THE ACTORS' GANG

Study Guide

for

OUR TOWN

by Thornton Wilder

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A Note from the Dramaturg

Thornton Wilder once remarked, “Onstage it is always now: The personages are standing on that razor edge between the past and the future ….” (The Paris Review, 1956)

This production of Our Town happens in the present. Yes, the Stage Manager introduces us to three specific time periods – 1901, 1904 and 1913 – but the events, relationships, and contexts on stage still strike us as immediate. That twelve-year span formed the crucial moment just before change swept in, a time filled with great potential for both advancement and destruction. Wilder writes about that era from the purview of 1937, another time just before vast change became imminent. Do we also stand on such a brink today? The lingering economic depression of the 1930s is undeniably familiar and significant for us. The international violence in the early 20th century that swelled by World War II still disrupts our societies. The gap between rich and poor has only widened since the Federal Reserve was established in 1913. Similar desires for community, for the accumulation of wealth and goods, for the legal and social recognition that haunted the first half of the 1900s remain in 2009. Wilder’s period piece evokes our beguiling present, a moment permeated by national and personal adjustment, reconsideration and reorganization. His situations and characters reflect much more than quaint sentimentality for a bygone era. Our Town compellingly links the commonplace and the eternal, making us continually question what has happened, what has resulted, where we are now, and what is to come. The Stage Manager tells us, “They’re waitin’. They’re waitin’ for something that they feel is comin’.” I’d ask, aren’t we?
Character Breakdown

Stage Manager: the narrator

Emily Webb: young lover

George Webb: young lover

Dr. Frank Gibbs: George’s father, town doctor

Mrs. Julia Gibbs: George’s mother

Rebecca Gibbs: George’s younger sister

Mrs. Myrtle Webb: Emily’s mother

Mr. Charles Webb: Emily’s father, editor and publisher of The Grover’s Corners Sentinel

Wally Webb: Emily’s younger brother

Simon Stimson: the church choir director

Mrs. Louella Soames: town resident

Joe Crowell: a newspaper boy

Si Crowell: Joe’s younger brother, also a newspaper boy

Howie Newsome: the local milkman

Professor Willard: professor from the State University

Constable Warren: the local policeman

Sam Craig: Emily’s cousin, businessman

Joe Stoddard: the town undertaker
Our Town Synopsis

The play begins with the Stage Manager informing the audience about the production they are about to see and how they are seeing a play within a play. The Stage Manager gives the facts about the town the play takes place in, which is Grover’s Corners, New Hampshire. In addition, the Stage Manager gives the audience a tour of the stage and lays out where everything in Grover’s Corner’s lies.

ACT I: THE DAILY LIFE
The date is May 7, 1901 and the first act begins with the everyday routine of town life. Howie Newsome is delivering the milk while Dr. Gibbs is on his way home from delivering babies over in Polish town. Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs are getting breakfast ready for their children before they head to school. After the school bell, Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Gibbs spent time in their gardens discussing life and dreams. The Stage Manager invites Professor Willard and Mr. Webb to provide the audience with some factual information about Grover’s Corners. After school, Emily and George share a moment reminiscing about the day before heading in to do their homework. In the evening, there is choir practice led by Simon Stimson at the Congregational Church and then everyone retires home while noticing the moon. Overall, it is a perfect example of a day in the life of an American family.

ACT II: LOVE AND MARRIAGE
The date is July 7, 1904. Emily and George have recently graduated from high school and the act begins in the morning of their wedding day. Both the Webb family and the Gibbs family are busy with wedding preparations in the morning and reflect upon their own weddings long ago. The day is filled with nerves and emotions as the families prepare for their eldest to leave the nest. At this point the Stage Manager decides to take the audience back in time to show the conversation that Emily and George had one year ago when they realized they were meant for each other. In the flashback,
Emily and George run into each other after school and Emily begrudgingly tells George how he has become conceited over the past year and is spending too much time at baseball. After an emotional outburst Emily realizes she has been too harsh on George and he consoles her by buying her an ice cream soda at Mr. Morgan’s drugstore. Instead of being upset with Emily, George is moved by how much Emily cares for him and his character. It is in this moment that George decides he is not going to go to State Agriculture School and instead stay in town to take over of his Uncle Luke’s farm. George and Emily admit their love for each other and they leave the soda shop hand in hand. The Stage Manager then takes us back to 1904 to the wedding ceremony, where he stands in as the preacher to wed Emily and George.

ACT III: DEATH AND ETERNITY
This act takes place at the Grover’s Corners cemetery nine years later in the summer of 1913. The act begins with the Stage Manager describing the gradual changes that affected the town over the past years, the layout of the cemetery, and gives a soliloquy about eternity. The first scene begins with Joe Stoddard preparing a grave, which we learn is Emily’s, and Sam Craig coming back for the funeral. We learn that Emily dies during the birth of her second child. The funeral procession makes its way to the cemetery and Emily’s ghost enters to take her place among the dead. Emily watches the mourners and asks the dead, one of whom is her mother-in-law Mrs. Gibbs, if she can go back to revisit her past. Even though the dead ask her not too, Emily decides to revisit her twelfth birthday, so she can see her family one last time. It is during this journey that Emily realizes that humans are “just blind people” who don’t have time to appreciate life while they live it. The pain of revisiting her past is too much for Emily and she decides to return to her grave. The act ends with George visiting Emily’s grave and Stage Manager wrapping up the play with the evening ritual of Grover’s Corner’s settling down for the night.
Thornton Wilder – A Writer’s Life

Born in Madison, Wisconsin in 1897, Thornton Wilder was well-educated and cultured. His father was a U.S. diplomat and the family lived in China for part of Wilder’s childhood. Wilder began writing plays in California at a young age and was often teased for being overly intellectual. He graduated from a high school in Berkeley in 1915, so Our Town is about a time period Wilder experienced and knew intimately.

Wilder then moved to the east coast to earn a B.A. from Yale University and his M.A. in French from Princeton in 1926, the same year he published The Cabala, his first novel. In 1928, he won the Pulitzer Prize for his story The Bridge of San Luis Rey, also his first commercial success as a writer. From 1930-1937, Wilder taught at the University of Chicago, where he penned Our Town. The play opened in New Jersey and New York in 1937, winning Wilder great praise and earning him another Pulitzer, this time for Drama (1938). In 1942 he won the prize again, for his play The Skin of Our Teeth.

Despite his recognition as a writer, Wilder served in the Army Air Force during World War II, earning the prominent rank of lieutenant colonel. He remained in Hawaii after the war, teaching at the university there before taking a position teaching poetry at Harvard.
Our Town was inspired by Wilder’s close friendship with author Gertrude Stein. Her piece The Making of Americans greatly influenced the play, which emphasizes the universality of the simple. It is widely believed that Wilder’s close friend Samuel Steward was his lover, although Wilder never publicly revealed this relationship. Instead, Wilder’s tight knit circle of famous artists (including Ernest Hemingway, Willa Cather and Montgomery Clift) most likely accepted that he was gay.

Wilder himself played the Stage Manager for a short stint on Broadway and later in many summer stock productions. He wrote several more novels and even a screenplay for Alfred Hitchcock, but his theatrical interest continued, with The Matchmaker, a play which later became the book for the popular musical Hello, Dolly! His last novel was published in 1973, and Wilder died two years later in New England.
The Pulitzer Prize

First awarded on June 4, 1917, the Pulitzer Prize is considered the highest honor in the United States for literary achievement, musical composition, and newspaper journalism. The award is named for Joseph Pulitzer, a journalist who, upon his death, left money for the prize to Columbia University.

There are fourteen categories of the award for Journalism (including breaking news reporting, feature writing, commentary, criticism, etc.) and six in Letters and Drama (including non-fiction, poetry, and history). One prize is given for music, as are several special citations and awards.

Famous literary recipients of the Pulitzer Prize include Margaret Mitchell, Ernest Hemingway, Harper Lee, Saul Bellow, Eudora Welty, William Faulkner and Robert Frost. Only a few playwrights have been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama more than once. Eugene O’Neill has won the prize four times, Edward Albee has won three times, while several others have won it twice. They include George S. Kaufman, Thornton Wilder, Tennessee Williams, and August Wilson. Arthur Miller, Rodgers and Hammerstein and Stephen Sondheim have also won the award.
The World of Wilder’s Play: An Historical Timeline
1901 - 1913

1901
- “Century of Electricity” replaces the “Century of Steam”
- As Vice President, Teddy Roosevelt states his rule of foreign policy, “Speak softly and carry a big stick”
- President McKinley is shot at point-blank range by an anarchist; he dies 8 days later, making Teddy Roosevelt becomes the youngest chief executive in U.S. history
- Artist Pablo Picasso begins his Blue Period
- U.S. Steel Company is created by J.P. Morgan
- Nobel Prizes, from a fund established by dynamite magnate Alfred Nobel) are awarded for the first time
- The American League of Baseball is organized
- Ragtime jazz develops in the U.S.

1902
- Cuba gains its independence from Spain and U.S. troops are withdrawn
- President Roosevelt officially ends the “great insurrection” in the Philippines
- Five month coal strike cripples the U.S. market and prices nearly triple
- First train route between Chicago and New York begins regular service
- U.S. acquires perpetual control of the Panama Canal Zone
- Comic strip “Buster Brown” appears in the New York Herald
- The Teddy Bear, named for President Roosevelt, is introduced and creates a national sensation
- J.C. Penney Company is founded in W.Y.; Pepsi-Cola Company is founded in N.C.

1903
- Congress votes to create the Department of Commerce and Labor
- The Supreme Court upholds an Alabama law denying blacks the right to vote
- Henry Ford creates the Ford Motor Company
- The Wright Brothers make their first sustained flight in a gasoline-powered aircraft
- Pulitzer Prizes, created by Joseph Pulitzer’s agreement to start Columbia University’s school of journalism, are first awarded
Jack London’s *The Call of the Wild* is published and gains popularity
In the first World Series baseball game, the AL’s Boston beats defeats NL’s Pittsburgh
Canned albacore tuna is first introduced
Construction workers break ground on the Hershey Chocolate Factory in Harrisburg, PA

1904
- President Roosevelt is re-elected in an easy win over Judge A.B. Parker of NY
- First major NYC subway line opens to the public
- First radio transmission of music happens in Austria
- Work begins on the Panama Canal
- The World Exhibition and the first American Olympics occur in St. Louis, MO
- Helen Keller graduates from Radcliffe College and begins to write about blindness
- Marie Curie discovers radioactive elements radium and polonium in uranium ore
- Cy Young pitches his first perfect game for the Boston Red Sox
- Campbell’s Pork and Beans is introduced
- The ice cream cone is introduced at the St. Louis exposition by a Syrian immigrant

1905
- Edith Wharton publishes *The House of Mirth*
- Pablo Picasso arrives in Paris and begins his Pink Period
- Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity is circulated
- Sigmund Freud writes “Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex”
- The first neon lighted signs appear
- The first regular cinema is established in Pittsburgh, PA
- Ty Cobb begins his major league baseball career, playing for the Detroit Tigers

1906
- President Roosevelt takes the first ever trip outside the U.S. by a sitting president, visiting the Panama Canal Zone
- U.S. troops occupy Cuba (until 1909)
- Upton Sinclair writes *The Jungle*
- First radio program with voices and music is broadcast in the U.S. by Fessenden
- The San Francisco earthquake kills 700 people and does $400 million in damages
- New York’s population reaches 4 million
- AL’s Chicago team defeats NL’s Chicago team in the World Series

1907
- President Roosevelt bars Japanese immigrants from coming to the U.S.
- An International Peace Conference is held at the Hague
- Oklahoma becomes the 46th U.S. state
- Ziegfeld’s first production of the “Follies” is staged in New York
- Pavlov presents his study on conditioned reflexes
- Immigration to the U.S. is first regulated by American laws
- S.S. Lusitania and the S.S. Mauretania set sail, breaking transatlantic records
- Chicago defeats Detroit to win the World Series

1908
- William Howard Taft is elected U.S. President
- Isadora Duncan becomes a popular interpreter of dance
- French artist Matisse coins the term “cubism”
- General Motors Corporation formed
- Fountain pens become popular
- Wright flies 30 miles in 40 minutes
- Ford Motor Company produces the first Model ‘T’, eventually selling 15 million of them

1909
- Newsreels first appear in the U.S.
- Freud first lectures on psychoanalysis in the U.S.
- Frank Lloyd Wright completes the Robie House and others in the Chicago area
- Ehrlich prepares the cure for syphilis
- U.S. explorer Peary reaches the North Pole
- The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, which will become the Rockefeller Foundation, is established
- The Plastic Age begins, as commercial manufacturing of Bakelite is developed

1910
- W.E.B. DuBois founds the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- The Mexican Revolution begins
- The South American tango gains immense popularity in Europe and the U.S.
- Murray and Hjort undertake the first deep-sea research exhibition
- Haley’s comet is observed by thousands
- Father’s Day is first celebrated in Washington, D.C.
- Carnegie Endowment for International Peace established
- The “week-end” becomes popular in the U.S.

1911
- U.S.-Japan and Anglo-Japan commercial treaties signed
- Leonardo Da Vinci’s “Mona Lisa” is stolen from the Louvre (and found in Italy in 1913)
- Irving Berlin’s song “Alexander’s Ragtime Band” gains worldwide popularity
- Kettering develops the first practical electric self-started for automobiles
- First flight from Munich to Berlin reaches a record height of 12,800 ft.
- American golfer Robert T. Jones wins his first title at age 9

1912
- Woodrow Wilson wins the U.S. presidential election
- Arizona and New Mexico become U.S. states
- Strikes in London cripple coal industry, dock work and transportation
- Nearly 5 million people in the U.S. now visit cinemas daily
- Explorer Scott reaches the South Pole
- S.S. Titanic sinks on her maiden voyage after striking an iceberg, killing 1,513
- The F.W. Woolworth Company is founded

1913
- The U.S. Federal Reserve System is established
- Federal income taxes are introduced in the U.S. through the 16th amendment
- Grand Central Terminal and the Woolworth Building open in New York
- Paramount, Charlie Chaplin, and Cecil B. DeMille make their first films
- Zippers and the foxtrot become popular
- John D. Rockefeller founds Rockefeller Institute with an initial grant of $100 million
- U.S. team wins Davis Cup tennis trophy
MAPS

The United States of America

Notice the size of New Hampshire in grey in the North East region in relationship to the rest of the country.
Elements of The Story

In creating a theatrical production, the first element is usually the play, book, or spoken word. The text contains the plot, characters, thoughts, dialogue, placement of songs and dances, and some stage direction.

Since this theatrical production began with a play, let’s examine the elements of the text.

A. Plot

The plot is the structure of the play. It is the actions/events which make up the story. The plot has five parts:

**Exposition:** The presentation of information that the audience needs to enter the play’s action.

**Rising Action:** Central part of the story during which various problems and complications arise, which cause the characters to take action.

**Climax:** The highest point or turning point in the action, which pits protagonist and antagonist against each other in a final confrontation that settles all their difficulties.

**Falling Action:** Contains the action or dialogue necessary to lead the story to a resolution or ending.

**Resolution:** The end of the story in which the problems are solved and the story is finished.

B. Structure
**Definition:** The way the story is organized and presented. The order of the action and the placement of the characters within it.

- How is the play structured?
- Would you add or take away different technical elements of the production that aided the storytelling?
- How did the actors encompass all the characters in the play? How did they physically or vocally transform themselves for each character, if they played multiple characters?

C. Setting

**Definition:** The time and place of the story. Geography, social eras and political events are all influential to a story’s setting.

The Actors’ Gang production of *Our Town* was set in an American theater. How did the design elements of the production create this time period?

- How did the setting of the production affect the storytelling?
- How did the costumes affect the story?
- How was the lighting used to tell the story?
- How did the sound design help tell the story?
Political Cartoons

1901

1903
Discussion & Essay Questions

1. Why do you think Thornton Wilder chose to present his play without scenery or props? What does this force the audience to do?

2. How does the world outside Grover’s Corners affect its residents through the years? For instance, social and political changes in the world at the time that changed Grover’s Corners residents’ lifestyle.

3. In Mr. Webb’s social and political report, he mentions that Grover’s Corners is run by a Board of Selectmen. That all males vote at the age of 21 and women vote indirect. What does he mean by that and how is that different from today?

4. What references to industrialization and immigration does the Stage Manager make and how do these movements affect Grover’s Corners?

5. Time is a very present theme throughout the play. Discuss some of the symbols that remind the audience of time in the text and in this production.

6. The Stage Manager thinks it would be a good idea to place a time capsule in the new bank under construction. In the capsule, he would place a copy of The Sentinel, The New York Times, the U.S. Constitution, the Bible, Shakespeare’s works, and the text of the play he is participating in, Our Town. If your class were to make a time capsule, what would you put in it?

7. Organized baseball had its first World Series in 1903. Why did Wilder make this sport such a prominent theme in the play?
Classroom Activities

I. Daily Life Exercise
(Sensory Awareness & Movement)

In *Our Town*, there are many routines that the mothers and children go through in their daily life. Discuss what routines the students saw in this production and how they relate to the routines they go through every day. Do the students have chores like chopping wood or stringing beans? Do they get allowances like George and Rebecca? How about the routines of their parents, like cooking and cleaning? If not, discuss how their life is different and why? How has the world changed socially and politically in regards to daily life since 1901?

**Objective:** The objective of this exercise is for students to realize that the smallest event in life can have great meaning and beauty. In Act III, Emily says to Mrs. Gibbs in the cemetery: “They don’t understand do they?” Like Emily, students will rediscover how even the most insignificant routine can be meaningful. In addition, students will compare the amount of work required by children in order to maintain the household and how technology has affected this aspect of life.

**Motivation:**
Discuss the types of chores that were required of children in the 1900’s. Ask the students how difficult they think it would be to do this kind of work. Why is today different? What machines do we have now that make household work easier?

**Activity #1: Machine Exercise (movement)**
In this exercise students to create a machine out of their own bodies and see how their part in the machine connects to the whole. After discussing the machines that we have now that help in our daily chores, the instructor
should choose one for the students to create in front of the class with their bodies. The exercise begins with one student starting a sound and movement that can be repeated easily. For instance, if the instructor chooses to start with a washer machine, then the first student up might be the door of the washer. Once this movement has been established, a second student connects with the first student by adding on with another sound and rhythmic movement. For instance they can be the tumbler of the machine. The exercise continues with more and more students joining and creating a living machine. One student might be the water, another the power button, another can be the clothes in the machine.

**Activity#2:** Work with the students to create a movement/ dance based on the activity of stringing beans. Break the activity into 8 beats which are then repeated: example: pick a bean off a plant, lay it in your apron, pick off the end of the bean, pull the string down the bean, pull off the other end of the bean, pop out the inside of the green bean, put beans in the bowl, thrown shell on the ground. (repeat)

Work with students to create a rhythm to this activity.

Once students understand how to create rhythmic beats based on simple work movements, divide them into groups and have them create 8 count rhythms to the following activities: sewing, washing clothes, cooking, chopping wood, etc.

**Evaluation:** Discuss how life was different for children growing up in the 1900’s. Discuss how life is so different for children today. Discuss the effectiveness of rhythm on everyday work patterns. Introduce the idea of how African Americans kept the pace of their work through work songs in the 1800’s.

Demonstrate how modern dances such as Alvin Ailey and Don McKayle have used these patterns to create new dances. Watch youtube clips demonstrating movement from Ailey’s *Wade in the Water* from Revelations (incredible use of movement to simulate movement in water)
and McKayle’s *Rainbow ‘Round My Shoulder* to show chain gang work movements.

*Lesson Plan developed with Professor Patricia Harter from UCLA’s Theater, Film & Television Department through the ArtsBridge Program.*

II. Point of View Exercise  
(Movement & Sensory Awareness)

In Thornton Wilder’s play, *Our Town*, many of the characters have specific points of view on their own community and on the world at large? Where in the text is this apparent? What was the Stage manager’s point of view of Joe Crowell dying in war? Could you tell what Mr. Webb’s point of view on culture and socialism was? What was Emily’s point of view on education? How about Dr. Gibbs’ point of view on city life? Who else in the play had a strong point of view on a specific topic? Finally, what is a point of view and how is it developed?

**Objective:** The objective of this group of exercises is for participants to understand what defines and shapes one’s point of view. To fully understand history and to relate to all aspects of our community, it is important for students to explore and respect multiple points of view. The warm-up exercise focuses on the students physicalizing their point of view, while the main exercise demonstrates how one’s point of view or the point of view of the medium one gets their information from, can affect our interpretation of a particular event.

**Motivation:** Show the class a comic strip or a political cartoon (multiple options are included in this study guide). Discuss how each cell/ block tells a story visually with emotion and relationship. Define point of view and how our personal experiences, relationships, family and environment have an impact on shaping it.

The instructor can also bring up a general topic like rain and discuss each student’s feelings about it. For instance, one student might hate the rain
because they once had an experience where they got drenched by a passing car. Another student might love the rain because the smell reminds them of a wonderful time camping with their family. The point of the discussion is that these individual experiences with the rain shape our future experiences and feelings towards it.

**Warm-up:**
- The exercise begins with everyone standing in a circle with one volunteer in the middle.
- The person in the middle strikes a pose, which they must hold for a couple of minutes.
- Everyone in the surrounding circle then has to recreate with their own body the pose they see before them.
- **Evaluation:** What happens is that since everyone has a different visual point of view of the pose due to sight visibility depending on where they are standing, so everyone’s recreation will be slightly different. Even the person who is directly in front of the pose will only be reflecting a mirror image. This exercise demonstrates how our interpretation of a pose or event can be affected by the place in which we experience it from and how we see it.

**Activity (Current Event/ Historical Event Storyboard Exercise):**
- Participants are handed the same newspaper article or summary of a specific historical event.
- Each group is then assigned a specific point of view: i.e. objective/factual, subjective/human interest, or sensational/over the top.
- Through storyboarding, each group must draw 3 cells that tell the story of this event. A cell is a square that represents one still image, for example in a comic strip.

Note: Each group must make sure their storyboard has a beginning, middle and end in the point of view they are assigned.
- Each group must share their storyboard with the rest of the class.
- Discuss the differences in their storyboards, even though it was about the same event.
Evaluation:
This exercise demonstrates how when events are forced into certain mediums, we are only receiving a part of the information depending on the point of view of the person reporting. This exercise can also lead into a discussion on political cartoons and their role in history.

III. Snapshot Exercise (Sensory Awareness)

Objective: This exercise familiarizes students with Wilder’s Our Town. This exercise requires the students to work together to create a visual story. Students also learn to visualize and recreate sensations.

Motivation: Show the class a comic strip. Discuss how each cell/block tells a story visually with emotion and relationship. Also discuss how in the production students were able to tell how each character felt about the others. How did they hold themselves physically? How did they tell the story of their character in just their movement? How did the director do this in the creation of his stage pictures?

Activity: Divide the class into groups of five. The instructor should assign each group a well-known fairytale (ex Cinderella, The Three Little Pigs, etc.) Explain that each groups is to tell the story of their fairytale with just five still pictures/snapshots. Each group must create the five snapshots that they think will help tell the story. There can be no movement or sound in each still picture. When it is time for the Snapshot presentations, the instructor should say “lights out”, so the audience can close their eyes, while the group is getting into their first snapshot, and then say “lights up” when they are done, so the audience can see their first image. The instructor repeats these orders until all five snapshots are seen and the class can guess what fairytale they just saw.

Then the instructor can break up the class again into groups of five and they need to tell the story of Our Town with seven snapshots each.
Evaluation: What visual cues in the snapshots were the most helpful in the retelling of the fairytale and play? What was confusing about some of the snapshots and why? Was it difficult to decide on the specific snapshots in your group? Why? What role did you play in the group dynamic? Was it difficult to rely only on your visual sense? What it difficult to remain still?

IV. Sound Effects Exercise
(Sensory Awareness & Improvisation)

Objective: The objective of this exercise is to familiarize students with the play Our Town and work on developing their storytelling skills. Through this exercise students will learn how to create a story with a beginning, middle/ conflict, and end.

Motivation: Discuss how music and sound effects were used in the Actors’ Gang production of Our Town. How did the sound effects help in storytelling? What are the basic story elements of this play?

Activity: Have the class sit in a circle facing each other. The instructor begins the story, while holding some sort of talking stick to indicate he/she is designated to speak. After a few lines, the instructor passes the stick to their right and it continues around the circle with each student adding a few lines each. An important note to make is that the group should be aware that they need to create a beginning, middle, and end and to use the whole circle wisely so as to not leave the whole ending to the last person in the circle. In addition, each person needs to have some sort of sound effect in his or her part of the story and when it comes up, all the students should make the sound together. The instructor can first do this activity with retelling the story of Our Town before creating an original story.
Evaluation: How clear do you think the story came out? Why? How could it have been improved? How did the sounds affect the storytelling? How was the environment set up? Would it have been easier if the characters were named, so they could easily be referred to? Was it difficult to remember the details of the story as it continued?

V. Pantomime Exercises
(Movement & Improvisation)

Objective: The objective of this exercise is for students to learn how to use body language as a form of clear communication. Students will also learn the definition of pantomime, which is the telling of a story without words, by means of bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions.

Motivation: Discuss The Actors’ Gang production of *Our Town* and how the actors used pantomime to create their environment and not actual props. Ask the students how they knew the mothers in the production were cooking? Could they tell what they were cooking? What were some activities and props that the actors’ pantomimed? How did that affect their storytelling?

Activity #1: (Object Exercise)
Divide the class into pairs. One of each pair will be the interpreter with a pen an pad of paper. The other will run behind a hiding place, observe an object (which will be laid out by instructor beforehand), then come back and pantomime the object to his or her scene partner. After the scene partner guesses the correct object, the partner runs backs and looks for the next object to pantomime. This is done until all seven objects are identified.

Activity #2: (Environment Exercise)
The instructor whispers a specified location into the ear of one chosen
student. That student then begins an activity in front of the class that would take place in the whispered environment. For example, if the chosen space is a kitchen, then the first student can pantomime opening the refrigerator and pulling out stuff for making a sandwich. Once another student in the class knows the environment that is being established, they can jump up and add to the environment by doing another activity in it, like washing their hands in the kitchen sink. The exercise can continue with 3 or more students adding their own activities to the environment, until there is a pretty good understanding as to what location is being established.

***Note: One way to adapt these activities to a current curriculum unit is to have students pantomime objects that would have been around in a certain time period or activities and environments that are relevant to a certain historical event being studied in class.

Evaluation:
Which objects were the toughest to pantomime? Which objects required a physical story to be told? Did any of the performers seem to be confused with the location of the environment? Did any stories or relationships form between the performers?

In regards to Our Town, what activities were really clearly pantomimed? How did this help in the storytelling? If this play took place in today’s time period how would the pantomime of making breakfast be different? Do we still have paperboys? Is the milk still delivered? How would the pantomime and environment change if we set this play ten years from now?
Content Standards
(Grades 9-12)

English Language Arts (Grades 11-12)
Comprehension and Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text
  1.5 Analyze an author’s implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.
Narrative Analysis of Grade-Level-Appropriate Text
  3.2 Analyze the way in which the theme or meaning of a selection represents a view or comment on life, using textual evidence to support the claim.

Historical and Social Analysis Skills (Grades 9-12)
Chronological and Spatial Thinking
  1. Students compare the present with the past, evaluating the consequences of past events and decisions and determining the lessons that were learned.
  2. Students analyze how change happens at different rates at different times; understand that some aspects can change while others remain the same; and understand that change is complicated and affects not only technology and politics but also values and beliefs.

Historical Research, Evidence, and Point of View
  1. Students identify bias and prejudice in historical interpretations.
Historical Interpretation
  2. Students interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.
  3. Students understand the meaning, implication, and impact of historical events and recognize that events could have taken other directions.

Visual and Performing Arts (Grades 9-12 Proficient)
Artistic Perception
   1.1 Use the vocabulary of theater, such as acting values, style, genre, design, and theme to describe theatrical experiences.
Creative Expression
   2.2 Write dialogues and scenes, applying basic dramatic structure: exposition, complication, conflict, crisis, climax, and resolution.
Historical and Cultural Context
   3.1 Identify and compare how film, theatre, television, and electronic media productions influence values and behaviors.
Aesthetic Valuing
   4.2 Report on how a specific actor used drama to convey meaning in his or her performance.