the morbid, macabre world of Gomez, Morticia, Fester, Grandma, Wednesday, Pugsley and Lurch. They've gathered – where else? – in the family graveyard, to celebrate life and death in a yearly ritual to connect with their past and ensure their future. They seem at peace, not just with each other and their inimitable, unchanging Addams-ness, but with their dead ancestors, too – who emerge from their graves on this night each year to join in this celebration of continuity.



Joan Marcus

Bebe Neuwirth and Nathan Lane in
The Addams Family.



*Bebe Neuwirth
as
Morticia
Addams*



But, at the end of the ritual, Fester blocks the ancestors' return to their graves. Those unchanging Addams family values are about to be tested. He enlists their help to set things right, just in case a new family secret goes terribly wrong. What's the secret? Wednesday Addams, that irresistible bundle of malice, has grown up and found love. So what's the problem? The young man, Lucas Beineke, is from Ohio, and his parents are coming to dinner to meet the family. Two different worlds are about to collide. Will love triumph, or will everyone go home vaguely depressed?

Wednesday Addams, that irresistible bundle of malice, has grown up and found love.

Gomez and Morticia are understandably leery. Wednesday is their baby, even if she is eighteen. Their doubts bloom into actual terror when they eavesdrop on Wednesday, who, in the midst of her afternoon play-date with Pugsley, refuses to torture her brother and involuntarily bursts into song – extolling all things bright and beautiful as love pulls her in an entirely new, and cheerful, direction. Like any parents faced with a child in terrible trouble, they wonder, “Where did we go wrong?”

Wednesday begs her parents not to cancel the dinner, and exhorts the entire family to act as ‘normal’ as possible when Lucas and his parents arrive. She loves her family just the way they are, but they clearly fall outside the realm of what the Middle-American Beinekes are used to, and Wednesday's afraid that, if his parents don't approve of her, they'll take Lucas back to Ohio, and she'll never see him again.



Adam Riegler, Krysta Rodriguez and Wesley Taylor in *The Addams Family*.

Like any unconditionally loving family, the Addams' promise to do their best to oblige, while, lost somewhere in Central Park, young Lucas asks his parents to resist any judgments and all catastrophic conflicts, so both families can enjoy one normal night.



*Kevin
Chamberlin
as
Uncle Fester*



*Zachary James
as
Lurch*



But the moment Lurch ushers the Beinekes inside the decrepit mansion, tension begins to mount. Mal, Lucas's father, in the demolition business, takes an immediate interest in tearing down the house. Alice, Lucas's mom, begins to spout happy poems at random – a nervous habit. Pugsley, Grandma and Fester try so hard to be normal, they could hardly be more peculiar. And Wednesday, having worn black every day for eighteen years, comes downstairs to meet her boyfriend's parents in a bright, yellow dress.

As soon as they're alone, Wednesday and Lucas plot when to reveal the real reason for getting the families together: They're so much in love, they've decided to get married, though it's clear they haven't really thought such a big step through. Lucas, trying to be cool, decides that he'll break the news – when the time is right. Sometime during dinner.

In a damp and moldy grotto in the bowels of the house, Gomez and Mal share cigars and "guy stuff" – as Gomez shows Mal his collection of exotic torture devices, and introduces him to one of the family pets – Bernice, a giant squid that came up one night through the toilet. While Gomez tries to find out what makes this Beineke fellow tick, Mal makes an offer to buy the house. Citing the sacred history of how these two acres were deeded to his great ancestor, Gomez politely, but firmly, refuses.

Morticia and Alice have settled down in Morticia's boudoir, leafing through family photos and sharing stories about their kids. But the spider in Morticia draws in the fly that is Alice, and before long, it's clear that Alice's marriage has lost some of its spark. Alice's absolute belief that "women our age have had our fun, done everything we've going to do, and now it's time to step aside for the children," gives Morticia pause.

When Morticia overhears Wednesday and Lucas mocking their parents' wasted lives, the pause becomes a panic. Gomez, tempting her with a pre-dinner tango, tries to entice her from her malaise. But Morticia – suddenly convinced that the best times are behind her, that she and Gomez have wasted their lives – turns him down, leaving her adoring husband alone and unsatisfied.



Joan Marcus

Kevin Chamberlin, Terrence Mann and Nathan Lane in *The Addams Family*.



Carolee Carmello,



Terrence Mann,



*and
Wesley Taylor*

*as
The Beinekes*



In yet another part of the house, Pugsley, having witnessed Wednesday and Lucas making out, worries that he's lost his best friend to her new, disgustingly sunny disposition. Plotting to break up the happy couple, Pugsley steals a volatile potion from Grandma's private stache – *Acrimonium* – one swig of which is guaranteed to bring out the dark side in anyone who drinks it.

After what is likely a less-than-normal meal, Wednesday quiets the table for Lucas' surprise announcement. But Gomez reminds Wednesday that, before anything else happens, it's time for the traditional Addams family game, "Full Disclosure" – during which everyone takes a sip from a sacred chalice and reveals something they've never told anyone. Gomez uses his Disclosure to try, again in vain, to calm Morticia. Fester announces that he's in the throes of a most unlikely love – with the moon. When it's Wednesday's turn, Pugsley seizes his chance! He secretly pours the *Acrimonium* potion in the chalice and passes it to his sister. But his plan to awaken the dark side in Wednesday goes horribly wrong when Alice, coughing, intercepts the chalice and downs the potion instead. A whole new Alice, very dark and uninhibited, is born. The powerful poison prompts her to reveal the long-buried problems with her marriage, humiliating Mal, who, fed up with all the weird and creepy events of the evening, makes to leave, with Alice and Lucas in tow. Wednesday blurts out the news: "Lucas and I are getting married!" Chaos engulfs both families like a tidal wave, and Fester, ever-helpful, urges the Family Ancestors to work some magic – whipping up a sudden, terrible storm and trapping the Beinekes with the Addams family for the night.



Joan Marcus

Terrence Mann and Carolee Carmello
in *The Addams Family*.

While the storm rages, Wednesday packs a bag, but Lucas has no appetite for running away and getting married without his parents' blessing. Wednesday, furious at everything it means to be normal, and furious at herself for trying so hard to become somebody his parents would accept, leaves alone.

One more of Gomez' foot-in-mouth episodes prompts Morticia to throw him out of her boudoir. Her world is changing and she's not ready, and her only comfort is knowing that death is waiting for her, just around the corner. But it is very cold comfort indeed.

In the guest room, Alice, under the influence of the darkness potion, can no longer rhyme. Neither can she

tolerate her husband's cynical attacks on Lucas and love. She packs him off with a pillow and blanket to sleep somewhere else, as the storm inside her heart, and outside in the park, rumbles to a conclusion.

Once the rains have stopped, Fester heads outside for a couple of hours of moon-bathing, realizing – after observing the three couples fighting – the sheer luck of being in a long-distance relationship, with the distant silver orb in the sky that smiles down on him from the heavens.

Sitting under the family tree, contemplating the twists and turns of this most unusual night, Gomez stops Wednesday on her way out of the park. He realizes the thing he was most resistant to – his baby girl's growing up – is inevitable, and proper. He sees that she's a young woman in love. And that makes him happy. And a tiny bit sad.

With her father's blessing, Wednesday offers Lucas one test to prove that he's The One. The test involves her skills with a crossbow, an apple, and Lucas standing with said apple on his head in front of the family tree. The boy is afraid of death, but even more afraid of losing Wednesday. He chooses the possibility of death over the certainty of loss... and wins.

Far below, in the grotto, Gomez and Mal, two displaced husbands, realize they have more in common than they would have dared imagine only a few hours earlier. When Mal reveals a childhood desire to swim, just once, in the warm ocean with the beautiful fish that beguiled him as a boy, Gomez leads him to the gentle, grasping tentacles of Bernice, the squid. While Mal swims with the giant cephalopod, Lurch ushers Alice down to the grotto. She's a woman on a mission; she's going to lay down the law; changes must be made if the marriage is to survive. But when she finds Mal, slimed and suckered from his swim, he's a new man. Embracing a dimly-remembered childhood dream in the arms of that squid has helped Mal rediscover his love for Alice!



*Krysta
Rodriguez
as
Wednesday*



Nathan Lane and Krysta Rodriguez
in *The Addams Family*

Joan Marcus



*Adam Riegler
as
Pugsley*



*Jackie
Hoffman
as
Grandma*



Joan Marcus

Bebe Neuwirth and Nathan Lane in a scene from *The Addams Family*.

Morticia stands on the roof of the house, silhouetted by the giant pre-dawn moon. The ancestors' spirits have led Gomez up, up, up to find her, to pull her back from the edge. The other warring couples, Wednesday and Lucas, Alice and Mal, have made their peace. Now Gomez woos his wife, as he first did one night many years before, with the promise to "laugh and cry and dance until the very gods weep with envy." The mournful strains of a bandoneon waft up on the breeze, entwining with the tempting wail of a violin – and a tango begins – the *Tango de Amor*, the quintessence of Eros, the dance that makes men weep and women cry out in the night. The irresistible expression of love between husband and wife. And Morticia cannot resist.

Once the rains have stopped, Fester heads outside for a couple of hours of moon-bathing

With all three couples reunited, Fester is emboldened to make his move, and launches himself to the moon. Landing safely, his face appears – the man in the moon – and, love having emphatically triumphed in heaven and on earth, the gate to the family crypt swings open, allowing the spirits of the ancestors to rest for another year.

It's been a night of darkness. Everything's changed. And the new, extended family understands: The unknown may be frightening, the darkness overwhelming, but if we don't run from it, we may see our mysterious, miraculous lives finally illuminated. If we move toward the darkness, we might find love and acceptance.

For when it is dark enough, we can see the stars.

–Rick Elice
Bookwriter for *The Addams Family*

OVERTURE TO THE ARTS

CHARLES ADDAMS: THE MAN BEHIND THE MACABRE

Charles Addams, the beloved creator of the dark and delightful *Addams Family* and thousands of other characters, was born in Westfield, New Jersey in 1912. Addams had a wonderful childhood complete with devoted parents and middle-class comforts. His first foray into art was at the age of eight when he was arrested for breaking into a Victorian house that was undergoing repairs and drawing skeletons all over the walls. According to Linda Davis, Addams' biographer, young Charles was "known as something of a rascal around the neighborhood." In her book, "Charles Addams: A Cartoonist's Life" she quotes Addams, "In Westfield, I was always aware of the sinister family situations behind those Victorian façades." Addams got many of his ideas for his darker cartoons from his memories of Westfield, and from the stories drifting around town of family scandals. He also drew heavily from his own

His first foray into art was at the age of eight when he was arrested for breaking into a Victorian house that was undergoing repairs and drawing skeletons all over the walls.

fears, especially his claustrophobia. According to Davis, Charles inherited his fears from his mother: "Charlie...shared her fearfulness. And he developed something more than a typical childish



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interest in the spirits of the dead." Addams lived in his imagination, and soon, that imagination began to live on the page. When he was twelve, his mother brought some of his drawings to the world office of the *New York Herald*, where cartoonist H.T. Webster told her that Addams had no talent, and to forget him ever having an art career. The next year, Addams won his first drawing contest.

After short stints at Colgate and the University of Pennsylvania, Addams enrolled in the Grand Central School of Art. One day in 1931, while cutting class, he submitted a sketch of a window washer on a tall building to *The New Yorker* offices, forgetting to include a return address. A few months later, when he returned to the offices to pick up his drawing, he learned his work had been accepted. Although his career was off to a promising start, the death of his father the

following year made Charles decide to leave art school in favor of a job retouching crime scene photographs for *True Detective* magazine.

Addams' first real success didn't come until 1933, when his second *New Yorker* cartoon was accepted. This cartoon depicted three hockey players in full uniform on the ice, one of them looking sheepish and without skates. The caption read, "I forgot my skates." Addams' signature dark style had yet to emerge. Despite his early successes, he was

It was in 1940, with his "The Skier" cartoon, that Addams received worldwide attention and his first taste of fame.

fearful that he would "run out of funny things". In March of 1935, Addams found inspiration in a new cartoon—his drawing depicted a tabloid reading "Sex Fiend Slays Tot" amidst a line of *New York Times*' rolling off a printing press. The success of the risqué cartoon opened Addams up to a new style and freed him to explore his dark side. The pieces that followed featured touches of macabre humor including a 1935 drawing depicting a woman, in a roller coaster car filled to capacity and inching up the first drop, pointing to the sky and exclaiming, "Alfred, look! Vultures!"

It wasn't until April 6th, 1938 that the first *Addams Family* cartoon crept into the pages of *The New*



"Vibrationless, noiseless, and a great time and back saver. No well-appointed home should be without it."

Yorker. This first cartoon depicted a then-unnamed Morticia (a lithe, dark beauty inspired by his first wife, Barbara) and a large man, later to be known as butler Lurch, standing in the foyer of a dilapidated Victorian house.

They are listening to a vacuum salesman pitch, "Vibrationless, noiseless, and a great time and back saver. No well-appointed home should be without it." The house, in grand Addams style, is covered in cobwebs, dust, and crawling with creatures, including a sinister figure peeking down from the top of the stairs. After the cartoon entitled "Vacuum Cleaner" debuted, Addams made no plans to develop the dark characters further, but was encouraged by Harold Ross (*New Yorker* founder) to explore "more characters in the delicious house." A year later, Addams submitted his second *Family* cartoon. A few more followed, including the introduction of Grandma, modeled after his own, and Morticia's lover Gomez, modeled after Thomas E. Dewey crossed with a pig. Even with the addition of more characters, Addams was uninspired by his *family*, and rarely made them the subjects of his cartoons.

It was in 1940, with his "The Skier" cartoon, that Addams received worldwide attention and his first taste of fame. A simple drawing illustrating a perplexed skier watching as another skier skis down a slope leaving tracks in the snow—one on each side of a tree as if she had gone right through it. Addams, then 28, received more purchase and reprint requests for his cartoon than any other published in *The New Yorker* that year. Later Addams expressed regret for selling the drawing for only \$35.



Despite his newfound fame, Addams was still haunted by the dark family that had begun to emerge in his cartoons. According to Davis, Addams told a reporter,

People always want to know more about them, but I've never been able to figure out what they're doing. Maybe they are at a gathering with some hobby in common. I've become quite attached to them. I think maybe I'm in love with the young looking witch.

He didn't have to wait long for his answer. In 1944, Addams expanded his family—including two children in his latest drawing entitled "Poison" featuring a round, mean-looking little blonde boy with a glass bottle and a thin, anemic-looking girl with braids wearing a black dress complaining to her mother. The caption reads, "Well don't come whining to me. Go tell him you'll poison him right back." The children later became known as Pugsley and Wednesday in the 1964 television series. The popularity of his *Addams Family* cartoons began to grow despite their relative scarcity in his output (only 30 out of 244 were *Family* cartoons in the 1940's). Davis recalls,

Like film stars, they attracted a devoted and eager following. Even the children of New Yorker readers, who would not otherwise have picked up the magazine, had come to watch for the cartoons that made scary things funny and celebrated breaking the rules...the children who loved Addams' cartoons understood that there was nothing really scary going on in them.

While many seemed to understand that Addams' *Family* was more funny than scary, his dark subjects began giving him a personal reputation

as a sinister character. Davis remarks, "People expected Charles Addams to live among crossbows and skulls...and the cartoonist was happy to accommodate them." Addams even used a discarded headstone he found in a desecrated graveyard reading, "Little Sarah, Aged Three" as a cocktail table in his apartment. "He had the unfortunate tendency to laugh at funerals", remarked one of his close friends. Davis speculates that Addams was merely satisfying the world's



perception of him, "Addams himself had invited the misperception—if only in jest...He had long delighted in telling reporters about some of the gifts he had received: a gilded skull, a human thighbone...he was known to picnic in graveyards, and he sometimes took souvenirs." Addams once remarked that he thought he looked like Uncle Fester (a character added to the cartoon in the mid 1940's), a "toothless grinning ghoul" who was depicted in one cartoon sitting in the audience of a movie laughing at a scene that was making everyone else in the

theater cry. Davis notes, "One quickly saw that the Addams wit, unlike that of many comic geniuses, was not confined to his art."

Despite his reputation as a ghoul himself, Addams was a consummate professional who took his art very seriously. Over his nearly 60-year career, Addams maintained his position as one of the most celebrated cartoonists of all time. He created several thousand cartoons and drawings. In addition, fifteen anthologies of his work have been published in numerous languages worldwide. Addams' *Family* cartoons have inspired a television show, two major motion pictures, a cartoon television show based on the films, as well as a Broadway musical. Addams' work can also be seen in many prominent museums

and libraries including The Museum of the City of New York, The New York Public Library, and The Library of Congress, where his works are part of their permanent collections.

In 1988, Charles Addams died of a heart attack inside his car, parked in front of his apartment. Addams' wife, Tee Addams remarked in his September 30th, 1988 *New York Times* obituary, "He's always been a car buff, so it was a nice way to go."



Joan Marcus

Nathan Lane and Bebe Neuwirth as
Gomez and Morticia

The Arts DISCUSSION

"People expected Charles Addams to live among crossbows and skulls...and the cartoonist was happy to accommodate them."—Linda Davis

Charles Addams had a reputation for being as ghoulish and sinister as his famous characters, but many suspected that he was only satisfying the world's perception of him. Was Charles Addams really as dark a figure as his characters, or was he merely playing a sinister role to fulfill the public's expectations?

What are some expectations you've had about someone that turned out to be wrong? In what ways can we keep ourselves from making generalizations about people based on their outward appearance or the way others perceive them?

The Arts WRITING



Charles Addams was inspired to create his ghoulish *Addams Family* characters from people in his life. Think of a member of your family or a close friend and use them as

the inspiration for a short story. What are some special things about them that would make them the subject of a good story? Do they have a specific look or style that sets them apart? What about them is humorous, mysterious or exciting?

In thinking about the traits that set them apart, consider what impact your story will have on how the person is perceived by those who read the story. Will the reader's opinion of the person change based on what they read in your story? Will something that is perceived as "normal" to you be seen as odd to a reader who doesn't know the subject as well as you? Think about other stories you know that have characters that you think are odd or different. Does your experience with your own story change how you perceive other characters?

The Arts EXPLORE

Charles Addams created thousands of cartoons during his life as a cartoonist. Go to the library and look through one of Charles Addams' fifteen published anthologies of cartoons. Find a cartoon that excites you, and write a short story using it as inspiration. If it has a caption, try to include the caption in your story. Make sure your story has a beginning, middle, and end. It can include dialogue or not. When you are finished, share the story and the cartoon with a friend or family member.

OVERTURE TO HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES



THE ADDAMS FAMILY—A CULTURAL PHENOMENON

"They're creepy and they're kooky, mysterious and spooky, they're altogether ooky: the Addams family."

Charles Addams' iconic *Family* began as a single-panel cartoon first appearing in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1938. Over 70 years later, *The Addams Family* still thrives as a pop culture phenomenon, with characters appearing in commercials, merchandise, movies, television, and an upcoming Broadway musical. Take a look at the history of *The Addams Family* as a pop culture phenomenon.

TELEVISION

In 1963, 25 years after they chilled the pages of *The New Yorker*, Addams was asked to name the members of his ghoulish *Family* (they had, up until then, been nameless characters) for a new television series being developed by ABC. Addams named his three main characters first, Morticia (the tall, sleek mother), Wednesday (the mischievous daughter), and Pugsley (Wednesday's scheming brother whom Addams originally wanted to name Pubert), and as the television series began to take shape, he named the rest of the family. He chose Gomez (the name of an old family friend) over Repelli (a name offered as an option by the producers), Uncle Fester, Lurch (for the way the Frankensteinian butler walked), and Grandma Frump (after his own Grandmother on whom he had originally based the character).

The Addams Family premiered on ABC on Friday, September 18th, 1964, and ran for 64 regular season episodes. The series theme song, written by



Joan Marcus

Kevin Chamberlin as Uncle Fester.

Vic Mizzy, featured a memorable four-note bass line and finger-snap punctuation.

John Astin starred as Gomez opposite Carolyn Jones as Morticia. Addams biographer Linda Davis remarks, "Though the television family was a considerably softened version of the Addams originals, the show did make an attempt to honor the cartoons. This family was also fond of

moonbathing and electric trains; as in the cartoons, Morticia was observed knitting three-armed garments, snipping rosebuds from their thorny stems, and lovingly tending her garden of poison hemlock and deadly nightshade.”

FILMS

In 1991, Paramount Pictures released the film *The Addams Family*. Directed by Barry Sonnenfeld, the film starred Anjelica Huston as Morticia, Raul Julia as Gomez, Christopher Lloyd as Uncle Fester, and Christina Ricci as Wednesday. The plot of the film centers around a con artist and her son who try to steal the Addams fortune by passing the son off as Gomez’s long-lost brother, Fester. The film pays homage to the recreates many of the iconic images from the *Family*’s early appearances in *The New Yorker*. The most notable reference to the original illustrations are in the film’s opening sequence where the Addams family pours a cauldron of oil on some Christmas carolers. Other images drawn from the cartoons are the passengers on Gomez’s



toy train, the octopus painted on the footboard of Wednesday’s bed, and Pugsley holding a road sign.

In 1993, a sequel arrived: *Addams Family Values*. Retaining the same lead cast and director, the film received greater critical acclaim than the first film because it focused more on the macabre humor that made the *Family* cartoons distinctive. In the second film, the family tries to save Uncle Fester from marrying his gold-digging new love interest, played by Joan Cusack. The film also introduced a new baby Addams named “Pubert” which was Charles Addams’ original name for Pugsley. The film was nominated for an Oscar for Best Art/Set Direction and Anjelica Huston was

The character of Wednesday was named by Aborigines, LTD.—the company that made the original *Addams Family* dolls for the television series. She is named after the line “Wednesday’s child is full of woe” in the Mother Goose poem, *Monday’s Child is Fair of Face*.

COMMERCIALS AND MERCHANDISE

The Addams Family characters and famous theme have appeared in countless commercials since the 1960’s including advertisements for Addams Family cereal, Crest toothpaste, Tostitos Tortilla Chips, Casa Modena (Spain), Coors Light (featuring “Thing”), a 1995 Honda Odyssey commercial featuring the cast of the second film (Japan), and most recently as their M&Ms counterparts to promote M&Ms Dark Candies.

All sorts of Addams Family memorabilia can be found on ebay.com and similar websites – *Addams Family* pinball machines, trading cards, magnets, card games, the official movie magazine, and *Addams Family* house model kits, demonstrating the long-lasting popularity of the *Family* with collectors and fans.

The cultural impact of the Addams Family is significant: what began as an occasional cartoon in *The New Yorker* gave rise to films, television series, commercials, merchandise of all kinds, and now a Broadway musical. The Addams Family has become an American icon.



CARTOONISTS OF THE NEW YORKER

“What do you do?”

“I’m a cartoonist.”

“I love cartoons. Where do you publish?”

“*The New Yorker*.”

“I love *The New Yorker*. What’s your name?”

“Frank Modell.”

“Yes? [Pause.] I’ve never heard of you.”

In the introduction to “The Comic Worlds of Peter Arno, William Steig, Charles Addams, and Saul Steinberg”, Frank Modell humorously relates a story that is the reality for most cartoonists. He goes on to say, “Instantly enjoyable and instantly

disposable, the single-panel comic cartoon is also instantly forgettable.”

The New Yorker published its first issue in 1925 as an alternative to the unsophisticated humor magazines of the time, and soon developed into one of the most well-known and respected literary publications in the world. Although the magazine offers a variety of essays, short stories, commentaries, criticisms, poetry, and fiction, the most widely recognized element of its pages are its single-panel cartoons and distinctive cover art.

Charles Addams is one of the few, if not the only, *New Yorker* cartoonist whose name is recognizable and can be linked to his life’s work. This is largely due to his cartoons being adapted into many other mediums including television, film, and theatre. Unlike Addams, most cartoonists whose work has appeared in *The New Yorker* over the course of its 84-year history never achieve such status, but are nonetheless important in understanding the history and artistic landscape during which Charles Addams lived and worked.

Following are profiles of six brilliant *New Yorker* cartoonists who, in addition to Addams, strove to reflect the zeitgeist of the day and shape the humor of a century.

Peter Arno (c. 1904-1968)

One of *The New Yorker*’s first cartoonists, Peter Arno’s work was published in the magazine from 1925-1968 and included 101 *New Yorker* covers and 600 drawings. Arno is credited with helping to save the struggling magazine in its early days, and was heralded in 1944 by *Life* magazine as the “...old master of *The New Yorker* cartoon school.” His drawings often featured New York society of the day including the “self-important executive” and the “well-endowed woman”. He originated the

phrase, “Well back to the old drawing board” in one of his cartoons depicting an engineer walking away from a crashed plane.

Helen E. Hokinson (c. 1893-1949)

Helen E. Hokinson was a cartoonist for *The New Yorker* in the 1930s and 40s; her work (captioned by James Reid Parker) is known for capturing the spirit of that time. An estimated 1,700 of her drawings were printed in the magazine from 1925 to the time of her death in 1949. The majority of her cartoons depict robust, upper class women with a fondness for fashion, pets, and gardens—her “marvelous matrons” they were called.

In addition to her work at *The New Yorker*, Hokinson published several books of her own cartoons, and, with Parker, created a monthly cartoon for *Ladies Home Journal* called “The Dear Man”. Tragically, she died in 1949 in a mid-air collision over Washington National Airport.

Saul Steinberg (c. 1914-1999)

Saul Steinberg is most famous for his 1976 *New Yorker* cover “View of the World from 9th Avenue” in which an abbreviated, sparse US and Pacific Ocean is depicted beyond the Hudson River. According to The Saul Steinberg Foundation, “his art is about the ways artists make art. Steinberg did not represent what he saw; rather, he depicted people, places, and even numbers or words in styles borrowed from other art, high and low, past and present...he elevated the language of popular graphics to the realm of fine art.” During his 60-year tenure with *The New Yorker*, Steinberg created almost 90 covers and over 1,200 drawings

Charles Addams is one of the few, if not the only, New Yorker cartoonist whose name is recognizable and can be linked to his life's work.

specifically for the magazine. His work has been featured in over 80 museums and galleries worldwide including the 1958 Brussels World's Fair and the Institute for Modern Art in Valencia, Spain in 2002.

James Thurber (c. 1894-1961)

James Thurber began writing for *The New Yorker* in 1927. He originally started as an editor, but soon found his calling as a writer. His work as a cartoonist began by accident when, in 1930, his friend and author of *Charlotte's Web*, E.B. White, fished some of his drawings out of the trashcan



Nathan Lane (left) and company in *The Addams Family*.

and submitted them for consideration. Thurber's cartoon style was minimalist and appeared shaky and ghostly due to a childhood injury that left Thurber with deteriorating eyesight. By 1942, his sight was so bad that he had to use a Zeiss



"Well don't come whining to me. Go tell him you'll poison him right back."

Loupe (a magnifying glass that fits to the face) in order to continue drawing. In 1961, he died from complications due to pneumonia.

Thurber's life's work includes many notable children's stories, almost 40 books, short stories, essays, and 2 Broadway plays, the second of which, *A Thurber Carnival*, won him the 1960 Tony award and featured him in the starring role for 88 performances.

In addition to his many honorary doctorates, James Thurber was commemorated on a US Postal Service stamp for the 100th anniversary of his birth.

William Steig (c. 1907-2003)

William Steig sold his first cartoon to *The New Yorker* in 1930. Over his career, he created over 1,600 cartoons for the New York staple including 117 of its characteristic covers. In 1968, he published his first children's book, and went on to write 30 others including *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* for which he won the prestigious children's book prize, the Caldecott Medal.

Check out www.cartoonbank.com to see some of the work mentioned in this article.

In 1990, he created the picture book *Shrek!* which became the inspiration for the blockbuster movie franchise and Broadway musical. In addition to his prolific career as a children's book author and *New Yorker* cartoonist, Steig published 13 collections of drawings and was hailed by *Newsweek* as the "King of Cartoons."

Roz Chast (c. 1954-)

Roz Chast began her career at *The New Yorker* in 1979 less than two years out of college. In the 30 years following, Chast's estimated 1,000 cartoons have been consistently featured in the magazine's pages, varying from black and white and color cartoons to covers. Her cartoons often depict good-natured, ill-fated everyman characters who deal with life's struggles including money, aging, family issues, friends, and many others. She has been called



Joan Marcus

Nathan Lane in *The Addams Family*.

“the magazines only certifiable genius” by David Remnick, the editor of *The New Yorker*, and has been presented an honorary doctorate from Pratt Institute. Chast’s cartoons and illustrations have been featured in nearly 50 magazines and several children’s books. In 2007, she teamed up with Steve Martin to create a children’s book titled, “The Alphabet from A to Y with Bonus Letter Z!” Chast continues to create art for *The New Yorker* and other publications while living in Connecticut with her family and a number of exotic parrots.



“Are you unhappy, darling?”
“Oh, yes, yes! Completely.”

Social Studies DISCUSSION

In the opening scene of *The Addams Family*, the family celebrate life and death in a yearly ritual connecting past, present and future—a ritual passed down from generation to generation.

Social and family dynamics have changed a lot over the past century. What do you know about your grandparent’s generation that is unique to their

time? How about your parent’s generation? How are these dynamics different from your own? How are they the same? Can you think of traditions that have been passed down through the generations to you? Ask your parents or your grandparents to share some of their stories.

Social Studies WRITING

Define Normal

What is “normal”? In the 1960s when *The Addams Family* was first becoming a cultural phenomenon, the definition of a “normal”

family was significantly different than it is today. Is what was considered “normal” in 1960 still considered normal today?

An interesting way to explore what a society defines as “normal” is through advertisements. Take a look at copies of LIFE Magazine from the 1960s (Check out books.google.com and search for “Life Magazine 1960s”). What do the advertisements from these old magazines tell you about what “normal” was in the 1960s? Advertisements tell us what normal is—what are they telling you?

Choose one advertisement from a 1960s LIFE Magazine and one from a current issue of a society magazine and write a paragraph comparing what is depicted as “normal” in each. What are some of the differences you can find?

Social Studies EXPLORE

Talk to your oldest relative or family friend and ask them what a typical family outing was like when they were your age. Where did they go? What was a typical family dinner like? How is it different from the way you interact with your family today?

OVERTURE TO LANGUAGE ARTS



THE COMICS ON BROADWAY: ADAPTING CARTOONS TO THE STAGE

The *Addams Family* isn't the first cartoon illustration to find its way to Broadway. Musical theatre writers have been turning to cartoons for inspiration for over fifty years. What makes *The Addams Family* unique and challenging to adapt to the stage, is the fact that many of Charles Addams' original single-panel cartoons have no written story attached. Each cartoon is its own, self-contained story. Above and beyond the challenges of creating a new, fresh story from a cartoon, what other challenges are there in adapting comics to the stage? How do writers approach bringing two-dimensional characters to three-dimensional life on stage?

Musical theatre writers have been turning to cartoons for inspiration for over fifty years.

In order to adapt *The Addams Family* cartoon into a Broadway musical, the writers had to study and capture the dark, macabre style of cartoon creator Charles Addams. They had to draw from that style and discover a living, breathing, talking, walking world. This process extends to all stage writers who adapt work from two-dimensional source material—they transport the audience to a world where characters they've only read about, or seen as a frozen image on a page, come to life right before their eyes.

Let's take a look at some of the other cartoons that have been adapted for the stage and explore the

choices that were made in bringing these beloved comic characters to singing and dancing life.

YOU'RE A GOOD MAN CHARLIE BROWN

The journey of adapting the beloved *Peanuts* characters by Charles M. Schulz to the stage began when, in the mid-1960s, songwriter Clark Gesner wrote an album of songs featuring the perennially unlucky and awkward Charlie Brown and his group of misfit friends. Gesner was then approached to develop the songs into a full-length stage musical.

In the case of adapting the *Peanuts* characters, Gesner's first responsibility was to capture the unique voice of Charles Schulz's characters in his lyrics. Gesner expanded on one of the most well-





Joan Marcus

Bebe Neuwirth and Carolee Carmello in *The Addams Family*.

known lines in the comic strip – “Happiness is a warm puppy” – to create the lyrics for the show’s finale, “Happiness.”

Everyone sings,

ALL

HAPPINESS IS SINGING TOGETHER WHEN
DAY IS THROUGH.
AND HAPPINESS IS THOSE WHO SING
WITH YOU.
HAPPINESS IS MORNING AND EVENING,
DAYTIME AND NIGHTTIME, TOO,

CHARLIE BROWN

FOR HAPPINESS IS ANYONE AND
ANYTHING AT ALL
THAT’S LOVED BY YOU.

LUCY

YOU’RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN.

In his lyrics, Gesner is able to capture how Charlie

and his friends feel about each other, but more effectively, how the audience feels about them. This attention to character allows the audience to make the leap from page to stage, and makes *You’re A Good Man, Charlie Brown* a delightful musical adaptation.

After its initial off-Broadway success in 1967 and subsequent Broadway run in 1971, the show was again revised for a remounting on Broadway in 1999. For this production, enormous changes were made including replacing the character Patty (not to be confused with Peppermint Patty) with Charlie’s precocious sister Sally, omitting 17 scenes while adding 21 more, and bringing in composer/lyricist Andrew Lippa (the composer/lyricist for *The Addams Family*) to add new songs.

LIL ABNER

A big obstacle in creating a musical from a comic strip often lies in constructing a plot that will synthesize years of episodic stories (in the comics) into a concise, two-hour live-action show. Composer Gene De Paul, lyricist Johnny Mercer, and bookwriters Norman Panama and Melvin Frank attempted just that when they adapted *Li’l Abner* for the stage in 1956. The comic, created by Al Capp,



which had run daily for 43 years, centers around the impoverished town of Dogpatch, Kentucky and its inhabitants including innocent, simple Li'l Abner and his band of hillbilly friends. The comic contains biting political satire, which appealed to the writers of the musical. For the musical adaptation, they

comic strip *Little Orphan Annie* by Harold Gray. The musical, (created by composer Charles Strouse, lyricist Martin Charnin, and bookwriter Thomas Meehan) opened on Broadway in 1977. It was nominated for 11 Tony Awards and won seven, including Best Musical, Best Score, and Best Book.

Joan Marcus



Nathan Lane and Terrence Mann in *The Addams Family*.

built the plot around the US Government declaring Dogpatch to be the “most unnecessary town in America” and calling for it to be turned into a nuclear test site. The residents of Dogpatch must fight back in what becomes a madcap musical comedy channeling the satire of the original comics and the charm of a Golden Age musical.

One exceptional addition to the musical adaptation of the comic was the choreography by Michael Kidd. Brooks Atkinson, theatre critic for the *New York Times* said in his review of the show, “Mr. Kidd has caught the spirit of Dogpatch civilization brilliantly enough to suggest that ballet is a . . .medium...for animating Al Capp’s cartoon drawings.”

ANNIE

The most successful comic-strip-to-musical adaptation is the musical *Annie*, adapted from the

The comic strip first appeared in 1924 and by the 1930’s took on a decidedly adult feel—often pitting the lovable orphan against murderers and gangsters. For the musical, the writers lightened the tone of the story while maintaining the desperate environment of depression era New York City. The title character, Annie, lives in an orphanage run by a mean-spirited matron named Miss Hannigan. She escapes the orphanage when she is adopted by billionaire Oliver (Daddy) Warbucks. Annie’s plucky spirit inspires everyone around her, including President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, to persevere until better days arrive.

In adapting *Annie* to the Broadway stage, the writers took major liberties with the loose story of the comics, but preserved Annie as a beacon of hope in an otherwise weary world. Her optimistic anthem, “Tomorrow”, perfectly captures her positive outlook:

WHEN I’M STUCK WITH A DAY
THAT’S GRAY,
AND LONELY,
I JUST STICK OUT MY CHIN
AND GRIN,
AND SAY,
OH

THE SUN’LL COME OUT
TOMORROW
SO YA GOTTA HANG ON

'TIL TOMORROW
COME WHAT MAY

TOMORROW! TOMORROW!
I LOVE YA TOMORROW!
YOU'RE ONLY
A DAY
AWAY!

The musical, which centered around Annie's optimism and courage in the midst of the Great Depression, was enormously appealing to 1970s audiences who were struggling with economic difficulties themselves; it ran for 2,377 performances on Broadway, and continues to be one of the most-performed musicals around the world.



"At the bottom of the steps, turn right.
The meter is on the wall."

Language Arts **DISCUSSION**



The Addams Family is only one of many musicals adapted from another medium, and like *The Addams Family*, many of these adapted works share the story of a unique character or group of characters. We are drawn to stories

that defy the norm because we all feel different at one point or another in our lives. We want to see characters that reflect those differences and, most importantly, overcome them.

Think of some of the adaptations you know. Why do you think you are drawn to a particular story? Is it a story about a super hero or a group of people who defy the rules put forth by society? We are drawn to characters that stand out from the crowd and dare to be different. Who are your favorites?

Annie's optimism and courage in the midst of the Great Depression, was enormously appealing to 1970s audiences who were struggling with economic difficulties themselves.

Language Arts **WRITING**

Many of Charles Addams *The Addams Family* cartoons do not have captions included with the images, but that didn't stop *The Addams Family* creators from giving the characters personalities and putting words in their mouths. Adaptation is about imagination after all.

Find a picture on the Internet—something funny, sad or exciting. Write a short story bringing the image to life!

Language Arts **EXPLORE**

Some cartoonists never include a caption with their cartoons. They rely on caption writers to make their characters speak. Go to: www.newyorker.com/humor/caption/ and enter the caption contest for this upcoming week. See if you've got the wit to be a caption writer too!

OVERTURE TO BEHAVIORAL STUDIES

CHARLES ADDAMS: FACING FEAR THROUGH ART

"Addams was a cathartic force, diffusing one's deepest fears by illustrating them."

The above quote, from the article *Charles Addams: American Gothic* by Fiona Murray, speaks to the foundation of Addams' position as one of the most memorable cartoonists of all time. For over 70 years, Addams has helped us face our fears by laughing at them. His cartoons tap into our deepest anxieties, and allow us to explore our dark side with lightness and humor.

The following excerpt from a 2006 NPR radio interview with Addams biographer Linda Davis sheds light on Charles Addams' appeal:

NPR: What makes him relevant?

LINDA DAVIS: His cartoons, unlike others, were for the most part timeless and dealt with universal themes...he laughed at things that were scary and diffused his own fear, and diffused ours in the process.

NPR: His own fear?

LD: Oh yes, he was very fearful. He was fearful as a child. He was very claustrophobic, and he struggled with that fear all his life. He had a fear of snakes, and so he drew them constantly in his cartoons—these enormous snakes that were about 20 feet long, and it was the most psychologically smart thing to do because by drawing out his fears and making fun of them, he diffused them.



Therese J. Borchard writes in a 2009 *World Of Psychology* article, "Fears are like annoying relatives. You can't avoid them forever, and ignoring them won't make them go away...Laugh at them... Scare them away." In illustrating macabre, often taboo, subjects in his cartoons, Addams found a way to cope with his own fears and connect with our desire to face difficult truths. He gave us the tools to be honest about

what scares us, and to break free from fears', often overwhelming, grasp.



HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY

In the musical, Gomez Addams explains one of the Addams family's traditions, a game called *Full Disclosure*.

FULL DISCLOSURE!
IT'S A GAME THAT WE PLAY
LET YOUR DARKEST SECRETS GIVE
YOU AWAY
FACE YOUR DEMONS AND THEN
HAPPILY SAY
I'M PLAYING FULL DISCLOSURE
WITH ALL THESE CRAZY HAPPY PEOPLE
FULL DISCLOSURE!

In the spirit of Charles Addams, the *Full Disclosure* game is a lesson in honesty; a way of telling secrets and facing fears. The Addams' believe that being honest is the only way to grow as a family. At the end of the first act, when they invite the visiting Beinekes to play *Full Disclosure*, chaos ensues forcing each character to examine the truth behind their fears and prejudices. It is only by being honest that the Addams family and the Beineke family can move beyond their differences and become friends.

Behavioral Studies DISCUSSION

"Even the children of New Yorker readers, who would not otherwise have picked up the magazine,

had come to watch for the cartoons that made scary things funny and celebrated breaking the rules...the children who loved Addams' cartoons understood that there was nothing really scary going on in them."

—*Charles Addams Biographer* Linda Davis.

*It is only by being honest
that the Addams family and
the Beineke family can move
beyond their differences and
become friends.*

We all deal with our fears in different ways. Some of us laugh, like Charles Addams, while others face them head on. What are some ways in which you face your fears? Can you think of a fear that may be funny or silly to others? What fear scares you the most? Which one of your fears could be faced with laughter? What are some other ways to face your fears?

Behavioral Studies WRITING

Think of something you're afraid of. Now write a short story in which you or a character you've created faces that fear using humor (like Charles Addams!).

Behavioral Studies

EXPLORE

Define Normal

Celebrating our differences sometimes begins by first acknowledging what makes us the same. Sharing things about ourselves can help bring us closer together and help us realize we're not that different after all. One thing we all have in common is that we're all afraid of something, and sometimes facing that fear requires a little more than a cartoon to laugh at.

Some fears are too big to face alone—we need to ask for help. Have each class member write down something they're afraid of and break into small groups. Have each group pick one fear and write a short skit about overcoming that fear using comedy. For example, write a skit about the time a spider scared you and you threw a shoe at it, or when you had to make a speech and you tried to picture everyone in his or her underwear to hilarious effect. Did you notice that telling people what you're afraid of helped you overcome that fear?



On April 20th, 2006, the Rochester Institute of Technology hosted an exhibit by its design students called, “Safe: Design Over Fear”. The project was modeled after a 2006 exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art in New York titled “SAFE: Design Takes On Risk”. According to an RIT press release, the design project consisted of more than 150 students who “designed and constructed a wearable or portable costume addressing a personal fear—ranging from a fear of germs, to a fear of getting bitten by a dog, to a fear of not wearing the appropriate outfit.”

The concept of facing our fears through art is not a new one. *New Yorker* cartoonist Charles Addams dedicated his career to bringing us face to face with our darkest fears.

OVERTURE TO LIFE SKILLS

THE ADDAMS FAMILY: DEFINE NORMAL

WEDNESDAY

Now here's the thing. We're gonna act real normal.

ADDAMS FAMILY

Gasp!

GRANDMA

Define "normal."

In *The Addams Family*, Wednesday Addams is worried that her family's strange traditions and rituals will disturb her boyfriend's visiting parents. She sings:

ONE NORMAL NIGHT
THAT'S ALL I WANT
THAT'S ALL I NEED FROM YOU
ONE NORMAL HOUSE
WITHOUT A MOUSE
TO FEED A PLANT OR TWO



Joan Marcus

Jackie Hoffman as Grandma and Adam Riegler as Pugsley

YOU MUST ADMIT WE'RE NOT
WHAT PEOPLE CALL "LAID BACK"
SO CAN'T WE MUSE A BIT
AND LOSE THE BASIC BLACK?
WHOA, ONE NORMAL NIGHT
WITH NORMAL PEOPLE ON THEIR WAY
JUST ONE NORMAL NIGHT
WHADDAYA SAY?

Wednesday considers her boyfriend Lucas, and his parents, to be a "normal family" and doesn't want her quirky relatives to embarrass her. She wants to make a good impression on her boyfriend's parents, and doesn't want her "different" family to scare them away.

In preparation for the Beineke's visit, Wednesday not only asks her family for "One Normal Night", she also changes her appearance and demeanor to become the kind of girl she thinks the Beinekes would approve of.



Adam Riegler, Jackie Hoffman, Krysta Rodriugez , Nathan Lane, Bebe Neuwirth, Zachary James, and Kevin Chamberlin in *The Addams Family*.

MORTICIA

What *are* you wearing?

WEDNESDAY

A dress?

MORTICIA

A *yellow* dress.

GOMEZ

Paloma – what happened? You look like a crime scene.

Wednesday radically alters her appearance and mood in order to conform to what she thinks is the normal way to behave. The rest of the Addams family believes they are just as “normal” as any other family, and don’t understand Wednesday’s request that they change who they are.

Life Skills

DISCUSSION

*Define
Normal*

What does the word “normal” mean? What are your assumptions about what “normal” is? Where do we learn what “normal” is? We see “normal” in movies and on television, but is that an accurate gauge of what is normal? Does the cultural information we learn in the media challenge or uphold stereotypes of what “normal” should be?

The Addams Family challenges standard definitions of “normal.” Can you think of other representations of “normal” and “abnormal”? In your discussion, explore other points of view of what “normal” means. How can just one “normal” exist with so many different kinds of people and cultures in the world?



Life Skills WRITING

Define Normal

Find two families or groups depicted in movies or on television and two families that you know personally—compare and contrast—What makes them “normal” or “abnormal” according to the status quo? Now compare the status quo to what you consider to be “normal”—what are some of the differences you notice?

Consider families on reality television. They are usually famous for being unusual. In what ways does reality television break stereotypes about what a “normal” family is supposed to be, and in what ways does it uphold stereotypes?

Choose two of the families that you have compared and contrasted, and write a scene in which they meet for the first time. Some things to think about while you’re writing the scene: what are some of the things that they notice right away about each other? Do the families get along? What conflicts arise when these two different families are

brought together? If you like, write another scene in which they find common ground and learn to accept each other’s differences.

Life Skills EXPLORE

Define Normal

Write two versions of a scene set around the family dinner table: one version that you consider “normal” behavior for your family and one that is “unusual.” Read both scenes out loud to the class and have them guess which is which.

What’s “normal” for your family? If your family were on a reality TV show, what would it be called? What would it be about? What makes your family different and unique that would make them a good subject for a reality show? Discuss your idea for a reality show based on your family with a parent, relative, or close friend.



Joan Marcus

Bebe Neuwirth as Morticia Addams in *The Addams Family*.





StageNOTES™

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