

Grades
6 - 12



THE LITTLE FOXES STUDENT GUIDE



IT'S ALL IN THE FAMILY

“It’s all in the family. And it will stay in the family.”

– BEN HUBBARD, *THE LITTLE FOXES*



▲ The whole Hubbard clan scheming in Cleveland Play House’s 1978 production of *The Little Foxes*.

TO DO:

Discover your heritage! See how far back you can trace your ancestors. Interview an adult in your life and together create a family tree or a presentation of where your family comes from. Use a computer or poster board and share with your classmates. Remember, anyone important in your life can be your family!

According to Lillian Hellman, *The Little Foxes* was the most difficult of all her plays to write. The play went through nine different drafts. Why so much trouble? *The Little Foxes* was personal.

Hellman, in her memoir *Pentimento*, recalls, “Some of the trouble came because the play has a distant connection to my mother’s family.” Hellman’s great-grandfather founded a dry goods store and created a business network across the North and South. Just like the Hubbards, the business stayed in the family. Her grandmother Sophie was critical with a keen business sense and was the basis for Regina. Her great-uncle Jake, a scheming businessman, inspired Ben Hubbard. Great-uncle Jake once told a young Hellman, “So you’ve got spirit after all. Most of the rest of them are made of sugar water,” a sentiment Regina repeats nearly verbatim to her daughter Alexandra. Meanwhile, Addie was drawn from Hellman’s own nurse Sophrophina. Hellman even put herself into the play in Alexandra “to half-mock my own youthful high-class innocence.”

LILLIAN HELLMAN, LEGACY

“ What a word is truth. Slippery, tricky, unreliable. I tried in these books to tell the truth. ”

— LILLIAN HELLMAN, *AN UNFINISHED WOMAN*

At age 29, Lillian Hellman made her Broadway debut with *The Children's Hour*. At a time when few contemporary plays openly discussed any form of sexuality, *The Children's Hour's* indictment of a child's lie about a lesbian love affair caused a Broadway sensation and exploded Hellman's career, making her a figure of sudden celebrity, life-long controversy and undeniably the first rank of American playwrights. When *The Children's Hour* was passed over for the Pulitzer Prize because of its subject matter, influential critics who had raved about its power and truthfulness set up their own award, The Drama Critics Circle Award, and gave it to Hellman.



▲ Lillian Hellman

Eighty years later, Lillian Hellman's legacy lives on. She became a role model and inspiration for female playwrights. Marsha Norman, Pulitzer Prize winning playwright (*Night Mother*) names Lillian Hellman as one of her heroes. Referring to Hellman's desire to write, Norman wrote, "When I lecture or talk to students now, I preach the sermons Lillian Hellman delivered so freely. Nobody is going to come and save you, that's your job. Save yourself. If you don't like where you are, get out of there. The object is not for them to like you, the object is for them to listen to you. Nobody knows what you want except you. And nobody will be as sorry as you if you don't get it."

TO DO:

The Little Foxes was a controversial play in its time. Research another play that was considered controversial when it premiered. Write about and discuss with classmates who the playwright was and what time period s/he lived in. Who was the target audience and how did they initially react to the play? What does the play you found do (or not do) that makes it controversial?

Example: *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen was considered a controversial play because it went against 19th century marriage conventions.

AN OPEN WORLD

“*The Century’s turning, the world is open. Open for people like you and me. Ready for us, waiting for us.*”

– BEN HUBBARD, *THE LITTLE FOXES*

By 1900, America had established itself as a world power; the West was won. Steel production was boundless and automobiles raced through the streets. From the end of the Civil War to the Stock Market Crash in 1929, American culture as we recognize it sprang into being. Dubbed the “Gilded Age” by Mark Twain, it was a time of unparalleled growth in technology, industry and commerce. Every man was a potential Andrew Carnegie, and Americans who achieved wealth celebrated it as never before. The opera, theatre and lavish parties consumed their leisure hours. One socialite even threw a dinner party to honor her dog who arrived sporting a \$15,000 diamond collar.

While the rich and their pets wore diamonds, many wore rags. In the South, African-Americans saw the political and economic gains of Reconstruction slip away as whites imposed systems of institutionalized racial segregation and disenfranchisement. Rural Americans and new immigrants crowded into urban tenements teeming with crime and filth. Telephones were in wide use and cities were being electrified, yet most people labored in the shadow of poverty.



▲ *A family in their tenement home.*



▲ *Andrew Carnegie’s mansion in Manhattan, New York City.*

KEYBANK CPH COLLEGE



People soon began to ask a fundamental question: Why did only some Americans get rich? Among the most popular answers was Social Darwinism, the concept of “survival of the fittest.” Social Darwinists believed that people who had the necessary skills — talent, brains, or hard work — would rise to the top. To the Social Darwinist, some people were poor because they simply did not have the necessary skills.

By the end of World War I, compassion and social reform replaced the Social Darwinist’s view. Just as Regina’s daughter Alexandra declares at the end of *The Little Foxes* that she will no longer “stand around and watch,” America’s citizens realized they could take social responsibility for their countrymen.

TO DO:

As you read above, *The Little Foxes* takes place during the Gilded Age and its characters are influenced by Social Darwinism. However, at the end of the play, Hellman subtly hints at a new philosophy that characterized the 20th century:

Progressivism. Research Progressivism and write about how the final moment of the play reflects this major cultural shift from one era to another in America.

THE PROGRAM:

Saturday master classes, performances throughout the school year

KeyBank CPH College introduces you to the circle of artists creating professional theatre at CPH. By participating in a variety of arts education experiences, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and the invitation to view professional theatre, you will discover the powerful impact theatre plays in your community and your life.

DETAILS:

WHO: High School Students, grades 9-12

WHEN: One Saturday per month

TIME: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM if attending classes and show, 10:00 AM – 1:30 PM if only attending classes

WHERE: Cleveland Play House Administration and Education Center
1901 E. 13th Street, 5th Floor

COST: Free (Includes lunch and a ticket to a CPH show)

To register, contact, or for more information:
opportunity@clevelandplayhouse.com
216-400-7061

DESIGN AND CONCEPT: AN INTERVIEW WITH SCENIC AND COSTUME DESIGNER, LEX LIANG

The role of the Scenic and Costume Designer is to create a physical world in which the story takes place. That includes the background, scenery, props, furniture as well as costumes. Designer Lex Liang collaborated with CPH Artistic Director and Director of *The Little Foxes*, Laura Kepley, to determine what this play's world would look like. Laura told Lex that she wanted to "shorten the aesthetic distance between our modern eye and the time period in which the play takes place." In other words, she wanted the audience to think, "Ooo—I'd like to live there! I'd like to wear that!" We sat down with Lex to learn more about his design choices.

What excites you about *The Little Foxes*?

The first thing that excited me most about *The Little Foxes* was the prospect of working with Laura again, and working with CPH for the first time. I know *The Little Foxes* is a very important play to her, and that is always exciting—getting to work with a director who's so invested in a piece is very motivating. Having never designed the show before, I was thrilled at the opportunity to re-interpret this classic with a more contemporary sensibility.

How did you start going about the play's design?

I suggested perhaps we explore a more "rock 'n' roll" approach. It was then that we started creating a 'neo-Victorian' or 'neo-Edwardian' aesthetic for our production—we started distilling the classic 1900 aesthetic to its broad strokes, imagining the Hubbards as rock-stars of their era, and creating an environment that was inviting to the contemporary eye.

How do the set and costume designs work together on stage? In this case, did one design inspire the other?

I feel really strongly that scenery and costumes need to be very cohesive in any production.

Our concept wouldn't work if Regina entered our sleek "neo-Edwardian" drawing room in a heavy, lacey period day-dress. Laura was very particular in that she did not want a complete departure from the original setting, but she wanted to create a contemporary lens through which our audience would watch the play.

Anything else you'd like our audiences to know about your process?

Most designers try to sneak in a bit of symbolism into the design, and that's certainly true in this production. By "cleaning up" a rather busy and cluttered period, we were able to make some simple choices that, when recognized, play as bold statements. Color plays a big part in telling each character's individual story. As they say, "the devil is in the details."



▲ *Upper class, Southern woman (anonymous) from the year 1900*



▲ *Costume Design by Lex Liang*

TO DO:

On the left is a woman in a traditional 1900's dress. On the right is a rendering of Regina's dress from Costume Designer Lex Liang. Compare and contrast the two dresses. Would a different dress change our perception of Regina in the play? Refer back to the interview; how do the images below confirm what you read about Lex's design choices?



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