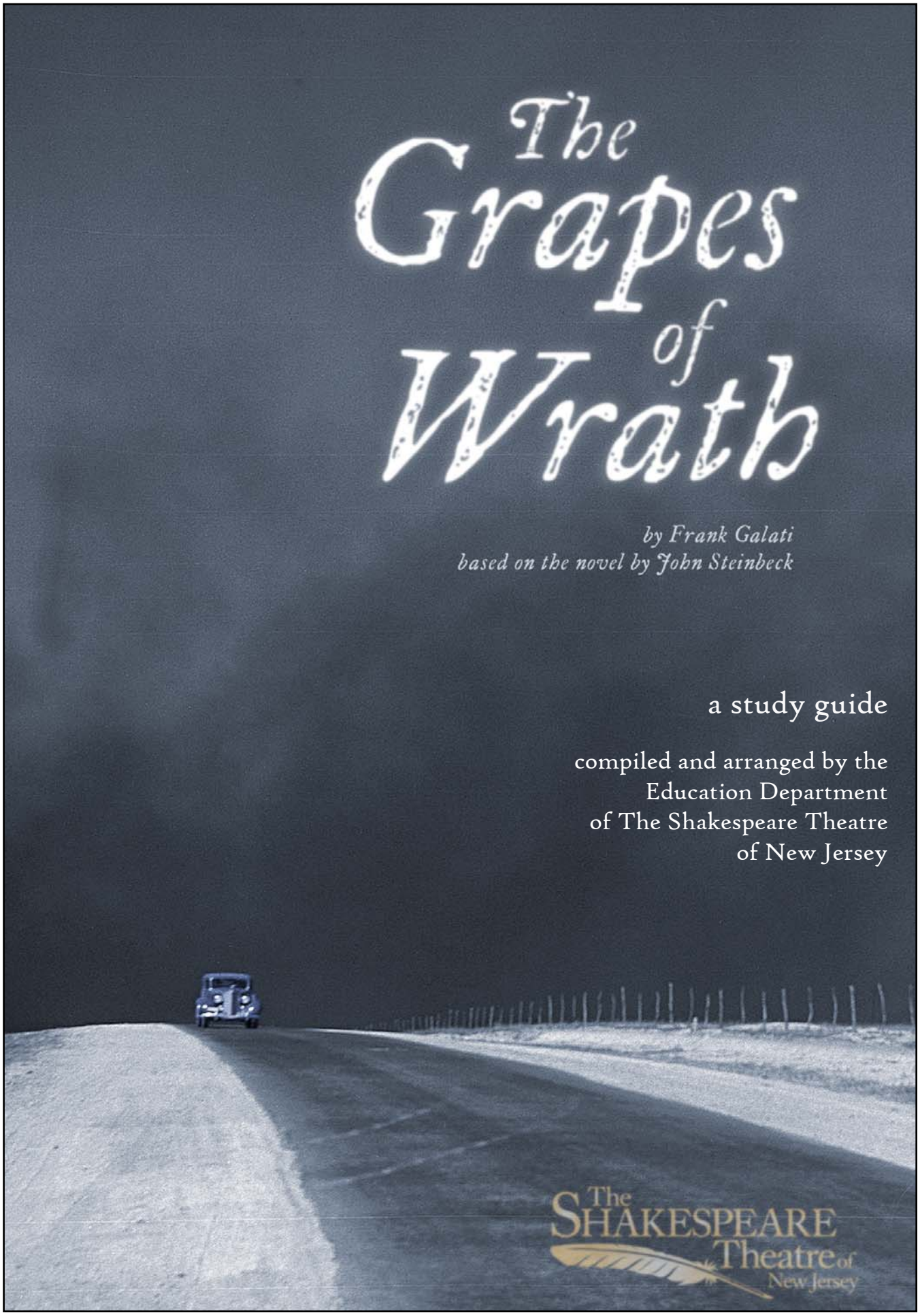

The Grapes of Wrath
by Frank Galati
based on the novel by John Steinbeck
a study guide
compiled and arranged by the
Education Department
of The Shakespeare Theatre
of New Jersey
The SHAKESPEARE Theatre of New Jersey

The Grapes of Wrath: A Brief Introduction

John Steinbeck's 1939 novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, depicts the journey of migrants who fled the poverty and suffering of the Great Plains region during the Dust Bowl era. The novel juxtaposes the intimate story of the Joads, a typical extended family from Oklahoma who leave their farm to seek work in California, with a more macrocosmic look at the effects of the Dust Bowl on the nation.

Steinbeck struggled to choose a title for his book, and in the end accepted a suggestion from his then-wife, Carol. "The Grapes of Wrath" is a phrase from "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," Julia Ward Howe's famous abolitionist anthem.

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
His truth is marching on.
- "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," 1861

Steinbeck's choice of title indicates his sympathies for the impoverished and downtrodden in American society, and suggests the possibility of a new "war of liberation" fought on behalf of the "common man" who, in Steinbeck's view, was being consistently exploited by the upper classes. However, in selecting an anthem of the Unionist cause, Steinbeck also connects his message to the preservation, rather than revolutionary destruction, of the United States and what is distinctively American.

A farmer and his sons walking during a dust storm in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. Photo by Arthur Rothstein for the Farm Security Administration. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

Julia Ward Howe's 'grapes of wrath' were, in their turn, an allusion to a passage from the biblical Book of Revelation:

> *And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs*
>
> (Revelation 14:19-20).

The Book of Revelation, of course, purports to be a detailed account of the events of the apocalypse, of the suffering of mankind during these "end times," and of the survival of a handful of devout Christians. The passage quoted above is part of a section in which mankind is tested and purified by natural disasters. The Biblical text depicts extreme suffering as well as the redeeming value of righteousness, both of which are major themes in Steinbeck's novel as well.

Apocalypse was certainly on the minds of Americans in the 1930s, as the extreme and bizarre weather conditions in the Midwest—drought, massive dust storms, flash floods, and so on — made many fear the end of the world had arrived. Skies darkened at noon in New York and Washington, overshadowed by clouds of soil blowing east from the Plains states, while actual plagues of locusts (grasshoppers whose natural predators had died) descended on Texas and Oklahoma. Observers described the approach of the dust storms as resembling a line of black mountains sweeping across the landscape faster than a moving car.

Even though Steinbeck did not personally experience the Dust Bowl, *The Grapes of Wrath*, like many of his novels, draws from autobiographical experiences. He grew up in the farming community of Salinas, California, which became home to many displaced families from the Great Plains. As a young man, Steinbeck worked as a farmhand alongside migrant families whom he befriended and whose stories of survival he heard. These experiences contributed to the writing of *The Grapes of Wrath* and others of his novels.

The Grapes of Wrath created controversy and a degree of furor when it was published in 1939. According to Peter Lisca, a Steinbeck scholar, the novel "was a phenomenon on the scale of a national event. It was publicly banned and burned by citizens, it was debated on national radio hook-ups, but above all, it was read." Some were outraged by the language and behavior of the Joads, which they felt were crude or even obscene. Many others, especially California authorities and landowners, accused Steinbeck of creating a piece of communist propaganda and attempting to foment class warfare. By 1962, however, when Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature, *The Grapes of Wrath* was widely acclaimed as one of the greatest American novels of its century.

Thanks to this intense interest, *The Grapes of Wrath* has been adapted many times for the theater, film, and television. In 1940, folksinger Woody Guthrie released an album entitled *Dust Bowl Ballads*, which included a song entitled "Tom Joad," retelling Steinbeck's novel in musical form. In the same year, John Ford directed a film version of the novel starring Henry Fonda as Tom.

This stage version of the American classic was written by actor and director Frank Galati with Chicago's Steppenwolf Theatre Company. The original run was so successful that it transferred to Broadway in 1990 and was nominated for a total of eight Tony Awards, winning the awards for Best Play and Best Direction of a Play. That production starred Gary Sinise as Tom Joad and Terry Kinney as Jim Casy, both of whom received Tony nominations for their performances. Galati's adaptation has since been performed at many regional theatres across the country.

Both the novel and play focus not only on the plight of the individuals in the Joad family, but on the needs and moral responsibilities of all Americans. A deeply human story of love and sacrifice in the face of extreme hardship, *The Grapes of Wrath* transcends its documentary roots, and speaks vigorously to Americans of all eras.

The Grapes of Wrath: A Brief Synopsis

A narrator introduces *The Grapes of Wrath* with a description of the Dust Bowl and the suffering of the people of the Midwest. Two men meet on the stage: ex-preacher Jim Casy, a man struggling with his religious faith, and Tom Joad, a young man who has just been paroled after killing a man in self-defense. Tom invites Casy to join his family for dinner, but the men find the Joad family farm abandoned. They learn that the Joads have gathered at the house of Tom's uncle, John, preparing to start a journey to California because they can no longer survive in Oklahoma.

The Joads receive both men warmly, thrilled that Tom has found them before they began their journey westward. After sharing a meal and talking about their dreams for a new life out west, the Joads pack up their truck and depart for California with Casy, who decides to join their quest. Before the family even leaves the state of Oklahoma, however, tragedy strikes as Grampa Joad dies. Devastated by her husband's death, Granma Joad in turn becomes ill and delusional.

The family continues west on Route 66, where they meet more families like themselves. They begin to hear rumors that the labor in California is not as bountiful as they had thought. The wages are far lower than advertisements had promised, due to the sheer number of migrants searching for work. Arriving at the Colorado River, Tom and his brother Noah go down to the river to bathe, and Noah makes a decision to abandon the family. Fearing to go into the unknown, he decides to remain by the river, arguing that he will at least be able to catch fish all day and not starve to death.

An 11-year-old migrant picking hops in Oregon, photographed by Dorothea Lange. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

Tom returns to the family and breaks the news about Noah's departure. Saddened that their clan is already fragmenting, the family continues onward through the desert. The trials of crossing the desert prove too much for Granma, who dies before she can even see the "promised land" of California.

Act II begins with the Joads' arrival at a California shantytown or "Hooverville," filled with other homeless migrant families. Tom meets Floyd, who mocks Tom's naiveté. Everyone is looking for work, Floyd explains, and there are not enough jobs to go around. When he complains about the exploitation of the migrant workers by large farm-owners, Tom suggests the possibility of a strike. Organized resistance is the only way to get better treatment, in Tom's view. Floyd warns Tom that he may be arrested or even killed if he is labeled an agitator.

A farm contractor enters, asking the assembled migrants whether they would like to sign on for some day labor with no guarantee of pay. Floyd reacts angrily as the local deputy sheriff comes in on his nightly patrol. Together, the contractor and the deputy sheriff falsely accuse Floyd of participating in a recent robbery. Tempers flare, and a fight breaks out between migrants and police. Tom and Casy both step in, but in the end, Casy takes the blame for the entire incident, knowing that if Tom were arrested, he would receive a much harsher sentence for violating his parole. Casy is taken into custody.

Floyd returns to warn the Joads that the camp is going to be burned down by the authorities that night. As they quickly pack their belongings, they realize that Tom's pregnant sister, Rose of Sharon, has apparently been deserted by her husband, Connie. The family has no choice but to flee without him.

The Joads arrive at Weedpatch Camp, a shelter run by the federal government specifically for migrant workers. Weedpatch is a dream compared to the other camps the Joads have experienced: the community makes its own laws, has its own police force, hosts dances and boasts clean public facilities. However, the Joads quickly realize that there is still no work in the area around Weedpatch, so they decide to go north, though not without regret.

The Joads move on to the Hooper Ranch, where they find work picking fruit. There is a strike going on to protest the low wages, and Tom encounters Casy there as one of the picketers. Casy tells Tom about his experience in jail, and describes how he and the other prisoners effected change by banding together to protest the poor conditions in the jail.

Two armed men arrive at the ranch, searching for Casy, who has been labeled as an agitator. A fight breaks out, and Casy is killed by one of the men. Tom, angered by the sight of his fallen friend, attacks the men, and then runs back to his family's campsite. Tom tells Ma what has happened, and explains that for the family's safety, he must leave them. He promises to become an activist, fighting the injustices around him. Tom departs, leaving a tearful but proud Ma behind.

The Joads and some other migrant families move from their tents to what seems to be more permanent shelter: a series of railroad boxcars beside a creek. They soon encounter a heavy rainstorm. Pa and Uncle John realize that the creek is going to flood and that the family is in danger. The men frantically construct a barricade to protect their boxcar homes from the rising waters. At the same time, Rose of Sharon goes into labor and the women band together to deliver her baby, which turns out to be stillborn. Uncle John volunteers to bury the infant, but in his despair decides to set the corpse adrift down the river, in hopes that someone will find it and realize the suffering of the migrants.

The dam which the men have cobbled together is quickly overwhelmed by the rushing waters, so the Joads decide to leave for higher ground. Al Joad stays behind with his new bride Aggie and her family, determined to risk the flood, but the others trek onward through the pouring rain, and finally happen upon a barn. They seek shelter inside, where they find a little boy and his desperately ill father. Ma asks to borrow their blanket, for Rose of Sharon is soaked and still weak from her labor. The boy explains that his father is starving to death, for he has not eaten in six days, and his stomach can no longer handle solid food. The boy begs the Joads for either money or milk to feed him. The play closes with a striking image in which Rose of Sharon chooses to comfort and nourish the dying stranger.

About the Author: John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck was born in Salinas, California on February 27, 1902, to John Ernst Steinbeck, a Monterey County Treasurer, and Olive Hamilton Steinbeck, a former teacher. The family also had three daughters: Beth and Esther, who were older than John, and Mary, who was the youngest child.

Salinas was a tight-knit farming community, and the Steinbeck family were prominent in its rural social scene. Even as a young boy, however, John dismissed his family's traditional character and longed for a cosmopolitan existence beyond his sleepy farmtown. By the age of fourteen, he had decided that he wanted to be a writer and started spending much of his time locked away in his bedroom, exercising his vast imagination by writing short stories.

At the insistence of his parents, Steinbeck entered Stanford University in 1919 as an English major, but was an on-again, off-again student, often dropping out of school to take odd jobs, ranging from a sales clerk to a factory worker to a farm hand, where he worked alongside the migrant workers who were traveling to California in droves during this time period. Although he left Stanford in 1925 without earning a degree, his many side jobs during this time gave him an intimate understanding of the plight of the downtrodden and the hardworking average American, which he would put to great use in his writings.

After leaving Stanford, Steinbeck moved to New York City, trying to fulfill his boyhood dreams. He continued to support himself with odd jobs, including working on the construction of Madison Square Garden, all the while searching for a publisher. He was unsuccessful in his endeavors, however, and returned to California. He took a job as caretaker of a Lake Tahoe summer home, which gave him ample time to work on his first novel, *Cup of Gold,* which was published in August of 1929, just months before the stock market crash that heralded the Great Depression.

Around this time, Steinbeck met his first wife, Carol Henning. The pair was married on January 14, 1930, and ultimately divorced in 1943. During their marriage, Henning was highly involved with her husband's writing: typing his manuscripts, helping him edit, and even suggesting titles. During their 13 years of marriage, Steinbeck wrote his most famous novels, including *The Grapes of Wrath, Tortilla Flat,* and *Of Mice and Men*.

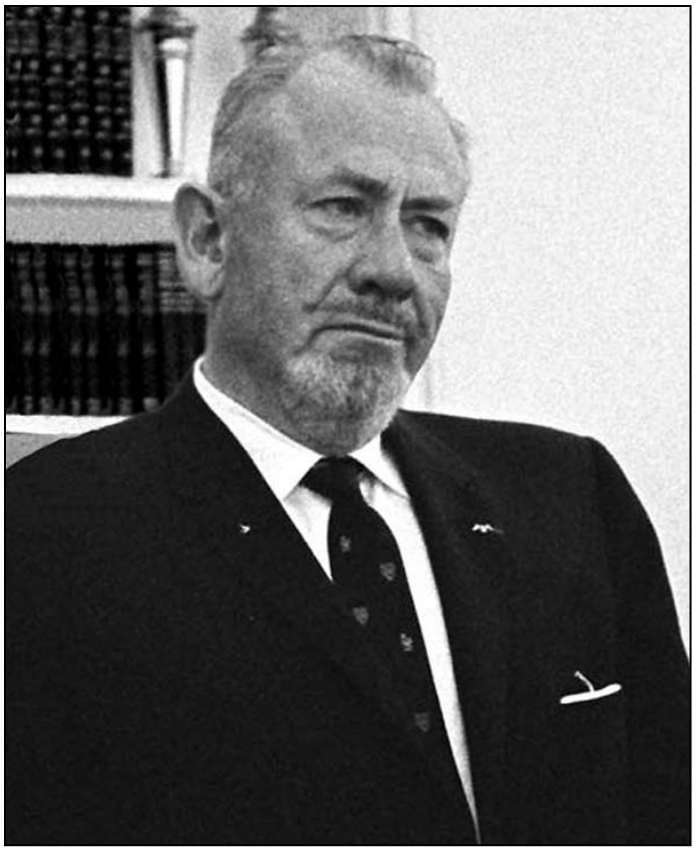
The 1940s brought more difficult times. After divorcing Henning, Steinbeck quickly married Gwyndolyn Conger, an aspiring singer more than twenty years his junior with whom he had been having an affair. He and Gwyndolyn had two sons, Thom and John. During World War II, Steinbeck became a war correspondent, and his assignments often took him on travels far away from his new family for extended periods of time. By 1948, Steinbeck and Conger's marriage was over.

Although Steinbeck's job during World War II may have had a negative effect on his second marriage, it confirmed in him a lifelong passion for travel. During the 1960s, Steinbeck traveled around the world with his third wife, Elaine Anderson Scott, whom he had married in 1950. During this period, Steinbeck's work became more ambitious, though less critically acclaimed, particularly in the United States. One of his better received works during the latter part of his career was *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*, a poignant journal based on his travels around the US with his poodle, Charley.

Soon after *Travels with Charley* was published, Steinbeck was awarded the 1962 Nobel Prize for Literature. Still, Steinbeck had his detractors. After Steinbeck was given the award, the *New York Times* published a fiercely critical editorial by noted critic Arthur Mizener. After reading this essay, Steinbeck decided that he was done creating new fiction.

However, Steinbeck did not stop writing altogether. Instead he began a modern translation of Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, a medieval chronicle of the tales of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. His research for the project took him throughout England and Wales. Steinbeck's translation was never finished, but the completed portions were published after his death.

John Steinbeck died in New York on September 20, 1968 following a battle with arteriosclerosis. He was 66 years old. Public regard for Steinbeck has continued to grow after his death. His novels are still studied in schools, productions of his plays continue to win awards, and many books have been published about his life and work. The United States government even issued a commemorative Steinbeck postage stamp in 1979, on what would have been his 77th birthday. John Steinbeck remains an influential and much-read chronicler of the American experience.



John Steinbeck, photographed during a 1966 White House visit with President Lyndon B. Johnson. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

About the Adaptor: Frank Galati

Frank Galati was born on November 29, 1943 in Highland Park, Illinois. He joined the ensemble of the Steppenwolf Theatre in 1986 as both a performer and a director. Since then he has been involved in 19 productions with the company. With Steppenwolf he adapted and staged *The Grapes of Wrath* in 1990, which eventually transferred to Broadway and won him two Tony Awards in the categories of Best Play and Best Direction of a Play. Other Broadway credits include *Ragtime, The Glass Menagerie,* and *The Pirate Queen.*

Continuing in his tradition of adapting literature for the stage, Galati adapted William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* in 1995 and Haruki Murakami's *After the Quake* in 2005. He has also directed several operas for both the Chicago Opera Theatre and Lyric Theatre of Chicago, and made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera House in 2000 with his production of *A View from the Bridge.*

Galati currently serves as an associate director at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, a role he has filled since 1987. He has directed several productions for the Goodman, most notably *The Good Person of Setzuan, The Government Inspector, A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum,* and *The Winter's Tale.*

Due to his outstanding contributions to Chicago theatre, Galati has been awarded nine Joseph Jefferson Awards. Other honors include an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay for his work on the film adaptation of Anne Tyler's novel *The Accidental Tourist.* He was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Science in 2001, and is currently a professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University.

This photo from the U.S. Department of Agriculture shows farm machinery buried by the dust storms, just one of the devastating effects of the Dust Bowl. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

Character Capsules

TOM JOAD is the second son of Ma and Pa Joad and arrives home after being released from MacAlester Prison to find that his family has been pushed off their farm. He accompanies them to California, learning from Jim Casy and maturing during their journey.

JIM CASY is a former itinerant preacher who befriends the Joad family and goes with them to California. He listens to the migrants and thinks deeply about what is happening to them. He becomes a role model and mentor for Tom.

PA JOAD is the head of the family and the father of Tom, Noah, Al, Rose of Sharon, Ruthie and Winfield. He becomes less and less able to take decisive action as life gets more difficult on the journey.

MA JOAD is the wife of Pa Joad and is especially close to her son Tom. As the play goes on, the harsh circumstances which the family encounters seem to bring out Ma's inner strength, and she becomes becomes the de facto head of the family.

GRAMPA AND GRANMA JOAD are the elders of the family who have a hard time leaving the land that has been home for so long. They represent a generation who cannot make it to the "Promised Land" of California.

ROSE OF SHARON, Tom's sister, is married to Connie Rivers and is pregnant with their first child. Her name, a Biblical reference, means "flower of the desert."

NOAH JOAD is the oldest Joad sibling, quiet and a little strange. He decides to stay by the Colorado River and not go on with the family into California.

AL JOAD is another of the Joad children, a bit cocky and full of himself as a teenager, but a loving brother and hard worker. He is an aficionado of cars and girls, and his skills in car repair come in handy on the journey.

RUTHIE AND WINFIELD JOAD are the youngest Joads. As Tom says when they cross into California for the first time, "Who's really seein' it is Ruthie an' Winfield." They represent the generation which would come of age in California.

CONNIE RIVERS is married to Rose of Sharon and is a dreamer but not a doer. He deserts Rose of Sharon and the family because he cannot deal with the reality of the family's difficulties.

UNCLE JOHN JOAD is Pa Joad's brother, a sad man who feels guilty about the death of his young wife years earlier. He turns to alcohol to numb his pain, but is also kind and empathetic, especially to the younger children.

Commentary and Criticism

I know what I was talking about, I lived off and on with those Okies for the last three years. Anyone who tries to refute me will just become ridiculous.

John Steinbeck
Los Angeles Times

[Steinbeck's] readers have come to expect the unexpected, his critics have taken refuge in enthusiasm or despair. But beneath this apparent variety, Steinbeck has been astonishingly consistent. A single purpose has directed his experimentation, a single idea has guided his literary thought. Always his fiction has described the interplay of dream and reality; his thought has followed the development of the American dream.

Frederic I. Carpenter

Steinbeck is, I think, the first significant novelist to begin to build a mystical religion upon a naturalistic base... It abandons all attempts to discern final purposes in life. It virtually reduces man again to animism; for, unlike Wordsworth, Steinbeck does not see through nature to a God beyond; he hears no intimations of immortality... There is only nature, ultimately mysterious, to which all things belong, bound together in a unity concerning whose stupendous grandeur he can barely hint. But such a nature Steinbeck loves, and before it, like primitive man, he is reverent.

Woodbern Ross

It is, we might say, an accident that so great a talent as John Steinbeck's should have come upon so great and so topical a theme [as the Dust Bowl]. But that so great a talent should have come to flower in our time is not in the same sense an accident. It is, let us say, the bounty of nature; and it is, moreover, what we have all been looking for, the fruit of long cultivation – the ripening of American literary culture in our day.

Joseph Warren Beach
"John Steinbeck: Journeyman Artist"

He depicts human existence as conflict, unremitting, and often savage battle. But he suggests that life is worth living, flagellant and baffling though it may be. When he produces a memorable character like Ma Joad, that character has an irrepressible will to live, even under heart-breaking conditions, is resourceful and indomitable before the hostility of a world apparently bent on his or her extermination. In a time when the prevalent note in creative literature is that of despondency and abandonment to malign fate, whether armed with sledgehammer or scalpel, Steinbeck's assertion of the resiliency and tough durability of life has set him off from the generality.

John S. Kennedy
John Steinbeck: Life Affirmed and Dissolved

The Joad family, even though unique, is a part of a whole people; and this novel, unlike most of the novels of the previous century, is as much about a people as it is about a few central people. In the midst of the blighting depression the concern for the individual begins to give way to the concern for the people.

Edwin T. Bowden
The Commonplace and the Grotesque

The Grapes of Wrath is not, therefore, a period piece about a troublesome past era; it is an allegory applicable wherever prejudice and a proud sense of self-importance inhibit cooperation. The message of the novel is that cooperation can be achieved only when individuals of their own volition put aside special interests and work together to achieve a common purpose.

Warren French

Frank Galati's adaptation of Steinbeck's novel has elicited a chorus of praise from critics, each with his or her own explanation of the reason why Steinbeck's timely tale of a problem in the 1930's continues to engage us in the 1990's.

Mimi Reisel Gladstein
***The Grapes of Wrath*:**
Steinbeck and the Eternal Immigrant

A migrant couple from Missouri, photographed for the Farm Security Administration by Dorothea Lange. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

The Dust Bowl: A Historical Overview

In addition to the economic disaster of the Great Depression, the 1930s saw the Great Plains region struck with simultaneous environmental disaster. The so-called "Dust Bowl" was a period of roughly ten years of drought, erratic weather patterns, dust storms, poverty, famine, and mass migration out of the Midwest. The term "Dust Bowl" was coined on April 15, 1935 by Robert Geiger, an AP correspondent in Guymon, Oklahoma, and the nickname quickly caught on with the public and the press. Hardest-hit were the panhandles of Texas and Oklahoma, as well as southeastern Kansas and southwestern Colorado.

The Dust Bowl was caused by an unusual series of weather patterns which exacerbated the effects of years of unwise farming techniques. The Midwest is prone to harsh weather conditions normally, with high winds, extreme dry heat in the summers and bitterly cold, and snowy winters. Nevertheless, during the United States' period of Westward Expansion in the latter half of the 19th century, government incentives led many pioneers to brave these conditions and establish farms across the Plains states. In plowing the soil for farming, they stripped away the tall prairie grasses that had protected the soil for millenia, replacing them with familiar crops from the East, which were not adapted to the climate of the Plains.

A dust storn approaches a farm in Stratford, Texas in 1935. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

For many years, farmers in the Great Plains region were able to scrape by on these practices— they did not practice crop rotation, depleting the soil of nutrients that would have sustained future crops, nor did they plant trees to prevent erosion. When months of drought began in 1931, the barren soil was defenseless; quickly drying up into dust that winds easily picked up and carried away at high speeds. The soil was so dry that farmers could not plant anything until September, and then the frost came early, leading to an abysmal wheat crop.

Meanwhile, massive overproduction of wheat in the years preceding the drought led to a price collapse: in July of 1930, wheat sold for sixty-eight cents a barrel, but by July of 1931, the price had dropped to a mere twenty-five cents a barrel. Many farmers went bankrupt or simply abandoned their farms, leaving thousands upon thousands of acres of barren land in their wake. Those farms that survived found themselves pummelled by gusts of wind and soil that sometimes created drifts several feet in height.

By 1933, the cycle of droughts and freezes led to 139 days of dust storms in the worst-affected areas. Thousands battled the dust daily, carrying wet cloths in front of their faces so that they could breathe, and trying to plug up every crack in their homes to prevent the dust from piling indoors. On scorching days of 100+ degree heat, hundreds of people died in their sealed-up homes. In 1936, temperatures of over 120 degrees Fahrenheit were measured in the Oklahoma panhandle. Outdoors, tractors, trucks and dead or dying livestock vanished under drifts of blowing soil.

In 1934, the Dust Bowl became a national news phenomenon, as a late spring dust storm darkened the skies as far as New York City and Washington, D.C. In Chicago, stunned residents watched as dirt fell from the sky like snow, blanketing the city streets.

Meanwhile, the largest relocation in US history had begun, as more than 2 million people, often homeless and desperately hungry, fled the Plains states in search of food, shelter and work. The greatest proportion of these migrants, over 200,000, went to California to work in the growing agricultural industry there. Such a massive influx of cheap labor in the midst of a worldwide depression, however, created massive unrest as the "Okies" as they were scornfully nicknamed by the native Californians, competed for scarce jobs. Wages fell and strikes roiled California's farms, ranches and mills as employers exploited the situation of the migrants.

In 1935 and 1936, the Dust Bowl seemed to reach its climax, with blizzards, earthquakes, and the storm known as "Black Sunday." April 14, 1935 was a mild, pleasant Sunday morning in Oklahoma, with a gentle breeze. Only a few people noticed a distant line of black clouds. Then something strange happened. As the air suddenly cooled, the sky filled with thousands of frantic birds, all flying in the same direction. Within minutes, the sun was blotted out by a howling wall of dirt two miles high, carried forward by sustained winds of 60 mph. People caught unawares in the storm found themselves crawling on the ground, unable to see more than five feet in any direction. To those huddled in their homes and cars, it seemed that the end of the world had begun.

Following the news reports by Geiger and others, Congress and the Roosevelt administration took action, establishing the Soil Conservation Service within the U.S. Department of Agriculture. New SCS staff fanned out across the Plains states, teaching farmers techniques for conserving topsoil and offering federal subsidies to those who put them into practice. Roosevelt ordered the Civilian Conservation Corps to plant millions of trees in the region to help control the wind and blowing soil. By 1938-39, a 65% reduction in blowing soil had been achieved. In 1939, the pattern of drought finally broke and rain returned to the Plains. It was too late for hundreds of thousands of farm families who had been displaced, never to return.

Defining and Documenting the 'American Way of LIfe'

Throughout the first 150 years of the United States, our culture was thought to principally reflect the cultures of Western Europe, and especially of the English motherland. During the 1930s, however, many people began to advance the idea of a distinctly "American" culture which could and should be documented in folk communities around the nation. Many documentary works of writing and art were created in the 30s to capture this sense of the "American," and *The Grapes of Wrath*, with its chapters that depart from the Joads' story to narrate the Dust Bowl, was related to this movement.

Documentary writing began as a distinct genre with social activists in the mid- to late-19th century in England. Jacob Riis brought this movement to the United States with the publication of *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890, which documented the poor living conditions of New York City slums. This tradition was continued in the 1910's by the journalists nicknamed "muckrakers." Perhaps the most well-known example of this is Upton Sinclair's book *The Jungle*, a chilling exposé on the horrors of the meatpacking industry.

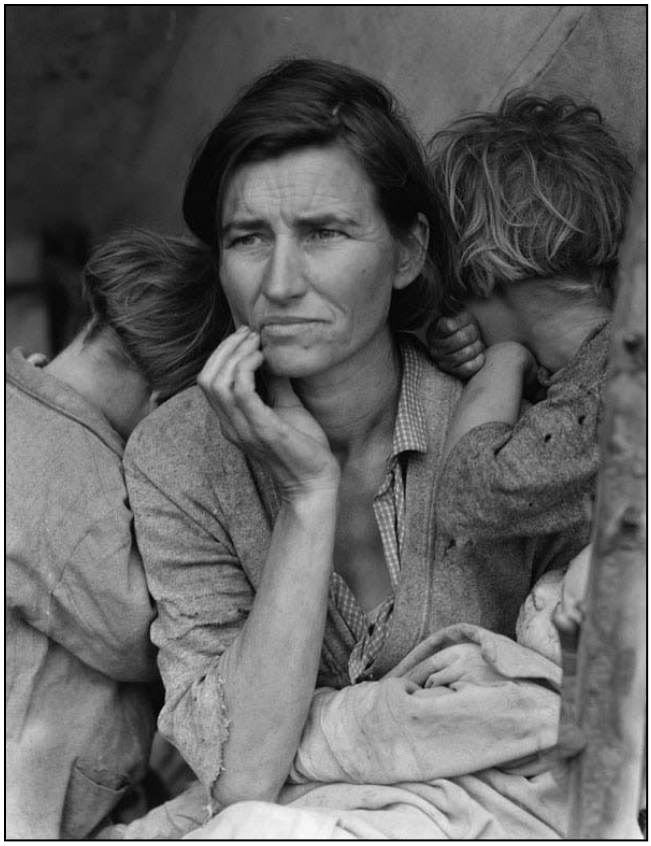
By the 1930s however, documentaries came to focus less on exposing corruption or injustice. Instead, Depression-era America began to focus on the daily life and quiet heroism of the 'common man' or 'working man'. Accordingly, documentary writers, photographers and filmmakers began to create work that reflected popular culture and the daily life of ordinary working Americans. For the first time, Americans began to move from a monocultural view of themselves as descendants of English culture to celebrating the "melting pot" that formed the population. The Roosevelt administration, hoping to lift public morale, eagerly promoted the concept of the 'All-American' worker. Federal projects hired photographers, writers, musicians, and filmmakers to document popular culture throughout the United States. Many on the right criticized these intitiatives as mere propaganda for Roosevelt's economic proposals, the "New Deal." Regardless of their origins, these documentaries serve as an important and enlightening glimpse into the era that helped define "American" society.

One inportant aspect of the evolving American culture was popular music. Many musical genres considered to be 'American' are in fact a conglomerate of several different musical traditions; these genres include jazz, swing, big band, and folk/country, a genre which plays an important role in Galati's adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Country music draws its roots from several cultures, all of which were brought together by the European immigrants and former slaves who settled in the Southern Appalachian Mountains. Its status in America culture became solidified during the Dust Bowl era, when many songs were written by migrant workers about the hardships they faced in the Great Plains region. Woody Guthrie, famous for his song 'This Land is Your Land,' was heavily influenced by his experiences in California during this period, and much of his music describes the plight of the 'common man.'

Popular and folk music played such a large part in defining the new American culture that it later became the focus of a government-funded ethnographic study. In 1940, two employees of the Department of Public Speaking at the City College of New York, Charles Lafayette Todd and Robert Sonkin, decided to record the songs of the California migrant workers. Sponsored by the Farm Security Administration, they traveled to California and began to record the dance tunes, cowboy songs, and traditional ballads that found their way west as well as the personal narratives of those who brought them there. These recordings, as well as scrapbooks and newspaper clipping collected by the ethnographers, have now been made available through the Library of Congress website.

Many famous visuals of American society stem from this era, thanks to federally-funded photographers. One such photographer was Dorothea Lange, famous for her 1936 photo "Migrant Mother," seen below. Lange was hired by the Farm Security Administration and the Resettlement Administration to document the life of the typical American. These photographs specifically focused on the working class that had been so dramatically affected by the Depression, and in turn came to be iconic representations of the indomitable All-American image that the government was striving to promote.

This documentary tradition in the 1930s provides major insight into a time of enormous turmoil and change in American history. During the Depression, Americans finally began to identify and proudly proclaim a distinctive cultural identity that could be said to rival traditional cultural models in Europe. The identification of America with the "common man" and the concept of a "melting pot" of cultures are important legacies of the 1930s that continue to resonate in politics and culture today.



Migrant Mother, a 1936 photograph by Dorothea Lange, is one of the most well-known images from Depression-era America. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. In *The Grapes of Wrath,* Steinbeck explores the idea of "the family of man" with his rhetoric about the importance of cooperation. For example, Casy describes how he and his fellow inmates only received better food in jail when they banded together in protest. How else does this theme present itself in the novel and stage adaptation? What can you infer about Steinbeck's political leanings? What does this ideology tell you about the time in which Steinbeck wrote the novel?

2. Steinbeck set out to write a truly American novel, focusing on the working class farmers of the Plains region. How does *The Grapes of Wrath* fit into the larger American literary canon? Describe the value systems and cultural characteristics in *The Grapes of Wrath* that are specific to the United States.

3. In *The Grapes of Wrath,* the Joads are driven out of their homes in Oklahoma, and when they migrate to California, they are unwanted and thus remain homeless. How are the Joads similar to the immigrants who came to the US from abroad? Discuss.

4. In the original novel, Steinbeck juxtaposes each chapter on the Joads with another that focuses on the broader effects of the Dust Bowl, either describing elements in nature or a conversation between other characters. In this way, Steinbeck makes sure that his novel is not just a story about a unique case, but rather, about an entire generation of people. When Frank Galati adapted the novel for the stage, he had to find a unique way to tell the story of the Joads while showing the universality of their situation. How does he do this? How does his storytelling differ from that of the novel? What is gained and what is lost in these differences?

About this Production

1. *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts a journey of over a thousand miles through several states, landscapes and communities. Clearly a stage play cannot aspire to show such a journey in the same way that a film would. How did the director and designers of this production use lighting, sound and other design elements to suggest the Joads' journey? How did they engage your imagination as an audience to fill in the details of a desert, a river, and so on?

2. Most of the actors in this production play multiple roles in creating the large cast of characters in Steinbeck's story. How did they do so convincingly? What techniques or strategies did you see them employ?

3. John Steinbeck wrote *The Grapes of Wrath* in part to document the historical events of the Dust Bowl. In what ways is the story still relevant today? Why might The Shakespeare Theatre have chosen to produce this play this year? Do you feel that any aspects of the production spoke specifically to a contemporary audience?

Follow-up Activities

1. *Review*: Imagine you are a writer for a local newspaper and you have been asked to write a review for *The Grapes of Wrath*. Be sure to include specific information for the production, such as set, lights, costumes and sound as well as the actors and the text itself. Include your own reaction to the play- How did you respond to each of the characters? Which aspects of the production did you find effective or ineffective? Which themes jumped out at you in particular? When you are finished, submit your review to the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's Education department, or see if you can print it in your school newspaper.

2. *Dust Bowl Ballads:* Music plays an important role in Frank Galati's adaptation of *The Grapes of Wrath*; it serves as a narrative thread that links the scenes together. Music also played a crucial role in the lives of migrant families. It allowed them to come together and bond over their common plight. Listen to some of the recordings from the Library of Congress website. Then, imagine you are an Okie moving west during the Dust Bowl, write your own song or change the lyrics to an existing song to reflect the experiences of the Okies. Don't forget to perform them for the rest of the class!

3. *The Sequel:* Towards the end of *The Grapes of Wrath,* Tom Joad sets out to fight injustice in his society. He says to Ma, "I'll be everywhere – wherever you look. Wherever they's a fight, so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cop, beatin' up a guy, I'll be there." Imagine you are Tom Joad. Write a journal entry about your adventures after leaving your family. Be sure to include where you end up, and what specific causes you are fighting for.

4. *Time Capsule:* Pretend you are one of the Joad children and have to leave your home in Oklahoma. Make a time capsule that you can bury and return to when you are older. Think about the things that are most special to you – what would you put in?

Teachers:
Do you have activities or exercises to suggest for this play? We are always looking for new ideas to inspire students (and teachers). Send your suggestions to **info@ShakespeareNJ.org**, *and we will share them with other teachers, or maybe even include them in future study guides.*

Meeting Core Curriculum Standards

In 1996, the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted Core Curriculum Content Standards that set out to clearly define what every New Jersey student should know and be able to do at the end of his/her schooling. The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is committed to supporting teachers by ensuring that our educational programs are relevant to standards-based teaching and learning.
Viewing a performance at The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey and participating in the post-performance discussion can serve as a powerful springboard for discussion, writing, and other outlets for higher-order thinking. On this page you will find suggestions for ways to align your study of our production to each standard.

LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY STANDARDS

As a theatre dedicated to the classics, we are continually engaged in exploring some of the world's greatest literature, and the relationship between the written text and performance. Our philosophy and practice follow the four underlying assumptions of the Language Arts Literacy CCCS: that "language is an *active process* for constructing meaning," that "language develops in a *social context*," that language ability increases as learners "engage in texts that are *rich in ideas and increasingly complex in language*," and that learners achieve mastery not by practicing isolated skills but by "*using and exploring language* in its many dimensions." In the practice of theatre, we merge all areas of the language arts, as the standards suggest, "in an integrated act of rehearsal, reflection, and learning." Using the visual and performing arts to motivate and enhance language arts learning is explicitly recommended by the CCCS, citing extensive research.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

STANDARD 3.1: All students will apply the knowledge of sounds, letters and words in written English to become independent and fluent readers, and will read a variety of materials and texts with fluency and comprehension.
Read a scene from the play as a class and use context clues to interpret new words and expand vocabulary (3.1.C/F); demonstrate understanding by performing a scene from the play (3.1.G); compare and contrast literary elements in the play with another text being studied (3.1.H)

STANDARD 3.2: All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
Write a new ending for the play in blank verse or in modern prose (3.2.D), write a critique of the play which will be workshopped and published in a classroom setting (3.2.A/B/D)

STANDARD 3.3: All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
Participate in a post-show discussion (3.3.A/B), memorize and perform a monologue or scene from the play (3.3.D)

STANDARD 3.4: All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
Select a speech from the play and compare its stage and film performances (3.4.A/B)

STANDARD 3.5: All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, nonprint, and electronic texts and resources.
Discuss how the play expresses cultural values of the playwright's time (3.5.A); compare and contrast the printed and staged version (3.5.B)

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS STANDARDS

According to both No Child Left Behind and the New Jersey CCCS, the arts (including theatre) are a core subject and "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." In the area of performing arts, performances, workshops and study guide exercises developed by The Shakespeare Theatre address all five state standards.

Below, you will find just a few of the possibilities for aligning your study of our productions to each of these standards.

STANDARD 1.1: All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Discuss the use of metaphor in the text and the design of the production; discuss how the play expresses cultural values of its period

STANDARD 1.2: All students will utilize those skills, media, methods, and technologies appropriate to each art form in the creation, performance, and presentation of dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Perform a monologue or scene from the play; participate in a classroom workshop that develops the physical and technical skills required to create and present theatre

STANDARD 1.3: All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theatre and visual art.
Participate in a post-show discussion of elements such as physicality and creating motivated action; discuss the relationship between playtext and production design

STANDARD 1.4: All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.
Write a review of the production using domain-appropriate terminology; develop a class rubric for effective theatrical presentations; compare and contrast the play with work by other artists

STANDARD 1.5: All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.
Discuss the representation of social issues (class, political leadership, etc.) in the play; research how the historical period affected the writer's work; compare the play to work from other historical periods

Sources for this study guide and recommended reading:

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"The Grapes of Wrath". Sparknotes. <Sparknotes.com>

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"Voices from the Dust Bowl." American Folklife Center. 8 Jan. 1998. Library of Congress. <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/afctshtml/tshome.html>

Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia. <wikipedia.org>

Young boy in Cimarron County, Oklahoma. Photo by Arthur Rothstein for the Farm Security Administration. From the collection of the Library of Congress.

Other Opportunities for Students... and Teachers

***SHAKESPEARE LIVE!* EDUCATIONAL TOURING COMPANY**

Shakespeare LIVE! is the educational touring company of The Shakespeare Theatre. This dynamic troupe of actors brings exciting, artistically-exceptional abridged productions of Shakespeare's plays and other world classics directly into schools each spring.

THE JUNIOR AND SENIOR CORPS

Two- and three-week summer acting intensives, geared for students in grades 6 through 12, these programs offer professional-caliber instruction and performance opportunities for young people who have developed a serious interest in theatre. Admission to this program is through audition and/or interview.

SUMMER PROFESSIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM

For graduating high school seniors and for university students, the 11-week Summer Professional Training Program offers acting apprenticeships and professional internships, providing academic training and hands-on experience in acting, technical, artistic and arts management areas.

***SHAKEFEST*: SUMMER SHAKESPEARE INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS**

Designed for elementary and secondary teachers of Shakespeare, *ShakeFest* is an weeklong professional development intensive filled with myriad practical ways to conquer "ShakesFear" and excite students about the Bard. In hands-on sessions, experienced teaching artists model active and exciting performance-oriented techniques to get students on their feet and "speaking the speech."

***SHAKESPERIENCE:NJ* STUDENT SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL**

This annual spring festival, developed in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library and Rider University, gives middle and high school classes the opportunity to spend a day at the Theatre experiencing Shakespeare together as both actors and audience. The *Shakesperience:NJ* Festival celebrates the power of performance as a teaching tool on a statewide scale.

About The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey

The acclaimed Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey (formerly called "New Jersey Shakespeare Festival") is one of the leading Shakespeare theatres in the nation. Serving nearly 100,000 adults and children annually, it is New Jersey's only professional theatre company dedicated to Shakespeare's canon and other classic masterworks. Through its distinguished productions and education programs, the company strives to illuminate the universal and lasting relevance of the classics for contemporary audiences. The longest-running Shakespeare theatre on the east coast, The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey marks its 47th season in 2009.

In addition to producing and presenting classic theatre, the Theatre's mission places an equal focus on education— both for young artists and audiences of all ages. The Theatre nurtures emerging new talent for the American stage and cultivates future audiences by providing extensive student outreach opportunities. Through our work, we endeavor to promote literacy, civilization, community, cultural awareness, the theatrical tradition, and a more enlightened view of the world in which we live and the people with whom we share it.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is one of 20 professional theatres in the state of New Jersey. The company's dedication to the classics and commitment to excellence sets critical standards for the field. Nationwide, the Theatre has emerged as one of the most exciting "new" theatres under the leadership of Artistic Director Bonnie J. Monte since 1990. It is one of only a handful of Shakespeare Theatres on the east coast, and in recent years has drawn larger and larger audiences and unprecedented critical acclaim. The opening of the intimate, 308-seat F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre in 1998, provided the Theatre with a state-of-the-art venue with excellent sightlines, and increased access for patrons and artists with disabilities.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is a member of ArtPride, The Shakespeare Theatre Association of America, Theatre Communications Group, and is a founding member of the New Jersey Theatre Alliance.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey is an independent, professional theatre located on the Drew University campus.

The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's programs are made possible, in part, by funding from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts/ Department of State, a Partner Agency of the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as funds from the National Endowment for the Arts. Additional major support is received from The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the F. M. Kirby Foundation, The Edward T. Cone Foundation, The Shubert Foundation, American Airlines and Drew University, as well as contributions from numerous corporations, foundations, government agencies and individuals. Crystal Rock Bottled Water is the official water supplier of The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey.

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