

RS RUSSELL
SAGE
COLLEGE
ALBANY & TROY



THE 39 STEPS

A Live Radio Play

written by Joe Landry
directed by David Baecker

March 19-26, 2021

TI THEATRE INSTITUTE
at Sage

Available to rent March 19-26 through Broadway on Demand
For more information: Call 518.244.2248 or visit theatre.sage.edu

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Welcome to your study guide!

This study guide is designed to help prepare your students to see *The 39 Steps: A Live Radio Play* and to help connect the performance to your curriculum. In addition to background on the author, story, and production, we have identified activities and areas of study that relate directly to *The 39 Steps Live Radio Play*. These activities will often satisfy two or more of the NYS learning standards. For example: an improvisational activity can be used to explore character relationships as preparation for a writing exercise; constructing models of the stage and set can be used to explore technology, geometry and physics; a visual art exercise can refine fine motor skills and foster a deeper understanding of self and community. It is our objective to suggest ideas for the creative, intellectual, social, physical, and emotional development of your students. We believe that drama, music, and dance activities are vital to a child's development!

About the Theatre Institute at Sage

The Theatre Institute at Sage (TIS) is under the umbrella of the School of Arts and Sciences at Russell Sage College (RSC). We strive to enhance the education of Sage students by providing theatrical opportunities as well as involvement as support staff and student teachers. TIS provides educational support services for productions (such as teacher dress rehearsals, study guides and post show residencies), as well as K-12 extracurricular programs on weekends, school vacation breaks, and during the summer. The Theatre Institute at Sage represents a commitment by RSC to develop and continue to provide teachers, students, and Capital Region residents with quality live theatre and arts-in-education opportunities.

Preparation for the Performance

Live theatre is an active and interactive experience!

As members of the audience, you provide an integral part in the success of a theatrical performance. In live performance, the audience reacts to the performers who, in turn, react to the audience in a constant interchange. Obviously, this interchange does not translate to “Virtual” theatre. We have seen this shift with theatre, music and sports. All of these shared experiences have had to regroup and revisit what is at the essence of the activity. For the theatre, that is telling stories. This production was performed onstage with all the elements of a traditional live performance except for the audience. The cameras became the audience, so we hope you will enjoy this as a shared experience with your class, and that it will spark conversation and discussion.

Elements of the Theatre

Students will have a greater understanding and appreciation for theatre when they can identify its individual aspects. Here are a few key terms.

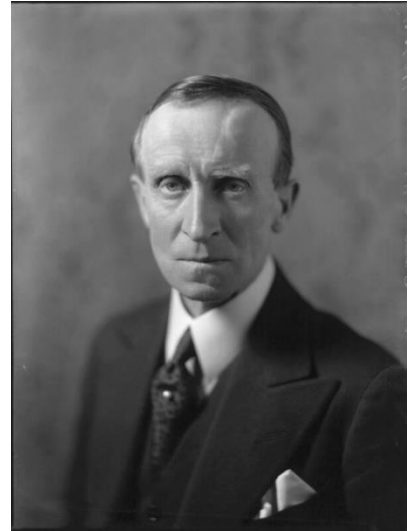
- Actor: any theatrical performer who portrays a character on stage
- Costume Designer: the person who creates what the actors wear in the performance
- Director: the person in charge of the blocking, acting, and artistic vision of a show
- Lighting Designer: the person who creates the lighting for the play
- Prop: an object used by an actor in a scene
- Stage Manager: the person in charge of recording blocking, calling cues, and managing the actors and crew members
- Foley: The reproduction of everyday sounds for radio, film, or video intended to enhance the final product.
- Production Concept: the creative interpretation of the script, which will unify the artistic vision of the production team.
- Blocking: the exact movement and positioning of actors on stage during a performance.
- Sound Designer: The person responsible for the design, recording and playback of all music and sound effects used in a production.

The 39 Steps

From Magazine to Book to Screen to Stage

Scottish public official, historian and author John Buchan created the Thirty-Nine Steps series. This story originally appeared very briefly, as a serial in Blackwood's Magazine in August and September 1915 before being published as a book by the Blackwood's publishing house in October the same year. This was most popular of Buchanan's series of secret-service thrillers and an introduction to Mr. Richard Hannay.

Richard Hannay, an all-action hero with a stiff upper lip and a miraculous knack for getting himself out of sticky situations would find himself in other series by the fast paced adventure story author. In 1935, *The 39 Steps* was released as a film helping establish Alfred Hitchcock as one of the premiere directors in the genre.



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Alfred Hitchcock was born in Leytonstone, England on August 13, 1899. He was the youngest of three children born to William and Emma Jane Hitchcock. He grew up in London's East End with a stern disciplinarian of a father and a hovering mother. His recollection of his childhood was that it was a lonely one.

After attending a St Ignatius College and London County Council School of Marine Engineering and Navigation Hitchcock held a job in the sales department at W.T. Henley's Telegraph Works Company. After a time in sales, he switched to the design department and that move sparked an interest in art. Hitchcock enrolled in design classes at the University of London, and this led to him working in London's film industry, first as a title card designer for silent movies. From 1919 – 1939 Hitchcock immersed himself in silent films, gaining experience on 18 silent films in areas including; prop manager, co-writer, art director, production manager. This led to work in studios in Germany where Hitchcock tried his hand in set design, script writing, and assistant directing. In the summer of 1925, he would be asked to direct.

It was also during this time Hitchcock met editor, Alma Reville who, in 1926 he would marry and in 1928, they had a daughter, Patricia. Hitchcock quickly gained notoriety as a director who delivered suspense, twist endings, and dark subject matter. He was popular with audiences at home and abroad, and in 1939 the Hitchcock family moved to Hollywood. Although Hitchcock had already made a string of successful movies, *The 39 Steps* brought him international recognition and helped launch his Hollywood career. The thriller, with the common theme of an innocent man mistakenly accused of a crime finding he must clear his name, became a defining film in Hitchcock's career.

In the decades to follow, Hitchcock would cement his legacy by directing and producing his most successful and enduring works. His television anthology, Alfred Hitchcock Presents, which featured dramas, thrillers, and

mysteries, ran from 1955 to 1965. What started as a 30-minute show created, hosted, and produced, by Hitchcock, grew into *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*, making him a household name.

Hitchcock created over fifty feature films in a career that saw not only the development of a very distinctive directorial style, but also landmark innovations in cinema. In 1929, *Blackmail* was his first feature film with sound, and in 1948, his first color film was *Rope*. Hitchcock himself was credited with pioneering many camera and editing techniques for peers and aspiring directors to emulate.

He collected many professional accolades including two Golden Globes, eight Laurel Awards, and five lifetime achievement awards. He was a five-time Academy Award nominee for Best Director, and in 1940, his film *Rebecca* won the Oscar for Best Picture. In 1980, he received a knighthood from Queen Elizabeth II.

A husband, father, director, and the Master of Suspense, Sir Alfred Hitchcock passed away on April 29, 1980.

Synopsis

While vacationing in London, Richard Hannay befriends a scared woman who, in the course of an evening, tells him that she is actually a spy and makes a cryptic reference to “the 39 steps.” The woman is later murdered, and Hannay becomes the prime suspect. He flees on a train to Scotland, and while on board he meets Pamela, an attractive young woman who tries to have him arrested. Hannay manages to escape, but he later goes to the local police to tell his story. They do not believe him, however, and Hannay runs. Soon thereafter he is spotted by Pamela, who alerts the police. Hannay is arrested, and Pamela is asked to accompany the officers. However, when it becomes clear that the men are not police officers, Hannay manages to escape once again, this time handcuffed to Pamela. The two make their way to a boardinghouse in the countryside, where Pamela slips out of the handcuffs while Hannay is asleep. As she is about to leave, Pamela overhears a conversation which convinces her that Hannay’s incredible stories are true and leads her to stay with him. The action climaxes at the Palladium in London, where Hannay finally deduces the secret of “the 39 steps.” With a performance taking place on stage, Hannay is able to expose the spy ring and finally prove his innocence.

Character breakdown (27 characters and only 5 actors!)

Actor 1: Our Announcer, Mr. Memory, Man 1 at the Music Hall, Ticket Merchant, Man 1 on the Aberdeen Express, Police 2, Driver, Professor Bartlett, Alfred

Actor 2: Manager, Man 2 at the Music Hall, Conductor, Man 2 on the Aberdeen Express, Police 1, George, Joe, Detective, Doctor

Actor 3: Richard Hannay

Actor 4: Woman at Music Hall, Pamela Stewart

Actor 5: Annabella Smith, Cigarette Girl, Newsboy, Innkeeper, Waitress, Usherette

List of Characters:

Stage Manager	Police 1, on the Aberdeen Express
Our Announcer	Police 2, on the Aberdeen Express
Manager, at the Music Hall	Newsboy
Mr. Memory, a trivia expert	Driver, a Scotsman
Woman, at the Music Hall	George, a butler
Man 1, at the Music Hall	Professor Bartlett, a leader of a spy ring posing as a retired professor
Richard Hannay, a Canadian	Joe, a henchman
Man 2, at the Music Hall	Alfred, a henchman
Annabella Smith, a foreign freelance agent	Innkeeper, at the King's Head Tavern
Conductor, on the Aberdeen Express	Waitress, in a pub
Ticket Merchant, at the station	Usherette, at the Music Hall
Man 1, on the Aberdeen Express	Detective
Cigarette Girl, on the Aberdeen Express	Doctor
Man 2, on the Aberdeen Express	
Pamela Stewart, a young woman	

Vocabulary

Review these potentially unfamiliar words and phrases with your students prior to the show to enhance their understanding of the show's dialogue!

culled: to choose or gather choice things or parts from.

celluloid: a tough, nitrocellulose and camphor substance once used in the manufacture of motion picture film.

quod: jail

freelance: a person who sells work or services by the day, hour, job, etc., rather than on a salaried basis.

shakedown: a makeshift bed

moors: a tract of peaty, wasteland often overgrown with heath.

teletype: a telegraphic apparatus by which signals are sent by striking the letters and symbols of the keyboard of an instrument resembling a typewriter and are received by a similar instrument that automatically prints them in type corresponding to the keys struck.

highlands: a mountainous region in northern Scotland

manacled: handcuffed, hampered or restrained

pluck: courage or resolution in the face of difficulties.

Inside Our Production

Director's Note

Directing THE 39 STEPS has been a gathering of my favorite hobbies--old time radio and Alfred Hitchcock films. Both genres work on your imagination--giving you just enough information for your mind to finish the story--and even working in a visual medium, I find that Hitchcock's films similarly withhold information and one is left to imagine much. THE 39 STEPS was an early introduction to the "MacGuffin", a plot device regularly used by Hitchcock, who said, "The MacGuffin is the thing that the spies are after but the audience doesn't care." While our story uncovers the mystery of THE 39 STEPS, most of the action involves our hero and heroine on the run, outsmarting the bad guys, and falling in love. Creating this world for the ear has been an exciting challenge with a great deal of trial and error, using boxes of macaroni to create a train, sliding boxes to simulate doors, and an egg beater to sound like the motor of a car. It's been a fun, safe collaboration, and COVID-friendly in terms of staging. I hope you enjoy THE 39 STEPS.

Costume Designer's Note

Putting together costumes for *The 39 Steps: A Live Radio Play* presented an interesting change for me as Costume Designer. When I initially read the script, I kept listing costume pieces for each new character. That is normally how I would approach a play where actors play multiple characters in rapid succession. My job is to provide each character with a costume or costume piece that helps to tell their story and to identify them to the audience. These pieces help to separate one character from another when actors play multiple roles. A radio play, however, is intended to be listened to not watched. There is no audience watching, making it pointless for the actors to keep changing their costumes. Radio actors communicated different character by changes of voice or adding an accent to make them distinct. So, in our play within a play, I created a 1940's look for each person putting them in the correct period as actors arriving to perform characters on the radio. For our very real audience watching the radio play, I used the costumes to tell a bit of each actor's story and tried to tie their costume to at least some of the characters they play. As rehearsals progressed, we decided to add a few costume pieces to distinguish characters in places where an actor plays 2 or 3 characters in the same conversation. It helps to help make things a little clearer in the fast-paced action. I hope you enjoy the performance. Maybe it will inspire you to think about a time when the look and action of a radio play was all in each listener's imagination.

About the Original Music

The radio play script for 39 Steps includes lyrics to hilarious jingles. A jingle is a short song used in advertising and is designed to be easily remembered. This is often done through a catchy hook that catches the ear of the listener and stands out. Sometimes, a jingle is so memorable that you can't get it out of your head!

The words to jingles are very important and send a message to potential customers, such as a product's brand name, description, or phone number to call in order to buy it. Many jingles have a common structure such as the "donut." In this form, music is initially presented with a vocal section. Then, the announcer talks about the product as the music plays in the background. Finally, the hook returns with singers again highlighting the product as a tagline. Jingles are often in major keys and try to represent the product stylistically (for example, a yoga studio would have soft relaxing music or an amusement park would have stimulating music).

Mark Ahola, an instructor in the Creative Arts in Therapy program at Russell Sage College, was charged with composing music for 4 pretend jingles in our production. These jingles were created in the big band style of the 1940s since that is the era for the play itself. The 1st jingle is an instrumental theme song for "Mr. Memory." The 2nd jingle is an advertisement for the imaginary airline, North by Northwest. The 3rd is a short jingle emphasizing the call letters of the WBFR playhouse radio station. Lastly, the 4th is a humorous song that advertises The Bates Motel, which was the setting for Hitchcock's thriller, Psycho.

Early in the production, Mark met with the cast and crew to help write the jingles. The group brainstormed their ideas of melodies to accompany the script lyrics. After the cast and crew came up with some great hooks for each jingle, Mark added harmonies to them in a 1940's big band style and taught them to the cast. Everyone enjoyed learning and singing the jingles, and even added motions to them (even though this is a radio play)! We hope that you enjoy our jingles and are humming them even after the show is over!

Post-Show Activities

Discussion

We have probably all seen a book we have read turned into a movie. Sometimes, if it is one of our favorite books, we probably already have a good picture of what we think the characters and location should look like. We have created the production concept in our mind. Discuss some of the books you have read and their film counterpart. Did they transfer to film well? Did they stay true to the story from the book and to what your production concept was? Have you seen any book or movies as a play?

Are there different limitations for each? Which has the least amount of limitations? The most? Why do you think that is so?

Foley Exercise

Did you ever think a box of Macaroni and Cheese paired with a train whistle could sound like a train? How about coconuts creating the sound of a horse or donkey cart? Thanks to the creativity of Jack Foley a new sound technique was developed. Foley sounds performed live, in time with the actors or film create a higher quality sound for the performance. The Foley sound technique started with the 1920s radio shows, where the sounds originally were on phonograph. Though not usually prevalent in theatrical productions, Foley sound effects became central to this play in Radio Show format.

Want to try to create a soundscape. Take a short video or movie clip (cartoons work really well). Play the clip with no sound. You can also use a paragraph or two from a book and read it aloud if you prefer. Next, find objects to create the sounds you want to make and create sound along with your story. It takes a lot of rustling, shaking and banging of objects to find what creates the best sounds. You may be surprised in what you find works best.

Here are some ideas to start...shredded paper in a bag sounds like walking through grass, crinkling a cellophane or potato chip bag sounds like fire, use your feet for footsteps or leather gloves or a feather duster can be a bird flapping its wings.

Memory Exercise:

How does Mr. Memory do it? He can remember an enormous amount of information, and according to the script, he adds 50 new facts every single day. Are there ways to help yourself remember things? Yes! Mnemonics are memory tools designed to help your brain store and recall information using key words, acronyms or visual and/or acoustic cues. We have all probably heard I before E except after C. Well, visual cues are also very helpful.

Read your students a list of 12 random words. frog, train, keys, water, motorcycle, guitar, map, ball, lake, sunset, typewriter, book.

See how many of these words your students can recall. Can they recall them in order?

Now ask your students to link these items together in a story they create. The more they can visualize the story the more success they will have remembering the words and keeping them in the correct order.

Perhaps the story starts as a green FROG jumps on a moving TRAIN, dropping his KEYS in a puddle of WATER.

Writing Exercise: Adaptation

Adapt a brief piece of literature into a theatrical script. This exercise can give students experience taking descriptive text and translating that into written dialogue between characters, using minimal descriptions since it is intended that the dialog will someday be performed.

Literary Example:

Excerpt from Cinderella by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

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This wife brought two daughters into the house with her. They were beautiful, with fair faces, but evil and dark hearts. Times soon grew very bad for the poor stepchild.

"Why should that stupid goose sit in the parlor with us?" they said. "If she wants to eat bread, then she will have to earn it. Out with this kitchen maid!"

They took her beautiful clothes away from her, dressed her in an old gray smock, and gave her wooden shoes.

"Just look at the proud princess! How decked out she is!" they shouted and laughed as they led her into the kitchen.

There she had to do hard work from morning until evening, get up before daybreak, carry water, make the fires, cook, and wash. Besides this, the sisters did everything imaginable to hurt her. They made fun of her, scattered peas and lentils into the ashes for her, so that she had to sit and pick them out again. In the evening when she had worked herself weary, there was no bed for her. Instead she had to sleep by the hearth in the ashes. And because she always looked dusty and dirty, they called her Cinderella.

--

Adaptation Example:

Setting: Cinderella and her father's home, the eve of their new family moving in.

Stepmother (*entering*): Alright darlings, settle in. Anything you need, let us know and your new father will get it for you, right dear?

Father (*meekly*): Yes, of course.

Stepsister 1: I'll be getting the largest room, because I'm the most beautiful.

Stepsister 2: No, I am!

Stepmother: You are both the most beautiful, just like your mother. Enough fuss. Go unpack your things.

Cinderella: Where will I be sleeping now?

Father: We haven't...

Stepmother: In the closet next to the kitchen. There should be enough room for you to make due.

Cinderella (*sadly*): Yes m'am.

Hours Pass. The whole family gathered together in the parlor

Stepsister 2: Why should that stupid goose sit in the parlor with us?

Stepsister 1: If she wants to eat bread, then she will have to earn it. Out with this kitchen maid

Both stepsisters stare at Cinderella with stern eyes as she exits the room

Once your students scenes are completed, have the student adaptors cast their scenes with their peers. Once the students have read the scene once or twice, ask them if they would perform the scenes aloud for the class. Do these adaptations tell the story?

Writing Exercise: Jingles

Your class can write their own jingle! First, present recordings of well-known jingles (you can find these on YouTube) and talk about the memorable aspects of them. Some famous jingles include Empire 800, Meow Mix, and Oscar Meyer Weiner. Students can probably even recall jingles that they have heard on TV or radio.

Then, think of a product that you want to market. Come up with a slogan that is catchy and that highlights the great benefits of your item. The words are the most important aspect of the jingle as it tells the listener what the product is, important information about it, and where to buy it.

Once you know the message/words for your jingle, write a catchy, memorable melody. Sometimes it's helpful to just say some of the words over and over to see what melody comes into your head. Or, you can even chant the words rhythmically without even adding a melody. If possible, you could even play chords to accompany the jingle with a piano or other instrument.

Your class's completed jingle should showcase your product and target the customers that will buy it. For example, if it were a product for teenagers, it would be in the style of current pop or country music. Lastly, record the jingle and watch your sales increase as listeners buy your product because your jingle motivated them to buy it!

Sources:

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