

INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



THE 39 STEPS



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Contributing Writers.....**Kimberly Colburn and Sally Gass**
Education Contributor**David Saphier**

DENVERCENTER.ORG
Administration 303.893.4000
Box Office 303.893.4100

39 Steps

Adapted by..... **Patrick Barlow**
From the novel by **John Buchan**
From the movie by **Alfred Hitchcock**
Licensed by **ITV Global Entertainment Limited**
And an original concept by **Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon**
Directed by **Meredith McDonough**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAY SYNOPSIS.....	4
A HISTORY OF VAUDEVILLE.....	4
THE AUTHOR OF THE NOVEL.....	5
THE DIRECTOR OF THE FILM.....	5
THE ADAPTER OF THE PLAY.....	6
THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK, THE MOVIE, AND THE PLAY	6
FROM TENSE BRITISH THRILLER TO BROADWAY COMEDY	7
ESPIONAGE BY THE GERMANS AND THE BRITISH BEFORE WORLD WAR II.....	7
MENTALISM	8

PLAY SYNOPSIS

The 39 Steps is a stage play adapted by Patrick Barlow from the 1915 novel by John Buchan and the 1935 Alfred Hitchcock film of the same name. The play follows the story of Richard Hannay, a man who finds himself caught up in a dangerous and exciting adventure.

Set in 1930s England, the play begins with Hannay attending a dull evening at the theater. His evening takes an unexpected turn when he meets a mysterious woman who asks to accompany him back to his flat. Later that night, she reveals that she is a spy and has uncovered a plot to steal important military secrets. However, when she is murdered in Hannay's flat, he becomes the prime suspect and must go on the run to clear his name.

As Hannay tries to unravel the conspiracy, he encounters a series of eccentric characters, including a crofter's wife, a saleswoman, and a Scottish police officer. Along the way, he is pursued by both the police and the spies and must use all his cunning and wit to evade capture.

The play is famous for its fast-paced action and slapstick humor, with the actors switching between multiple characters at a rapid pace. The show's inventive staging includes shadow puppets and clever use of sound effects to create the illusion of car chases, airplane crashes, and other action-packed moments.

A HISTORY OF VAUDEVILLE

Vaudeville was a popular form of entertainment in the United States and Canada from the late 19th century until the early 1930s. The word "vaudeville" comes from the French term "voix de ville," which means "voice of the city." The term was originally used to describe the popular songs and dances performed by people in the streets of Paris. Vaudeville eventually became a staple of American entertainment, with a diverse range of acts including comedy sketches, acrobats, magicians, singers, and dancers.

Vaudeville emerged in the late 1800s as a response to the increasing urbanization and industrialization of America. The shows were designed to provide an escape from the stresses of everyday life, with performers offering an array of entertainment options to appeal to a wide audience. The format of vaudeville shows varied, with performers typically performing for 10-15 minutes at a time and the acts changing frequently throughout the show.

One of the most notable figures in vaudeville was Benjamin Franklin Keith, who opened his first theater in Boston in 1883. Keith was known for his strict professionalism and insistence on high-quality acts, which helped to elevate the reputation of vaudeville as a legitimate art form. He also pioneered the use of electric lighting in theaters, which allowed for more elaborate and visually stunning performances.

Mr. Memory can be seen as a nod to the vaudeville tradition of the "human marvel." These were performers who specialized in seemingly superhuman feats of memory, such as reciting long lists of numbers or recalling obscure facts. Mr. Memory's ability to recall any piece of information presented to him is reminiscent of the impressive memory feats that were a staple of vaudeville shows.

Vaudeville became an important platform for African American performers, who were often excluded from other forms of entertainment due to racial discrimination. Many vaudeville shows featured blackface minstrelsy, which was a controversial and problematic aspect of the genre. However, vaudeville also provided opportunities for African American performers to showcase their talents and gain national recognition. Performers like Bert Williams, who became the highest-paid African American performer of his time, and the Nicholas Brothers, known for their incredible tap-dancing skills, were among the most celebrated performers of their era.

Vaudeville declined in popularity in the 1920s and 1930s, as other forms of entertainment, such as radio and movies, became more widely available. However, the legacy of vaudeville lives on in the many performers who got their start in the genre and went on to achieve great success in other areas of entertainment.

Vaudeville was a popular and influential form of entertainment in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It provided a platform for a diverse range of performers and helped to elevate the reputation of American entertainment. While it may no longer be as popular as it once was, the legacy of vaudeville continues to be felt in the world of entertainment today.

Sources:

"Vaudeville: Old Time Variety" by John Kenrick (<https://www.musicals101.com/vaude.htm>)

"The Rise and Fall of Vaudeville" by Peter Filichia (<https://www.playbill.com/article/the-rise-and-fall-of-vaudeville-com-86805>)

"Vaudeville, Old and New" by Frank Cullen, Florence Hackman, and Donald McNeilly (https://books.google.com/books/about/Vaudeville_Old_and_New.html?id=XFfnKg6BcAC)

THE AUTHOR OF THE NOVEL

John Buchan was born in Perth, Scotland in 1875, the first son of the Reverend John Buchan, a Free Church minister and his wife, Helen. He attended Glasgow University and later Oxford, where he became president of the Oxford Union and published a collection of his own short stories. In 1907 he married Susan Grosvenor and became the chief literary advisor to publishers, Thomas Nelson and Son, as well as deputy Chairman of Reuters News Agency. In 1912 the couple moved to 76 Portland Place, London; John continued writing and publishing short stories, essays and biographies and began dividing his time between London and Scotland. In 1914 he was drawn into secret intelligence work. That year, plagued by a duodenal ulcer, he was ordered to bed where he rested and wrote *The 39 Steps*. In 1917 he was appointed director of the new Department of Information responsible directly to the Prime Minister. A year later he became Director of Intelligence in the newly formed Ministry of Information. At the same time he wrote the four volume History of the Great War.

In 1927 Buchan became a member of Parliament representing the Scottish Universities. As the 1930s dawned, he became a close advisor to Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald. In 1935, as Lord Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, he sailed to Canada to become Governor General. Adventurous and pioneering, he journeyed into the Arctic but continued to write. He died in February 1940 after an accident related to a stroke and was mourned across Canada.

THE DIRECTOR OF THE FILM

Alfred Joseph Hitchcock was born in Leytonstone, a suburb of East London to William and Emma Hitchcock, a lower middle-class couple who owned and ran a grocery and poultry shop. The youngest of three children, he was brought up a strict Catholic and at the age of 11 was sent to St. Ignatius, a Jesuit school in Stamford Hill, London. By his own account, he was a lonely child with a penchant for practical jokes, a habit that remained with him for the rest of his life. He voraciously read magazines, novels and plays, developing a taste for the macabre stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Charles Dickens' *Bleak House*.

When Hitchcock's father died in 1914, he began working for the Henley Telegraph Company, first as a clerk and then in the advertising department where he exercised his talent for drawing. He also attended evening art classes at the University of London. In 1920, eager to break into the film industry, Hitchcock secured a menial job designing titles at Famous Players-Lasky, an American-owned studio in North London. In a short time he became head of the titles department, which devised and supervised the text that was inserted into the silent films produced by the company, a job that involved an element of scriptwriting. In 1922 Famous Players-Lasky pulled out of their studios and rented the property to Michael Balcon and Victor Saville, who formed Gainsborough Pictures. Balcon recognized Hitchcock's skills and offered to let him try his hand at directing. Balcon also introduced Hitchcock to Alma Reville, a film editor and scriptwriter whom he married in 1926.

Hitchcock joined British International Pictures (BIP) under the direction of producer John Maxwell in 1927 for a record fee, making him the highest paid director in England at only 28 years old. During this period he began to explore the possibilities of manipulating space through creative camera placement; changing time through editing, and psychology through the insertion of subjective shots. With the development of his visual language, he signed a deal with Balcon's Government British Pictures in 1934 that allowed him to make a series of suspense thrillers with writer Charles Bennett. These included *The Man who Knew Too Much* (1934), *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Secret Agent* (1936), *Sabotage* (1936), *Young and Innocent* (1937) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1938).

Hitchcock is acknowledged as the master of the thriller or suspense genre, manipulating his audience's fears and desires and taking the viewers into a state of association with the representation of reality facing the characters. He often placed an innocent, average, responsible person into a strange, life-threatening or terrorizing situation, in a case of mistaken identity, misidentification or wrongful accusation as in *The 39 Steps*, *The Wrong Man* (1956) and *North by Northwest* (1959).

He came to the United States in 1939 under contract to David O. Selznick. Here he made such thriller classics as *Dial M for Murder* (1954), *Vertigo* (1958), *Rear Window* (1954) and *Psycho* (1960). This master of suspense died in Los Angeles in 1980.

THE ADAPTER OF THE PLAY

Patrick Barlow, the stage adapter of *The 39 Steps*, born in March 1947, is an English actor, comedian and playwright. He is founder, Artistic Director and Chief Executive of the two-man National Theatre of Brent.

On television he played the character Bob in a British sitcom “Is It Legal?” who was besotted with his co-star Imelda Staunton. His film work has been small cameo roles in such movies as *Shakespeare in Love*, *Notting Hill*, *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, *Girl from Rio* and *Nanny McPhee*.

He is best known for his adaptation of Alfred Hitchcock’s *The 39 Steps*, which premiered in June 2005 at the West Yorkshire Playhouse. It transferred to London’s Tricycle Theatre in 2006 and opened on Broadway in early 2008.

Sources:

Buchan, John. *The 39 Steps*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Haefner, Nicholas. *Alfred Hitchcock*. Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2005. <http://www.filmsite.org/thrillerfilms.html>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patrick_Barlow

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE BOOK, THE MOVIE, AND THE PLAY

“Drama is life with the dull bits cut out.”

-Alfred Hitchcock

John Buchan’s book *The 39 Steps* takes place in 1915 England where Richard Hannay is a colonial mining engineer. There are no female characters; the murdered spy in Hannay’s flat is a man named Scudder whom Hannay has known for a few days. Buchan spent much ink describing the glens and mountains of the Scottish Highlands and populating his story with colorful eccentrics—an innkeeper with literary aspirations, a Liberal candidate with pacifist sympathies, a working-class railroad man addicted to drink and a bald archaeologist who is not what he seems. In the book the enemy agents aren’t just trying to steal information, they’re also planning to assassinate the Greek Premier. In addition, Hannay doesn’t have a love interest. Finally, “The 39 Steps” is an actual staircase containing 39 steps leading to a beach. Buchan’s book sold a million copies before he died in 1940.

Alfred Hitchcock ripped away most of the contents of the novel and, in doing so, “struck a blow for the director as a creative voice in his own right, independent of and superior to the novelist.”¹ The movie is a picaresque thriller that “deals with the travails of a plucky and adventurous character, who, in a series of interlinked and colorful episodes, confronts various adversaries and life threatening situations.”² In *The 39 Steps*, Hitchcock took the premise of the innocent bystander, pushed and pursued by both the forces of good and evil, and added the atmosphere of Vaudeville and the music hall, bits of slapstick, provided sexual tension, and changed the period from 1915 to the 1930s. Hitchcock also used the MacGuffin, which is “a plot element that catches the viewers’ attention and appears to be of utmost importance, but functions to intentionally misdirect the audience.”³ In the film the MacGuffin is the smuggling of secret plans vital to England’s defense as well as the nature of the 39 steps. Hitchcock added the character of Mr. Memory who answers Hannay’s question as to the nature of The 39 Steps. “The 39 Steps is an organization of spies, collecting information on behalf of the foreign office—.”⁴ Then he is shot by Professor Jordan. According to Marian Keane, a Hitchcock scholar, “the director’s deepest subjects—theatre and its relation to film, the abandonment of human beings in vacant and foreboding landscapes, the complex human quest for knowledge, and the nature of accidents—abound in *The 39 Steps*.”

In the play, every scene from the movie is reproduced by four actors who play a cast of some 50 characters, scrambling hats, props and accents. The play makes many references to Hitchcock’s other films as well as some popular movies set in English locales. Most notably, the stage adaptation of *The 39 Steps* shift the tone from a tense thriller into a hilarious love letter to movies, melodrama, and Hitchcock.

Sources:

1. Eder, *All Movie Guide*.

2. Haefner, p. 20.

3. www.filmsite.org

4. Keane.

Buchan, John. *The 39 Steps*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.

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<http://www.filmsite.org/thrillerfilms.html>

FROM TENSE BRITISH THRILLER TO BROADWAY COMEDY

John Buchan, recovering from a duodenal ulcer, wrote and published *The 39 Steps* in 1915. In the book Richard Hannay, a mining engineer, is framed for a spy's murder, learns of a plot to steal British defense secrets and flees London for Scotland. Four Hannay stories followed, but the first one remained most popular and stayed in print to the present day thanks to Alfred Hitchcock.

Hitchcock adapted the novel in 1935. He added various nuances such as romance in the notorious scene in which Pamela (Madeleine Carroll) removes her stockings while handcuffed to Hannay, Robert Donat. The year it was released Buchan became Governor General of Canada and said Hitchcock "improved on his novel."¹

But others believed they could improve this movie. In 1959 Ralph Thomas made a Technicolor version that matched Hitchcock almost shot for shot. Another remake, in 1978, starred Robert Powell and stayed much closer to Buchan's novel—that is, until a final scene in which Hannay (like Harold Lloyd) dangled from Big Ben's clock hands.

Ten years later Powell starred in a TV series called "Hannay," which lasted for 13 episodes. Then in 1996 another remake was discussed: a contemporary American one to be written and directed by Robert Towne, screenwriter of *Chinatown*. Rumors proliferated that Mel Gibson would be the star, but nothing materialized.

In 1998, Simon Corble and Nobby Dimon scripted a stage adaptation using four actors that re-created chase scenes with sheets, ladders and trunks. The same year they toured Britain. Producer Edward Snape bought the script in 2001 but couldn't seem to get it to London until 2004, when he hired Patrick Barlow, founder of a comic troupe known for send-ups of the Bible and the Ring cycle. Barlow, meant to play Hannay, instead rewrote the whole script, adding numerous Hitchcock references. Two years later, director Maria Aitken joined the group and added a vaudevillian flavor. Transferring to the West End of London in late 2006, the show won a surprise Olivier Award for Best New Comedy and made it to Broadway a little over a year later.

Sources:

1. nymag.com

<http://nymag.com/arts/theatre/longstory/42755>

ESPIONAGE BY THE GERMANS AND THE BRITISH BEFORE WORLD WAR II

"A spy, like a writer, lives outside the mainstream population. He steals his experience through bribes and reconstructs it."

-John Le Carre

The Abwehr (meaning "defense" or "fending off") was the German military intelligence organization from 1866-1944. It was founded to gather information for the Prussian government during a war with neighboring Austria.

During World War I in 1914 German agents worked to pinpoint the location and strength of Allied forces, helping the German army to invade and progress through northern France before trench warfare began. Agency director Walter Nicolai recognized the need for a modernized intelligence force and reorganized the department to include experts in reconnaissance, cipher and radio monitoring and counter espionage. This enabled the agency to tap communication wires and intercept and decipher Allied dispatches. Abwehr also sent several agents to spy on the manufacture of poison gas in France and tracked munitions production and shipping in Great Britain. While the Abwehr was generally successful, the loss of the German codebook to British intelligence undermined the agency's ultimate efficiency during World War I.

When the Nazis gained control of Germany in the 1930s, the Abwehr expanded from an organization of 150 persons to nearly 1000, employing civilians as well as army and navy personnel. Under its director Wilhelm Canaris the agency reorganized into three branches: espionage, counterespionage and saboteurs. Its successes included placing two operatives inside the British intelligence agency for two years and developing an encryption device called the Enigma machine. Agents tracked and monitored various resistance movements in occupied Europe and even sabotaged military and government strongholds behind Allied lines. Spies managed to steal the blueprint for every major American airplane built for the war effort.¹

Despite their successes, the Abwehr had some failures. Its surveillance of the Russian Red Army prior to the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union proved inadequate, just as their various attempts to infiltrate the spy systems of Great Britain, Canada and United States failed completely. By 1939, there were no German agents working in England.

The Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) is responsible for supplying the British government with foreign intelligence. It is more often referred to in the mass media and popular speech by its former name MI6. The Service was founded in 1909, a joint initiative of the Admiralty and the War Office to control secret intelligence operations in the UK and overseas, particularly concentrating on the activities of the Imperial German government. Its first director was Captain Sir George Marshall Smith-Cumming. He typically signed correspondence with his initial C in green ink. This usage evolved as a code name and has been adhered to by all subsequent directors of SIS when signing documents to retain anonymity.

After World War I and throughout most of the 1920s and under Sir Smith-Cumming's direction, the SIS was focused on Communism, in particular, Russian Bolshevism. Examples included a thwarted operation to overthrow the Bolshevik government in 1918 by SIS agents Sidney George Reilly and Sir Robert Bruce Lockhart as well as additional espionage efforts within early Soviet Russia.

In the early 1930s attention was shifted to Germany following the ascendance of the Nazis. During World War II the human intelligence work of the service was overshadowed by several other agencies. These were:

- The cryptanalytic (code-breaking) effort undertaken by the Government Code and Cypher Service.
- The extensive "double-cross" system run by MI5 to feed misleading intelligence to the Germans.
- Imagery intelligence activities conducted by the Royal Air Force Photographic Reconnaissance Unit.

Despite these difficulties the SIS nevertheless conducted substantial and successful operations in both occupied Europe and in the Middle East where it operated under the cover name Interservice Liaison Department (ISLD).

Sources:

Adams, Jefferson. *Historical Dictionary of German Intelligence*. Toronto: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2009.

West, Nigel. *Historical Dictionary of British Intelligence*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2005. <http://www.answers.com/topic/abwehr>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secret_Intelligence_Service

MENTALISM

Mentalism is a performing art in which its practitioners, known as mentalists, provide their audiences with a theatrical experience of witnessing or participating in demonstrations that appear to utilize highly developed mental or intuitive ability. These performances may include telepathy, clairvoyance, divination, precognition, psychokinesis, mediumship, mind control, memorization and rapid mathematics. Much of what the modern mentalist performs in his or her acts can be traced back directly to tests of supernatural power that were carried out by mediums, spiritualists and psychics in the 19th century.

THE 39 STEPS

STUDY QUESTIONS

Pre-Performance Questions

1. What happens to the story and characters when adapting a novel to a movie or a play? Or in this case, from a novel to a movie and then to a play? What is left out or added? What is changed to fit the medium?
2. What plot devices and/or characters are needed to make a mystery or suspense play work?

Post-Performance Questions

1. How does the character Mr. Hannay change in the play? How would you describe Hannay at the beginning of the play? How would you describe him at the end?
2. How does the genre of film noir and vaudeville accentuate the play? Give specific examples where the plot or character development fit into the genre and how it affects the play.
3. How many of Alfred Hitchcock's films were mentioned or alluded to in the play? Create a list of the referential moments that you remember and compare your list to someone else's list.
4. Is there commentary on class issues in the play? How would you describe Hannay's interaction with the multitude of characters? Does class play a part in his interactions?
5. Are there moments where the characters in the play comment on the play's actions? How does this make you feel as an audience member?
6. The cast of characters is rather long but only played by four actors. Were the character changes simple or complex?
7. How were different locations represented in the play?
8. If you are familiar with either the book or the movie, what are the similarities and differences in the stories? How were moments from the Hitchcock movie portrayed in the play?

ACTIVITIES

Fairytale Adaptations: Genres

1. Create a list of different genres and write these on the board. For example, film noir, kung fu, western, silent movie, etc.
2. Give each group about five minutes to cast and rehearse their scenes.
3. Perform the scenes for the rest of the class.
4. After the initial performances, assign the students one of the genres from the compiled list. You may give them a few extra moments to rehearse or, if able, have them incorporate the genre while acting.
5. Discuss what adding the genres did to the performances. Did they enhance the performances? Did they add or detract from the original fairytales?

Fairytale Adaptations: Tableaus

1. Break the class into smaller groups of about 5 or 6 students for each group. If you prefer, you may use the same groups in the previous exercise or start from the beginning.
2. Each group will pick a fairytale to work on and cast the scene. Each group will create three frozen images (tableaus) that tell the entire story of their fairytale. Every student must be in at least one of the images that are created and as they are frozen images, there should be no movement or voice.
3. The three tableaus should convey the whole story including character and setting. What happens if the groups create one single tableau that shows the whole story?
4. Discuss what each tableau contains and the challenges that each group faced in creating these pictures. What are the actors doing to that conveys the idea of the story? What can be improved to make the story clearer?
5. To add a variation, see if the groups can adapt a recent movie and transform them into three (or five) images. What allows the audience to recognize the movie?

Change Three Things

1. Students line up in two lines facing each other so that each person has a partner who is standing across from them. One row will be Row A and the other is Row B.
2. Tell the group that they will have 30 seconds to observe their partners. At the signal, they will turn their backs to each other.
3. While their backs are turned, each person must change three things about their appearance. All changes must be visible. This can be simple; taking off a shoe, switching their hair style or more difficult; removing an earring.
4. At the signal, the two rows turn back and face each other. They have two minutes to figure out what their partner changed.
5. Discuss which were easy changes to spot and which were more difficult. How many people caught all three changes?
6. After the performance, discuss how the two actors were able to represent all their characters in *The 39 Steps*. Were costume changes the only device they used or were there others?



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