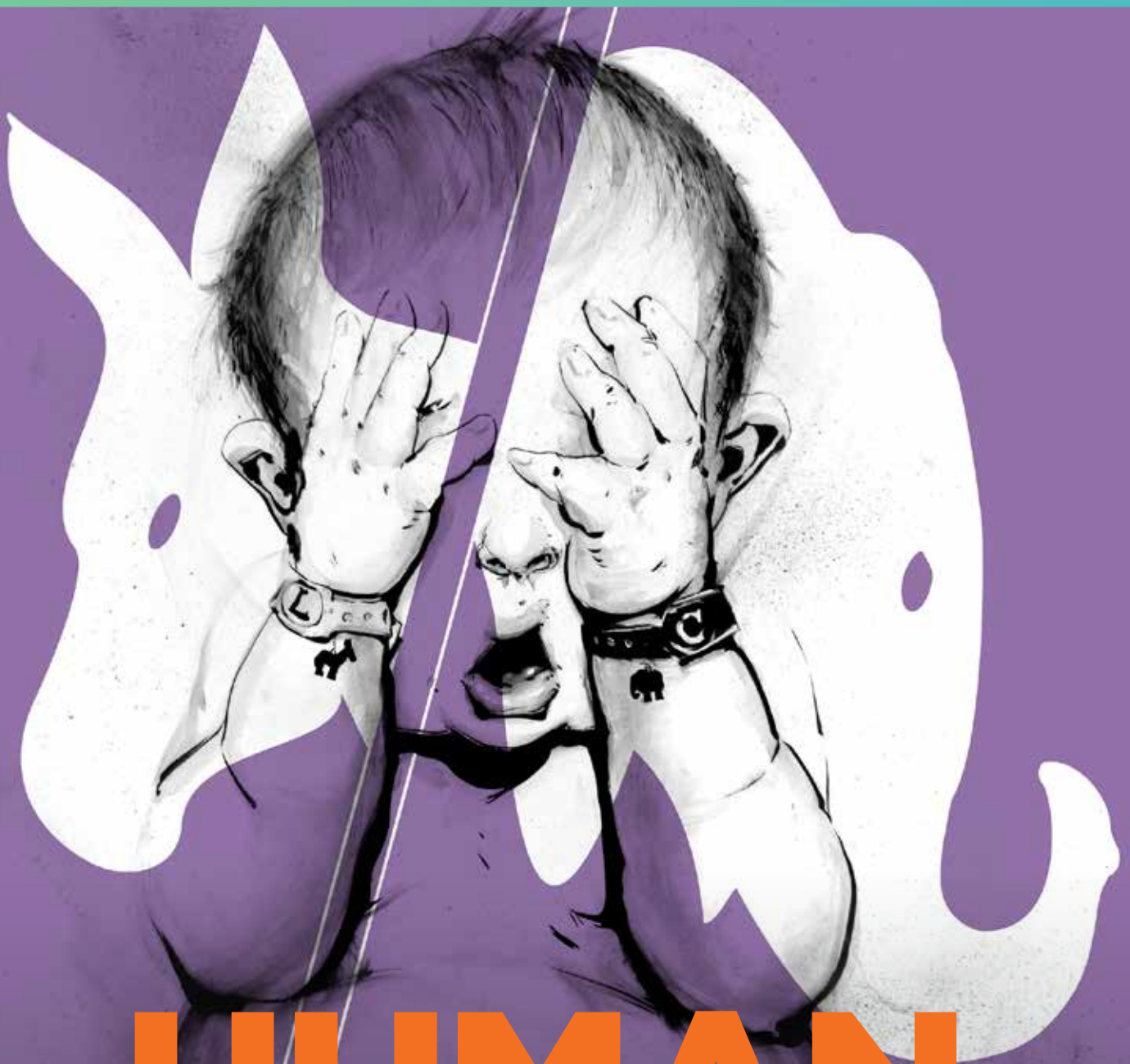




DENVER CENTER FOR THE
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Theatre Company

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



HUMAN ERROR

HUMAN ERROR SYNOPSIS

"A man's errors are his portals of discovery."

— James Joyce

Marrieds Madelyn and Keenan are PBS-watching, NPR-listening, vegan Blue State liberals, while Heather and John are NRA, conservative, truck-driving, Red State carnivores, both couples of whom are trying to get pregnant through in vitro fertilization. After a mix-up caused by their bungling fertility doctor, Heather becomes pregnant with Keenan and Madelyn's baby, and she and John reluctantly agree to carry the child to term. Now the two couples must face a nine-month's odyssey of culture shock, opposing values, difficult emotions, shifting attitudes, and finally an unlikely friendship.



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HUMAN ERROR

By **Eric Pfeffinger**

Directed by **Shelley Butler**

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PLAYWRIGHT ERIC PFEFFINGER

Eric Pfeffinger is from Toledo, Ohio and graduated from Indiana University in Bloomington. His plays have been produced by the Humana Festival of New American Plays, the Geva Theatre Center. The Denver Center Theatre Company, Childsplay, Imagination Stage, the Noble Fool, the Bloomington Playwrights Project, Abington Theatre, Theatre of Note and others. He developed plays through workshops and readings at Playpenn, Page 73, the Lark, the

Colorado New Play Summit, Chicago Dramatists, Geva, and Rattlestick Playwrights Theatre. His plays are published by Dramatic Publishing and Dramatics Magazine. He has received commissions from the InterAct Theatre, Imagination Stage and the Signature Theatre. He is co-author of the novel *The High Impact Infidelity Diet* and contributes to such magazines as *American Theatre* and various websites. He is also a librarian at the Toledo Lucas County Library.

IN VITRO FERTILIZATION: IVF

In Vitro Fertilization — IVF — is an Assisted Reproductive Technology, also called “artificial insemination”. IVF attempts to induce pregnancy in couples who can’t conceive the usual way, by extracting eggs from the would-be mother, collecting sperm from the father, and then combining egg and sperm in a controlled laboratory environment. If the process is successful, the resulting embryo is implanted in the host mother.

In the IVF embryo transfer process eggs are taken from the donor mother through a minor surgical procedure that uses ultrasound imaging to guide a hollow needle through the pelvic cavity to remove the eggs. In the insemination procedure the donor father produces sperm which is combined with the egg, which are then placed together in the laboratory to allow fertilization.

In some cases where there is a lower probability of fertilization, a single sperm cell is injected directly into the egg to improve the odds of a successful pregnancy. The egg is monitored to assure that fertilization and cell division are taking place. Once this occurs, the fertilized egg is considered a viable embryo, and transferred to the host mother three to five days following fertilization.

Assisted reproductive technology (ART) involves

a significant physical, financial and emotional commitment on the part of a couple. Psychological stress and emotional problems are common, especially if the procedure is unsuccessful. A single IVF cycle can range from \$12,000 to \$17,000, and not every attempt is successful — some couples may have to try more than once to achieve a successful pregnancy, and in a few cases despite several attempts, no successful pregnancy occurs.

Some experts in the field warn that the growing field of assisted procreation can involve serious medical blunders such as “misdirected” embryos — embryos implanted in the wrong mother. In 1999 a white New York State woman gave birth to twin boys, one white and the other black. The woman had undergone an embryo transfer the same day that an African-American couple were also having an IVF. But the black woman’s embryo wound up implanted in the white woman, reportedly through a lab error, and the white woman was the only one to become pregnant. The couples initially agreed to a shared custody agreement, but it ended in a dispute in court. Eventually, the genetic parents won.

<http://americanpregnancy.org/infertility/in-vitro-fertilization>

<http://mews.nationalpost.com/health/vf-mix-ups-lead-to-babies-born-with-unintended-parentage>

RED STATES AND BLUE STATES

“When Americans say that politics has nothing to do with what really matters, they are usually right.”
—E. J. Dionne, Jr.¹

According to *The Washington Post*, the terms ‘Red States’ and ‘Blue States’ came into use in the United States in the presidential election of 2000 when Tim Russert used them on an episode of the Today show. The advent of color television prompted TV news reporters to rely on color-coded electoral maps. *The Post* claims that from 1976 to 2004, the broadcast networks alternated between red and blue for the competing parties. According to another source in 1976, John Chancellor, the anchorman for NBC Nightly News, asked for a large illuminated map of the United States. If Jimmy Carter won a state, the map would light

up in blue; if Gerald Ford won a state, it would light up in red. The feature proved to be so popular, that four years later, all three major networks would use those colors to designate the winners in each state. In the election of 2000, the outcome of which was unclear for some time, major media outlets used the same colors on the electoral map, which was continually in view.

Since that time, the terms Red State and Blue State have come to describe states that are generally thought to be predominantly Conservative or Liberal.

1. Bender and Leone, p. 159.

Bender, David L. and Leone, Bruno, eds. *Politics in America: Opposing Viewpoints*. San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1992. *The Parties versus the People*. London: Yale University Press, 2012.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red-states-and-blue-states>

LIBERALISM

What does it mean to say that a person is a *liberal*, or to say that a thing may be described with this word? The following list contains ideas that many liberals believe to be true:

Liberals may:

- believe in governmental action to achieve equal opportunity and equality for all, and that it is the duty of the government to address community issues and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights.
- believe the role of government should be to guarantee that no one is in need.
- emphasize the need for the government to address the people's economic and social problems.
- be referred to as being on the Left of the political spectrum.
- generally be Democrats.
- believe in abolishing the death penalty as being cruel and unusual punishment, not being effective in preventing crime, and that the death penalty may result in innocent parties being wrongfully executed.
- favor a market system in which government regulates the economy to protect against big business, monopolies, and to generally level the playing field.
- support universalized government-supervised health care.
- believe that the U.S. should enact laws to control and reduce carbon emissions.
- believe that the 2nd Amendment is only intended to arm a militia, not private individuals.
- believe in the separation of Church and State.
- support legal immigration, amnesty for illegal immigrants, and visas for spouses and children to join immigrants already in the U.S.
- believe that marriage should be legal for all individuals regardless of their sexual identities.
- support fair taxation and provide social welfare for the poor and needy.

CONSERVATISM

Roughly two-fifths of Americans call themselves “conservative.” What do they mean by the word? Conservatism is a political and social philosophy promoting traditional social institutions and ways of life.

Conservatives may:

- believe that tradition and prevailing social norms often contain within them handed-down wisdom.
- desire to preserve the political philosophy and rules of government articulated in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
- believe that it is imperative to preserve traditional morality as it is articulated in the Bible, through cultural norms and possibly the power of the State.
- embrace localism, community and family ties, human scale, and a responsibility to the future.
- believe that America shouldn't intervene in the affairs of other nations except to defend ourselves from aggression and enforce contracts and treaties.
- embrace gun ownership
- believe in the illegality or immorality of abortion.
- oppose American liberalism, multiculturalism, identity politics, affirmative action, welfare, European-style social policies.
- desire to be left alone by government.
- believe in federalism.
- believe that taxes should be lower and government smaller.
- believe that the national debt and deficits put America in peril.
- believe that whenever possible, government budgets should be balanced.

YOGA

Yoga is both a physical and a spiritual practice, having ancient origins on the Indian sub-continent and the Indus Valley, and now popular throughout the western world. Although yoga originally evolved in a religious and devotional Brahmin society, yoga in the West is considered secular, or non-denominational, not associated with Hindu religion, though some of its original outer trappings, such as chanting, might be retained.

Yoga was originally introduced to the West by several highly-regarded East Indian teachers in early and mid-20th Century. Although mainly associated with East Indian traditions, scholars believe that Asian Buddhist tantric practices also contributed substantially to the canon of yoga philosophy and practice.

Yoga was originally a practice that focused on meditation and breath control practices for gaining spiritual insight; physical, or 'hatha' yoga, which focuses mainly on bodily postures or exercise, was popularized by Indian personalities like Vivekananda, a spiritual teacher who came to the West to lecture and teach in the early 1900's, and by Indian teachers Iyengar, Desikachar, and K. Patabhi Jois, whose western students brought the physical practice of postures to the West, particularly Indra Devi, who taught yoga to Hollywood movie stars and personalities. A number of other respected Indian teachers such as Swami Sivananda have also contributed to the understanding of the practice in the western world, and a great many western teachers have taken up the practice.

Yoga is a holistic, healing discipline that offers a broad range of tools for supporting health and personal transformation. Yoga's tools include dynamic postures, conscious breathing techniques, meditative practices, gestures, use of vocal sounds, guided self-inquiry, and much more. These tools can be utilized in many different combinations to suit the unique needs of the individual. Yoga views the human system as not just the physical body, but as comprised of several dimensions, or "sheaths", including breath, mind, personality and emotions. These dimensions of the human system are interconnected and interdependent.

In the decades since its introduction, yoga in America has morphed into too many different styles to count, all of them promising various health and beauty benefits – Hot Yoga, Iyengar Yoga, Vinyasa

Yoga, Yogaerobics, Ashtanga Yoga, Men's Yoga, and it seems these days that each teacher seeks to find a unique brand for the yoga that they teach. This can be confusing to the beginner, but almost every teacher uses the same core poses in their work.

Some instructors teach a very athletic practice, others a gentler approach, designed for the elderly or those with injuries or disabilities, or those who simply want to pursue a more slow-paced, introspective physical practice. There is also a growing tradition of yoga therapy, principally based on the teachings and methods of Indian teacher Krishnamacharya and his son Desikachar. Their highly individualized approach to treating physical ailments are now being carried on by a number of American and European yoga therapists who studied in depth with these teachers.

In general a regular yoga practice, taught by a qualified teacher, can greatly improve flexibility, digestion, circulation, strength, balance, lung capacity, mental alertness, body awareness and many other subtle benefits.

Originally, yoga was taught and practiced almost exclusively by men, but in the 20th century, women began to flock to the practice of yoga, and some teachers such as Geeta Iyengar, daughter of famed teacher B. K. S. Iyengar, specialized in teaching yoga to women, and has published a book called *Yoga, a Gem for Women*.

"At each stage of a woman's life, her body goes through physical and physiological changes. The practice of yoga can be modified and adapted to suit her changing needs in each phase, helping her achieve peace of mind and bodily poise."¹

A consistent practice of yoga offers mental and physical health benefits, including but not limited to increased mental clarity and stress reduction. The benefits contribute to an increased feeling of well-being. Most yoga routines work the entire system during a single session, perhaps offering a more global sense of oneself, unlike for instance weight training, running, or calisthenics.

1. Iyengar, p. 30.

Iyengar, B. K. S. *Yoga: the Path to Holistic Health*. London: DK Publishing, 2001

Long, Ray Dr. *The Key Poses of Yoga*. New York: Bandha Yoga, 2003.

<http://www.verywelllift.com/http-health-benefits-of-yoga-3566783>

'NEW AGE' PHILOSOPHIES AND BELIEFS

In the play *Human Error*, Madelyn and Keenan might be called “new-agers”, young urban liberals who try to follow an organic lifestyle and left-of-center politics. “New Age” philosophy and beliefs come under a broad umbrella of ideas that seemed to enter the American cultural scene in the so-called “hippie” era of the 1960s and ‘70’s, and continue today in different forms, although the roots of new age ideas stretch back into the 1800s with movements such as Theosophy and Transcendentalism. The New Age was and remains a counter-cultural groundswell whose followers hope to correct at least in part the many ills that afflict modern society through a return to a simpler, largely pre-Industrial lifestyle.

In the 1967 musical *Hair*, the song “The Age of Aquarius” was seen by many as an anthem of the coming New Age, a theoretical time when humans will (hopefully) experience a cosmic cyclical change that would bring world peace and a new spirituality

based more on individual experience and less on dogma.

Some of the ideas that fall under the rubric of New Age include non-violence, vegetarianism and veganism, recycling, environmentalism, meditation and yoga, simplicity, sustainable energy practices such as solar panels and composting, holistic medicine, social justice, liberal politics, growing one’s own vegetables, conserving water and energy, Eastern practices such as Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, Tai Chi, Qi Gong, acupuncture, herbalism and other alternative medicine practices, as well as eating organic foods, the non-GMO movement, and using non-toxic cleaning and beauty products.

Although the core philosophies of the New Age appear to be generally agreed upon as uncomplicated, a major commercial aspect of *new age* thought and lifestyle has flourished, with books, music, food products, clothing, beauty products.

UNLIKELY FRIENDSHIPS – OPPOSITES ATTRACT

“Each friend represents a world in us, a world possibly not born until they arrive, and it is only by this meeting that a new world is born.”

—Anais Nin

Most of us choose our friends, or are chosen by our friends, based on common interests (X-box, nature photography), some form of affinity (“I just like her”), or sometimes just through being parked next to another person in a school room or at a ball game and realizing you get on well and enjoy spending time together.

Another kind of friendship is the kind where two or more people that don’t have much in common are thrown together by circumstance, and learn to get along, even like one another, in spite of their differences.

They say that opposites attract, and it’s common for two very different types to find common ground. While romantic partners should ideally share the same values, differences in personalities can make for good friendships. Researchers have analyzed combinations of people who became best friends, and found that their relationships thrived because of the differences in their personalities. Their studies found that one individual may be extroverted,

agreeable, emotionally stable, conscientious and open to change. Such extroverts find it easier to make friends quickly, but often seek a more introverted friend to balance them out and bring a more introspective quality to the relationship.

Quieter types tend to be introverted, conscientious, and flexible and cooperative. But such individuals also may also come with the emotional issues that create their shyness, and so tend to choose tougher or more outgoing types for a friend.

Many studies have concluded that most people meet and make their best friends in their early years, through school, university, the military, and social organizations. Later on in life, as work and family responsibilities take precedence, people find it more difficult to make significant new friends or to maintain their earlier close relationships.

As they mature, people may tend to befriend others with whom they have something in common, such as neighbors, co-workers, parents of their children’s friends, church members, book club members or gym buddies, or others who share common interests. These friendships, however, tend not to be as deep or long-lasting, but may be enjoyable, healthy and supportive just the same.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2015/10/how-friendships-change-over-time-in-adulthood/411466/>

HUMOR AS A LITERARY TOOL

Humor is one of the most effective literary devices available for entertaining an audience – humor can help to establish character, and to make plots engaging and memorable. Humor can serve many functions in a dramatic work. It arouses interest in the audience, sustains attention, helps to connect with the characters, emphasizes and relates ideas and helps audience grasp the situation. One key function of humor is to provide surprise, which keeps an audience leaning forward, interested and engaged. It is one of the best ways of bringing people together through the intimacy of shared laughter and understanding. The quality of humor can range from gentle situational jokes to sight gags, from Neil Simon one-liners to door-slamming farce. Comedy can make for a light evening's entertainment, to the sugar-coated pill (making tough truths more palatable), to a piece that has real heart, or a social message.

Comedy and jokes often trade on truth, and we like to laugh at what we recognize as true. Many situations in comedy are based on the discomfort caused by either conflict or deceit, and while we might feel stressed in our own lives in such situations we can sit back and laugh at others onstage or screen who are struggling to control their own discomfort.

For Baby Boomers, classic television series were a rogue's gallery of contrasting personalities, from Lucy and Ethel, to Ralph Kramden and Ed Norton, to Archie Bunker and Edith Bunker, or Archie and his son-in-law Meathead, and so many more. Television's *Will and Grace* offers four sharply contrasting central

characters, from Will's fussy, uptight lawyer to Grace's impulsive, no-boundaries career girl, from Jack's clueless party boy to Karen Walker's boozy insensitive socialite, all four characters bouncing off of one another in always-surprising antics. The cult favorite Fox series *Arrested Development* used a whole cast of clashing types with hidden agendas.

The play, movie and television series *The Odd Couple* is a classic case of using contrasting characters for humor. Oscar is a self-indulgent slob, used to being disorganized and sloppy, smoking cigars and leaving dishes in the sink; his friend Felix is an uptight neat-freak who can't stand mess and clutter. The two men are forced to move in together to make do in the process of getting divorced from their wives, which puts them into a pressure-cooker situation that only intensifies their differences and rising irritation, as they are all the while trying to maintain a friendship, usually for comic effect.

<http://theconversation.com/jumanitas-a-new-word-for-humor-and-seriousness-combine82556>.

<http://theconversation.com/permission-to-laugh?/82544>

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-Performance Questions

1. When you have polar opposite views on an issue with another person, is it possible to create and/or preserve a friendship? If the friendship is broken, what can be done to restore or repair the relationship?
2. How can one's personal assumptions support or detract engaging with other people?
3. What are the similarities and differences between "friends" on social media and friends that we communicate to in person?

Post-Performance Questions

1. What surprised you about the scenic design? How does it add to the overall storytelling?
2. How would you describe the relationship between Madelyn and Keenan? What obstacles do they find in their path?
3. How would you describe the relationship between Heather and Jim? What do they have in common with Keenan and Madelyn?
4. How does the play comment on parenthood? What are the responsibilities and expectations of first-time parents? What are each couple's views about parenting?
5. What are some of the issues that the two couples discuss? Which side do you find yourself agreeing or disagreeing with?
6. Are the couples able to come to some sort of agreement on any issues or are they still at odds?
7. What do you think happens to the couples after the play concludes?

PERSPECTIVES

Make your experience unforgettable when you join us for one of these insightful, educational events:

Creative Team Perspectives

May 18 | 6:00pm | The Jones

Get an exclusive insider's perspective before the show when you join us for a free, professionally-moderated discussion with the creative team.

Cast Perspectives

Jun 10 | 1:30pm

Join a fun and engaging discussion with the actors after the performance.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The Denver Public Library recommends: Read!

Listen to your mother: what she said then, what we're saying now edited by Ann Imig (2015).

These essays showcase the personal side of parenthood starring mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and others who are the invisible force of love in children's lives. The stories are raw and honest about what it's like to be raised by two lesbian moms, to be adopted, to select a surrogate, to lose yourself in motherhood, and to use your children's imaginary lice outbreak to get out of social obligations. The stories are short, most less than five pages, which makes them perfect to read while you're waiting to see if your son is actually going to stay in his bed this time or when your daughter is in time out. When you feel like parenthood has punched you in the face, connect to others who feel the same.

Watch!

Enlighten Up! directed by Kate Churchill (2009)

Filmmaker and yoga true believer Kate Churchill had a mission: to prove that yoga could improve the mental, physical, and spiritual health of anyone. For her experiment she enlists Nick Rosen, an unemployed Boulderite and yoga skeptic, to undergo total yoga immersion while she records what she expects to be a dramatic transformation of body, mind, and soul. Their journey into the heart of yoga takes Kate and Nick across America and India, pairing Nick with famous yogis at every stop. Despite being game, Nick's spiritual aha moment never comes, even as he grows more flexible. Much to her consternation, Kate is forced to reexamine her closely held beliefs about the power of yoga. Together they discover that the best yoga is simply the yoga that a person can commit to doing, and one needn't travel far to find it.

Listen!

I Want My Epidural Back by Karen Alpert, parenting blogger extraordinaire, author of babysideburns.com.

Listen to Alpert read this funny memoir about mediocre parenting, it's like her version of Helicopter parenting. I think this is the guide that Heather would give Madelyn, because children will not understand Sunday mornings in bed, or why you won't be around Friday nights because it's dad's boys night out! Say goodbye to those people that you were and get ready to embrace the hilariously mediocre parents you are about to become.

Download!

Strangers in their own land: anger and mourning on the American Right by Arlie Hochschild.

With the ever-relevant goal of uncovering common political ground, one of the most influential sociologists of our time, Arlie Hochschild, leaves behind the homogeneously liberal town of Berkeley, California to immerse herself in the deeply conservative bayous of Louisiana. While her hope to bridge the political divide seems overly optimistic at first, she uses her background in sociology to gain a greater understanding of the emotion at play in politics, even coming to empathize and embrace the men and women she meets on her journey. Find this title and other downloadables at denver.overdrive.com.



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