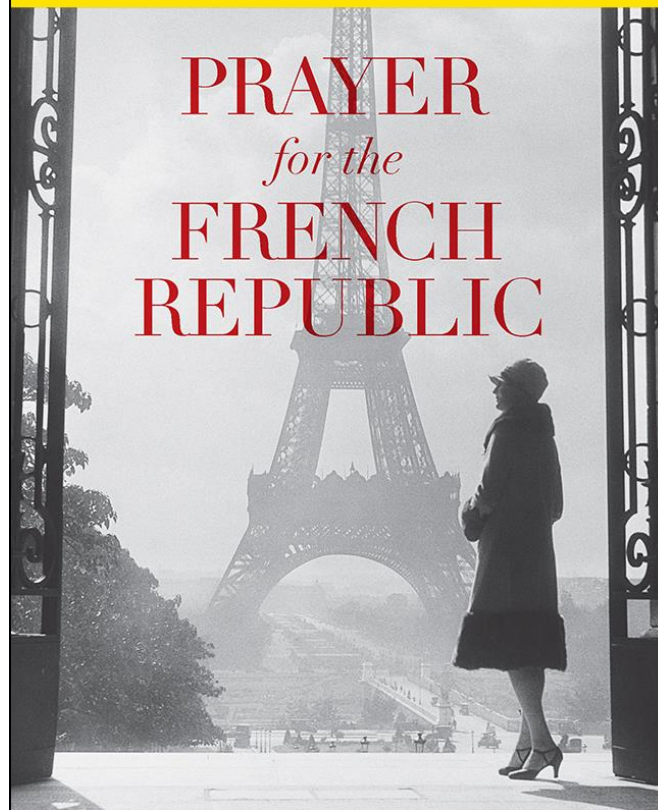




PLAYBILL®

MANHATTAN THEATRE CLUB AT
THE SAMUEL J. FRIEDMAN THEATRE



**Lights Up! Library
Classroom Activities**

Prayer for the French Republic

By Joshua Harmon

Directed by David Cromer



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 *Prayer for the French Republic* by Joshua Harmon.

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 Joshua Harmon's *Prayer for the French Republic* opened on January 9, 2024, at the Samuel J. Friedman Theatre. It was directed by David Cromer. The cast included Betsy Aidem, Francis Benhamou, Ari Brand, Anthony Edwards, Ethan Haberfield, Rachel Masur, Nael Nacer, Daniel Oreskes, Molly Ranson, Nancy Robinette, and Aria Shahghasemi. Scenic design was by Takeshi Saka; costume design was by Sarah Laux; lighting design was by Amith Chandrashaker; original music and sound design was by Daniel Kluger.

CHARACTERS, SETTING, AND TIME

(2016-2017)

Marcelle Salomon Benhamou, 50's

Charles Benhamou, 50's, Marcelle's husband

Elodie Benhamou, 28, their daughter

Daniel Benhamou, 26, their son

Patrick Salomon, 50's, Marcelle's brother

Molly, 20, a distant American cousin

Pierre Salomon, 80's, Marcelle & Patrick's father

(1944-1946)

Irma Salomon, 70's, Pierre's grandmother

Adolphe Salomon, 70's, Pierre's grandfather

Lucien Salomon, 40's, Pierre's father

Young Pierre Salomon, at age 15

SETTING/TIME:

Paris, 2016-2017 and 1944-1946



PREPARING STUDENTS TO VIEW THE PLAY

FRAMING QUESTIONS

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

- What are the reasons families might decide to uproot themselves and relocate?
- What are some family or social traditions and rituals that are important to you?
- What does the word “safety” mean to you?
- What, if any, has been your prior experience with antisemitism or other forms of religious or racial prejudice and hostility? What do you know about antisemitism and other forms of religious prejudice?

WRITING ACTIVITY: REFLECTIVE WRITING

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

Ask students to create two written reflections based on their lived experience, one entitled “A Time I Felt Unwelcomed,” the second entitled “A Time I Felt Welcomed.” (If you prefer, have half the class write on the first topic, half of the second.)

Share and discuss what they have written.

Encourage them to pay attention to how this dual dynamic operates in *Prayer for the French Republic*, how the characters at various points identify as “unwelcomed” and at other points feel part of a family and/or a larger community.

ACTIVITY: STAY OR GO

National Core Arts Standards: TH:Cr1-II.c., TH:Cr1.1-III.c., TH:Cr2-I.a., TH:Cr2-II.b., TH:Cr3.1-I.b., TH:Pr4.1-I.a., TH:Pr4.1-I.b., TH:Pr4.1-II.a., TH:Re8.1-I.b., TH:Re8.1-II.b., TH:Re8.1-II.c., TH:Cn10.1-I.a., TH:Cn10.1-III.a.

The fraught central issue for the Benhamou family in *Prayer for the French Republic* is whether to uproot themselves and emigrate from Paris to Israel to escape what they feel to be the increasing danger from antisemitism. Through the following scene-writing exercise students can engage with this issue in personal terms. (As noted above, the subject of

emigration might well be difficult, perhaps stressful for some of your students. Please address the issue sensitively and carefully.)

Discussion: What circumstances might lead a family to consider relocating? (Note that relocating could simply mean changing neighborhoods, or maybe moving from the city to the suburbs, or vice versa.) What might make such a decision difficult? What are possible arguments pro and con?

Working in small groups, students create a list of at least five “Reasons to Relocate” for a hypothetical family. Have them organize their lists in order of increasing urgency, starting perhaps with “Move into a bigger home” and maybe ending in “Fleeing potential violence.” (Of course, students should come up their lists on their own.) Share and discuss the difference lists.

Instead of writing scenes, the subgroups could complete their templates and perform their scenes as structured improvisations. Or the class could work together to create one template, in which case you could conduct this activity as a “tag-in” improvisation, allowing students in the audience to jump into the scene, replacing either the “A” or “B” character and offering additional arguments or counter-arguments.

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](#).

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?
- How do the scenes in the play set during and after World War II connect with and inform the present-day story?
- How do you feel about the Benhamou family's final decision? In their place, what would you have done?
- How does the character of Molly change during the course of the play?

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

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 *Prayer for the French Republic* 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.