



**Lights Up! Library
Classroom Activities**

Mary Jane
By Amy Herzog
Directed by Anne Kauffman



INTRODUCTION

Thank you for bringing Manhattan Theatre Club's Lights Up! Library initiative into your high school classroom! We're thrilled to provide to you and your students these classroom activities and the performing recording of *Mary Jane* by Amy Herzog.

Our goals for this initiative are:

- To help students better understand themselves and the world through the medium of theatre
- To help develop a knowledgeable, perceptive new audience for the theatre and for the arts in general
- To stimulate participants' imaginations, creativity, and critical thinking skills through engagement with challenging theatre works

The activities are divided into three sections:

- **Preparing Students to View the Play** — activities may include classroom discussion prompts, writing prompts, and theatre games or improvisations
- **Viewing the Play** — including questions for classroom discussion after students watch the performance
- **Follow-Up Activities** — further activities intended to deepen students' personal and intellectual interactions with the play

Additionally, [click here](#) to access supplemental resources which may include links to articles and videos meant to bring further context to this experience.

Our hope is that you will have the time to activate all of the activities in this document; however, we understand that time is among the scarcest resources in a high school classroom. One could maintain a rich experience by engaging in the framing questions, one preparatory activity, post-show questions, and one follow-up exercise. And, of course, please modify these activities — or devise your own — in any way necessary to meet the needs of each student in your classroom.

Some of the activities you'll find on these pages align to the [National Core Arts Standards for Theatre](#), and most will align to your local benchmarks and standards.

We hope that this experience will be enriching and educationally beneficial to your students!



ABOUT MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB

Over the past five decades, Manhattan Theatre Club has been a preeminent producer of the highest quality, award-winning theatrical productions of new works by American and international playwrights. Our over 600 premieres have been produced throughout the country and across the globe and have contributed a proud legacy to the American theatrical canon.

Our artistic mission, which Artistic Director Lynne Meadow created and has implemented since 1972, is to develop and present new work in a dynamic, supportive, environment; to identify and collaborate with the most promising new as well as seasoned, accomplished artists; and to produce a diverse repertoire of innovative, entertaining, and thought-provoking plays and musicals by American and international playwrights in our theatres each season. Our commitment to excellence extends to every aspect of the company: from the gifted permanent staff; to a supportive Board of Directors; to a first-rate Education program, which has served more than 100,000 students of all ages in New York City, across the country, and around the world; to a quality, paid career training program, which prepares the next generation of theatre professionals for jobs at MTC and beyond; to a robust behind-the-scenes developmental program for new work. MTC performs in multiple venues: our Broadway home at the 650-seat Samuel J. Friedman Theatre—formerly Biltmore Theatre—which we restored and reopened in 2003, and at New York City Center off-Broadway, where we created a 300-seat Stage I and a 150-seat Stage II.

MTC productions have earned 7 Pulitzer Prizes, 30 Tony Awards, 51 Drama Desk Awards, and 49 Obie Awards, amongst many other honors, but our success is not measured by awards. Instead, the merit of our work is represented by the output and talent of the myriad of writers and artists who have debuted at MTC and who continue to return for multiple productions. We are proud of the artists whom we have discovered and nurtured, as well as their impact on our industry.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Manhattan Theatre Club's Broadway premiere production of Amy Herzog's *Mary Jane* opened at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre on April 23, 2024. It was directed by Anne Kauffman and featured Rachel McAdams in the title role. The supporting cast included April Matthis, Susan Pourfar, Lily Santiago, and Brenda Wehle. The scenic design was by Lael Jellinek; costumes were by Brenda Abbandadolo; lighting was by Ben Stanton; sound was by Leah Gelpe.

CHARACTERS, SETTING, AND TIME

Mary Jane: a woman in her thirties

Part One

Ruthie: a building superintendent

Sherry: a nurse

Brianne: a Facebook friend

Amelia: Sherry's niece, a college student

Part Two

Dr. Toros: a pediatric intensivist

Chaya: a Hasidic woman

Kat: a music therapist

Tenkei: a Buddhist nun

Besides Mary Jane, all the roles are doubled, so that five actors are required: Ruthie/Tenkei (sixties or seventies), Sherry/Dr. Toros (forties or fifties), Brianne/Chaya (thirties or early forties), Amelia/Kat (twenties).

SETTING/TIME:

New York City. Now-ish, June – October

Part One:

The living room/kitchen of a junior one-bedroom apartment in Queens. Mary Jane also sleeps in this room.

Part Two:

The “parents room” on the pediatric floor of a Manhattan hospital. A shared room in the Pediatric ICU or PICU (pronounced PICK-you).

Ideally, the play is performed without an intermission.

PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

FRAMING QUESTIONS

Either through classroom discussion or individual journaling, ask students to reflect upon these questions:

- Who are the caregivers you have known during your lifetime?
- What kind of care have you received or are you receiving?
- Have you yourself been a caregiver? For whom and in what circumstances?

WRITING ACTIVITY: HEROS

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cn10.1-1.a.

Ask students to do a 5-7 minute free-write in response to: What does it mean to be a hero? Do you know any?

Ask students to share their responses to the extent they are comfortable doing so.

ACTIVITY: CAREGIVING TABLEAUS

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr2-II.b.

Mary Jane is about the quiet heroism of caregivers; each of the play's nine scenes depicts a different form of caregiving. The following activity will highlight this aspect of the play for your students.

Working as a whole class or in small groups, students create a list of different types of caregivers. Encourage them to be broad and expansive in their thinking. Could, for example, school crossing guards be thought of as caregivers?

- Discuss the list.
- What challenges and obstacles do different kinds of caregivers face?
- What sacrifices do they make?
- What are the personal rewards we receive from caregiving?

Divide the class into small groups. (Since *Mary Jane* consists mostly of scenes with two characters, you might want to have students working in pairs.)

Privately give each group an index card with one of the following “caregiving forms.”

- Mechanical (fixing something for someone)
- Medical (caring for a patient)
- Medical Emergency
- Maternal (taking care of a child)
- Mutual (supporting one another)
- Musical (singing or playing for someone to ease suffering or cheer them up)

Ask each group to prepare a tableau that will make clear to the rest of the class what’s written on their card.¹ (You can include or omit the subheads in parentheses as you see fit.)

Each group in turn performs its tableau and the rest of the class tries to identify what was on their card. Ask the audience to give evidence for their opinion: how did the performers use their faces, bodies, and physical relationships to express the type of caregiving on their card?

Explain that these are the forms of caregiving dramatized in the play.² If you wish, you can have groups create tableaus for some of the other kinds of caregiving on the lists they created.

VIEWING THE PLAY

You’ll receive a link and password to the performance recording of the play on the first weekday of the month for which you registered to view the play. The recording may be viewed only during regularly scheduled class time in classrooms or assembly spaces on your campus. Viewing credentials may not be shared with students for individual viewing at home or on social media.

You may wish to assign each student to “track” a character during the performance using a [Character Profile Form](#).

¹ A tableau is a frozen pose, a “freeze-frame,” that expresses a theme, idea, or relationship. You can “launch” each tableau by calling out (or having the class call out) “3-2-1 Freeze!”

² Mechanical: Ruthie; Medical: Sherry, Dr. Toros (Amelia: Emergency); Mutual: Mary Jane and Brianne, Mary Jane and Chaya; Maternal: Mary Jane and Alex (also Brianna -> Seth; Chaya -> Adina); Musical: Kat; Metaphysical: Tenkei

CLASS DISCUSSION

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-1.a., TH:Re8.1-1.c., TH:Re9.1-1.b., TH:Re9.1-1.c.

After viewing the play, use these questions to facilitate a class discussion about the theatergoing experience:

- What moments in the production were particularly vivid and powerful?
- What was surprising?
- What was confusing to you?
- What were the pivotal moments?
- Who of the characters seemed most sympathetic? Why?
- Which characters were less admirable? Did they have redeeming qualities that helped you understand their behavior?
- Why do you think the playwright wrote this play?
- What offers have you personally received or made? What offers might you make now and in the future?
- In the final scene, Mary Jane says to Tenkei, "I don't know what to hope for anymore." What does she mean?
- What do you feel happens in the play's final moment?
- Has studying and viewing *Mary Jane* affected your understanding of what it means to be a hero? If so, how?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

MONOLOGUE WRITING: DESCRIBING A LOVED ONE

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1.1-11.c., TH:Pr4.1-1.b., TH:Pr4.1.11.a., TH:Re8.1-1.c.

In the play's final scene, Mary Jane describes Alex to Tenkei, the Buddhist nun. To highlight this beautiful moment for your students, ask them individually to bring someone, preferably a loved one, to life through words. Each student creates a written description of someone they know well to someone who doesn't in a way that will enable the listener/reader to "see" the person they're writing about.

Ask students to share their monologues to the extent they are comfortable doing so.



DRAWING CONNECTIONS

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Re7.1-III.a., TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Re8.1-III.b., TH:Re9.1-III.c., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn11.1-I.a.; TH:Cn11.2-I.b.

How does this play connect to the world around us?

Individually or in small groups, ask students to find an article, news feature, interview, or other recent artifact from current events that reflects one of the play's themes or ideas. Then, have students share and discuss:

- Why is this theme or idea relevant today?
- Have they encountered the theme or idea in other artistic mediums or media?
- Does this new information alter your personal response to the production? If so, how?

What did we discover?

Ask each student to identify a topic in the play with which they were previously unfamiliar. The student should gather as much information as they can on this subject and share with the class. Sources could include articles, news features, videos, interviews, or other relevant artifacts. Guide students through the compilation of research and the structure of the sharing as best appropriate for your subject area and curricular goals.

FEEDBACK FOR MTC

We appreciate that you chose to bring Manhattan Theatre Club's production of *Mary Jane* into your classroom, and we hope that your students had a great experience with these activities and the play.

You'll receive an email at the end of the month in which your class had access to the performance recording. Please complete the Lights Up! Library Feedback Form linked in that email so that we can continue to improve this initiative.