

The Little Foxes

a study guide

compiled and arranged by the
Education Department
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The Little Foxes: A Brief Introduction

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil our vines; for our vines have tender grapes

- Song of Solomon

Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* takes its title from the Song of Solomon in the Old Testament. Like the little foxes, the Hubbards use cunning and stealth to feed their own selfish desires and to crush what is weak and tender.

The Little Foxes dramatizes the story of the Hubbard and Giddens families, who represent the new Southern aristocracy at the turn of the 20th century. The Hubbard siblings, Oscar, Ben, and Regina, are characterized by their particular brand of conniving greed as they try to invest in a new cotton mill, while the other characters of the play negotiate around these powerhouse personalities.

Hellman found the inspiration for these characters in her own family members, whom she observed through the Sunday dinners of her childhood. Hellman's great-uncles on her mother's side were bankers and storekeepers from Alabama, and were prone to the same greed and deceit that Hellman depicts in the Hubbards. Though Hellman is clearly critical of these traits, she also found them amusing, which shows through in the dark humor of her play.

The Little Foxes opened on Broadway on February 15, 1939 to rave reviews and played 410 performances. The show was a hit, with audiences lined up nightly to get a glimpse of the talented cast, including Tallulah Bankhead, who starred as the crafty Regina Giddens.

The play was such a success that Hollywood producers quickly jumped at the opportunity to make a film version. Hellman was enlisted to write the screenplay, and attempted to make the film appeal to the American consumer, even adding a romance plot for Alexandra. Despite these alterations, the film was also a box office smash and carries the same universal themes as the original text.

Although Hellman based *The Little Foxes* on her own family and her personal experiences, she wanted to create a story that anyone could relate to, as witnessed by the opening lines of the film version: "Little foxes have lived in all times, in all places. This family happened to live in the Deep South in 1900." No doubt her choice of topics was greatly influenced by the period in which she was writing as well. By 1939, America had spent nearly a decade suffering from the Great Depression, where the irresponsible spending and corruption of the 1920s ended with the stock market crash of 1929, ushering in a decade of economic misery. Therefore, it is no coincidence that Hellman was concerned with issues of greed and the dangers of exploitation in her play.

In the play's final moments, Ben Hubbard remarks that "There are hundreds of Hubbards sitting in rooms like this throughout the country. All their names aren't Hubbard, but they are all Hubbards and they will own this country someday." To many in the audience in 1939, Ben's sentiments must have seemed to prophesy their own Depression-era experience.

Despite the fact that *The Little Foxes* was a hit onstage and onscreen, Hellman was not satisfied. She was skeptical of the rave reviews she received, and wondered if the general public understood the overall themes of the play. Hellman fell into a deep depression after completing the screenplay, turning to alcohol as an escape. Eventually, she returned to the stage in 1941 with her little-known *Watch on the Rhine*, among other plays and prose. Hellman remains one of the most notable female playwrights of 20th-century America, and *The Little Foxes* is still one of her most well-known works.



Regina Giddens (Kathryn Meisle) and her ailing husband, Horace (Bradford Cover), in The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2009 Main Stage production of *The Little Foxes*. Photo: ©Gerry Goodstein, 2009.

The Little Foxes: A Brief Synopsis

The Little Foxes opens as servants Addie and Cal set up a party in the living room for the Hubbards and their honored guest, Chicago businessman Mr. Marshall. Oscar Hubbard and his wife Birdie enter first, bickering bitterly, followed by their son, Leo. Regina Giddens and Ben Hubbard, Oscar's siblings, also enter, followed by Regina's daughter Alexandra (nicknamed "Zan") and Mr. Marshall.

The Hubbard siblings have been planning a business deal with Mr. Marshall which would enable them to open up a profitable cotton mill in their area. The Hubbards need Mr. Marshall's consent to continue with their plan, so they try to flatter and coax him over their bottle of port wine. After Mr. Marshall agrees to the deal, the success of their plan relies solely on acquiring Horace's portion of the money for the down payment. However, Horace is away in Baltimore getting treatment for a serious heart condition.

Once the deal is sealed, the conversation turns to the state of the Southern aristocracy; Birdie is the only member of the family from the old plantation line, for the Hubbards' wealth is recently acquired. Birdie laments the loss of her family's former plantation, Lionnet, which has degraded in its elegance and grandeur. Alexandra and Leo leave to drive Mr. Marshall to the station, and the remaining Hubbards discuss their desire to marry off first cousins Alexandra and Leo, whose alliance would keep all the wealth in the family.

As the need for Horace to approve of the business deal gets dire, Regina resorts to sending Alexandra to fetch him by herself. As the first act comes to a close, Birdie and Zan share a tender moment when Birdie vows that she will never allow the Hubbards to force Zan and Leo to marry. When Oscar overhears this conversation, he is enraged and confronts Birdie.

Act Two begins a week later, as the Hubbards anxiously await Alexandra and Horace's return from Baltimore; they are a day late, and have not sent word as to why they were delayed. Oscar, Ben, and Leo are concerned for Horace's well-being solely because it might prevent him from handing over the money that they are relying on, and they even discuss the idea of taking bonds out of Horace's safety deposit box without his knowing. Leo has previously revealed that he has access to the box. Regina, on the other hand, remains cool and calm.

When Horace and Alexandra finally arrive, it is clear that Horace's health has gotten very poor. Nevertheless, Regina berates him about the business deal. He refuses to give the siblings his portion of the down payment, and explains that he no longer wishes to help the Hubbards abuse the people around them, for in the past they have charged extremely high interest rates to the poor, especially former slaves, among other misdeeds. Horace states that he would like to remain an honest man as he approaches his death.

Regina and Horace's bitter fight upsets Alexandra immensely, for she is extremely concerned for her father's health. The act ends

when Ben enters, saying that everything has been settled, and that they are going to Chicago to give Mr. Marshall the money. They claim that they have borrowed the remaining funds from Leo's friend. Though the Giddens family is still unaware, Ben, Oscar and Leo have instead decided to "borrow" Horace's Union Pacific bonds.

Act Three begins two weeks later on a rainy afternoon, as Horace, Addie and Cal are in the living room listening to Birdie and Alexandra play the piano. Birdie reminisces about the days when Horace would play the fiddle beside her. When Addie brings out cakes and elderberry wine, Birdie opens up about her unhappy life, and even admits that she turns to alcohol to ease her pain. She shares her first memory of her husband, and how her mother warned her that the Hubbards were not "good people"; they killed animals wastefully and for sport, and they made predatory loans to former slaves. Though Birdie thought that Oscar loved her when they married, she soon learned that he had wooed her only to acquire her aristocratic status and large plantation. The party discusses the need for Alexandra to get away from the family, especially with Horace so near to death, and Addie promises Horace that she will take her away when he asks.

When Regina returns home, Horace informs her that her brothers have stolen his bonds, but he intends to let them keep the money. He tells her that he will be rewriting his will in just a few hours, wherein he will leave her only the exact amount of money that her brothers stole from him, leaving a significantly greater amount to Alexandra.

The couple bitterly discusses their failed marriage. Horace tells Regina that he loved her once, whereas she tells him that she only wanted material things. Her father left her nothing, so she has been waiting for Horace to die from day one. The agitation causes Horace to suffer a heart attack, while Regina stands idly by, not calling for Addie to get his medicine from upstairs. Instead, they send for a doctor and wait.

The other characters enter in the living room, and Regina tells her brothers about Horace's intent to change his will, and that she and Horace know about their theft. She blackmails them for seventy-five percent of the profits from the cotton mill. When Alexandra enters, it is clear from her demeanor that her father has died, and she becomes hysterical as her mother and uncles simply continue to discuss their business deals in front of her.

Zan stands up for herself as the play comes to a close, defying her mother by refusing to accompany her to Chicago. Alexandra exclaims that she will not stand by and watch the family hurt those around them. Regina, perhaps, shows some remorse and regret when she asks Alexandra to sleep in her room that night; Zan simply responds, "Are you afraid, Mama?" The question remains unanswered as the curtain falls on the play.

About the Author: Lillian Hellman

Lillian Florence Hellman was born on June 20, 1905 to a middle-class Jewish family in New Orleans. At the age of five she moved to New York with her parents. Until she graduated from high school, she would spend only half the year in New York City; the other half was spent in New Orleans in the boarding house owned by her aunts. This allowed her the opportunity to experience two drastically different aspects of American society, and her interactions with her Southern extended family would later form the basis for several characters in her plays.

Hellman remained in New York after graduating high school and briefly attended both New York University and Columbia University, although she decided to leave school before earning a degree. It was at this point in her life that she began working for a New York publishing house, where she met Arthur Kober, a fellow writer whom she married in 1925. With Arthur, she travelled to Nazi Germany in 1929 where she first encountered fascism and anti-Semitism, her opposition to which became a theme of her later writing.

Upon returning to the United States in 1930, she moved to Hollywood with her husband and found a job working as a reader for MGM Studios. This job gave her the opportunity to meet other artists and political activists working in Hollywood, particularly Dashiell Hammett, a former detective turned mystery writer and left-wing activist. Hellman divorced her husband in 1932 after becoming romantically involved with Hammett.

Hellman began writing plays at the suggestion of Hammett, and her first play, *The Children's Hour*, premiered on Broadway in 1934. It tells the story of two school teachers who are accused by one of their students of having a lesbian affair with each other. Unable to deal with the accusation, one of the school teachers ultimately commits suicide. The play is a sobering tale of the abuse of power and the effects it can have on those not in power.

The Children's Hour was banned in several cities due to its subject matter, but received wide critical acclaim. The Pulitzer Prize committee refused to consider *The Children's Hour*, but it had a successful Broadway run which brought Hellman into the public's attention as well as a screenwriting position from Samuel Goldwyn. Her first movie, *Dark Angel*, was released in 1935 and was soon followed by a screen adaptation of *The Children's Hour*.

Hellman returned to stage writing in 1936 with *Days to Come*, *Dead End* (1937), and, perhaps her most famous play, *The Little Foxes* (1939). Her political activism continued throughout the 1940's with her anti-fascist plays *Watch on the Rhine* (1941) and *The Searching Wind* (1944), both of which openly criticized the American government for inaction during both Hitler's and Mussolini's respective

rises to power. She also wrote a "prequel" to *The Little Foxes*, entitled *Another Part of the Forest*, which Hellman herself directed on Broadway in 1946.

Hellman's involvement with the political left and her relationship with Hammett, a known member of the American Communist Party, caused much wariness on the part of the U.S. Government, and in 1950 she was called to a hearing with the House Un-American Activities Committee. Although she agreed to testify, she famously refused to discuss the activities of anyone other than herself, stating that "To hurt innocent people whom I knew many years ago in order to save myself is, to me, inhuman and indecent and dishonorable. I cannot and will not cut my conscience to fit this year's fashions, even though I long ago came to the conclusion that I was not a political person and could have no comfortable place in any political group." As a result of her defiance, she was blacklisted by Hollywood film studios for several years, and her reputation as a defender of Communism overshadowed her later career.

During the time of her blacklisting, Hellman began to write her memoirs, which were published in three volumes over a span of seven years: *An Unfinished Woman* in 1969, *Pentimento: A Book of Portraits* in 1973, and *Scoundrel Time* in 1976. These publications created many more enemies for Hellman, who claimed that she shaded over several details in her life.

One such enemy was Mary McCarthy, a novelist who strongly opposed Hellman's pro-Communist views. During a 1979 appearance on *The Dick Cavett Show*, McCarthy stated that "every word she writes is a lie, including 'and' and 'the'." Hellman responded by filing a \$2.5 million slander lawsuit against her. The lawsuit dragged on for years, only dropped after Hellman's death of natural causes on June 30, 1984.



1947 photograph of Lillian Hellman by Irving Penn. From the collection of the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery.

Historical References and Southern Idioms

“You have been chattering to him like a magpie.”

– A magpie is a member of the crow family with black and white feathers and a noisy “chattering” call. To refer to someone as a ‘magpie’ is often a way of implying that they talk too much or too carelessly.

“...bring my music album right away.”

– In 1900, an “musical album” did not mean a recording, as one might think. Early phonograph records were shaped like cylinders. The first record album, in the modern sense of the word, appeared in 1909, when Odeon Records released *The Nutcracker Suite* on a set of four new phonograph discs, packaged in a book that resembled a photo album. The “music album” to which Birdie Hubbard refers is a kind of scrapbook for autographed programs from the opera or symphony.

Port wine – Port is a sweet wine, usually a deep red color, which takes its name from the city of Porto in the Douro Valley in Portugal. It is fortified with brandy, which leaves higher levels of residual sugar in the barrel during fermentation, giving the wine its sweet taste. It is often served as a dessert wine, due to its sweet flavor.

“He’s been very ill. He is at Johns Hopkins.”

– A hospital associated with Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, located in Baltimore, Maryland. It was built at the behest of banker Johns Hopkins, who specified in his will that his estate of nearly \$7 million should be used to build both the university and the hospital that would eventually be named after him. It has long been considered one of the best hospitals in America, and has harbored the first studies in several medical fields, among them neurosurgery, pediatrics, and cardiac surgery.

Lionnet Plantation – A fictional plantation of the Deep South in *The Little Foxes* that was once owned by Birdie’s family and inherited by Oscar Hubbard when the two were married.

“It was Henry Frick, your Mr. Henry Frick, who said...”

– An American industrialist and art patron at the turn of the century. He became rich by starting a company with two cousins and a friend of his that used a beehive oven to turn coal into coke, a product used in steel manufacturing. He eventually bought out the partnership and soon became friends with Andrew Carnegie, owner of the Carnegie Steel Company. His art collection, now known as The Frick Collection, is displayed in a Manhattan museum.

...railroads are the Rembrandts of investments.”

– Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn was a 15th century Dutch painter and etcher whose work is often considered the pinnacle of the Dutch Golden Age in art. He is especially

well known for his multiple self-portraits and his extensive knowledge of classical iconography, which he employed specifically in his religious artworks.

“And the figs and the blue little plums and the scuppernongs.”

– A scuppernong is a specific variety of muscadine grape, native to the American South. They are typically green in color and similar in appearance to white grapes, however they tend to be rounder and about twice as large, earning the nickname ‘big white grapes’. The name comes from the Scuppernong River in North Carolina.

“We might even make a regular trip to Jekyll Island.”

– An island off the coast of Georgia which was a popular vacation spot for the wealthy during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to this era, Jekyll Island was home to vast plantations which declined after the Civil War. The Jekyll Island Club was specifically for the wealthiest of the Southern aristocracy.

“Bet you got enough bobwhite and squirrel...”

– A Bobwhite is a variety of quail native to the southern states and popular in game hunting. Its name is derived from its call, which sounds as though it is saying ‘bob-white’.

“I didn’t tell them...about my fancy women.”

– The term ‘fancy woman’ is old-fashioned slang terminology for a prostitute.



Laborers on a Georgia cotton plantation. Photo taken from *New Pictorial Atlas of the World* by George Wharton James and Alan Burgoyne, 1921.

Commentary and Criticism

Miss Hellman has made an adult horror-play. Her little foxes are wolves that eat their own kind.

**Brooks Atkinson, *The New York Times*,
February 16, 1939**

The Little Foxes will not increase your admiration for mankind. It is cold and cynical. But it is a very exciting picture to watch in a comfortably objective way, especially if you enjoy expert stabbing-in-the-back.

**Bosley Crowther
The New York Times film review**

Hellman's characters are frighteningly real, every word in the script tells, and the story builds to what ought to be a shocking denouement.

**Clarence Threepwood
*The Little Foxes at the Shaw Festival (A Review)***

Money's been the subject of a great deal of literature because it . . . isn't only money, of course, it's power, it's sex; it's a great many other things.

**Lillian Hellman
*Conversations with Lillian Hellman***

What the audience sees is brutality under the patina of soft southern accents and gruff, appealing humor. The irony sizzles beneath.

**Deborah Martinson
*Lillian Hellman: a life with foxes and scoundrels***

Regina Giddens was a rapacious bitch, cruel and callous., etched in acid by Miss Hellman.

**Tallulah Bankhead
Actress (Regina, Original Broadway Cast)**

A play so perfect that nothing could be imposed.

**Patricia Collinge
Actress (Birdie, Original Broadway Cast)**

The Children's Hour and *The Little Foxes*...deny their audience the sop of poetic justice that well-made playwrights typically provide... goodness invariably suffers at the hands of the wicked, with little prospect dangled for any future reordering of the balance.

**Mark W. Estrin
*Critical Essays on Lillian Hellman***

The Little Foxes is such a good play that it seems reduced when its essential politics are isolated, and the politics seem redundant when they are listed as tenets within Marxist doctrine; the conflict of base and superstructure, the exposure fo Social Darwinism, the condemnation of capitalist self-interest, the view of alternative world sought by some of its characters in rebellion against their harsh surroundings.

**Timothy J. Wiles
*Lillian Hellman's American Political Theatre:
The Thirties and Beyond***

This social melodrama, or whatever term one applies to it, continues to captivate audiences no longer enmeshed in the debate between Marxism and capitalism. The underlying themes of greed and revenge continue to strike a responsive chord in audiences whenever the play is revived, and its terse, witty dialogue and tense, streamlined plot draw each new audience under its remarkable power.

**Carole L. Hamilton
*Drama for Students***



Birdie Hubbard (Deanne Lorette) recounts stories of her childhood to her young niece Alexandra (Lindsey Wochley).in The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2009 Main Stage production of *The Little Foxes* Photo: ©Gerry Goodstein, 2009.

The People Who Ate The Earth: Greed and Inaction in *The Little Foxes*

In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman tells a riveting tale of greed, manipulation, and revenge in one Southern family. While her characters are often deliciously evil, Hellman is more concerned with the way that malice is handled by her characters and their society. Hellman focuses on the ideas of action and inaction, repeatedly showing that people have a moral duty to be active in preventing corruption rather than watching it happen before their eyes. *The Little Foxes* sheds light on many different examples of societal inaction.

Hellman creates a world in flux in *The Little Foxes* by setting the play in the Deep South at the turn of the 20th century. In the antebellum South, white plantation owners could afford a relaxed, luxurious lifestyle, as the world turned a blind eye to their exploited and brutalized African slaves. Slavery produced wealth and splendor, so even those who opposed the atrocities produced little change until the Civil War. Although the events of the play are after the Civil War and the Reconstruction era, the characters are still negotiating the differences between the Old and New South. Birdie, who has married into the Hubbard family, is the only one who comes from an old line of aristocratic plantation owners; however, the glory days of her family's plantation died with the end of the Civil War. Oscar Hubbard's desire to possess Lionnet through his marriage to Birdie shows that these status symbols of the Old South still mattered in the new era.

Although the Hubbards clearly show a longing to be associated with the Southern aristocrats of the Old South, they also show features of a post-Civil War mercantile capitalist culture. Far from remaining at leisure, the Hubbards work tirelessly to generate new wealth, though exploitation is still involved. They try to impress upon Mr. Marshall, a Northerner from Chicago, that they are the perfect combination of Southern charm and gentility combined with the Yankee Protestant work ethic. The Hubbards seem bent on being progressive aristocrats fit for the New South.

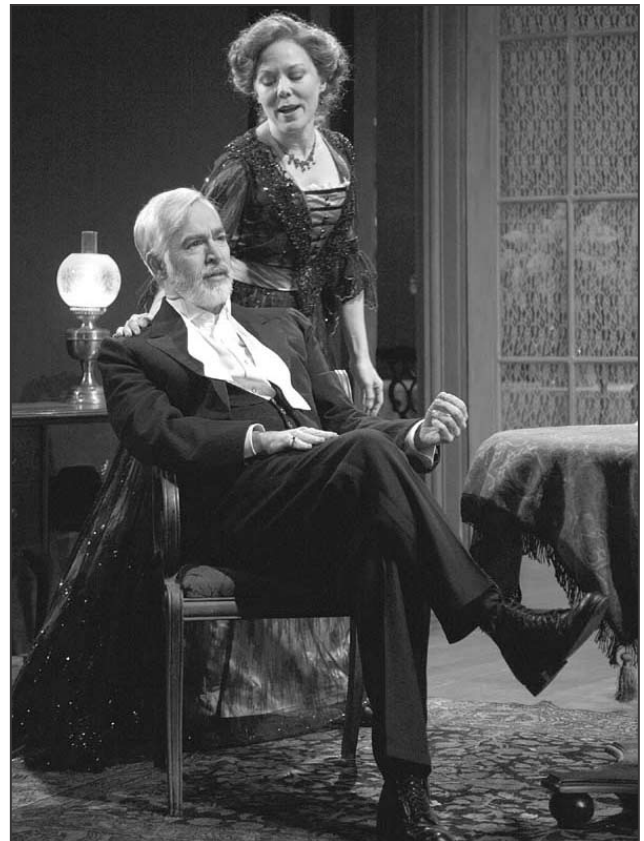
However, the reality of the Hubbards's behavior is by no means a great advance upon the practices of the antebellum South. Though slavery was abolished in 1865, racism and exploitation continued in 1900, as former slaves became servants, like Addie and Cal in *The Little Foxes*. The Hubbards constantly abuse those around them by lying, blackmailing, stealing and cheating; the main theme of the play is the way certain characters resolve to become active in preventing this type of behavior. Horace and Alexandra in particular decide to end the cycle of inaction that has caused so much wrong in their society, from the antebellum South to their own era. Hellman uses an era almost forty years before her own to discuss the inaction that she felt still prevailed in her own era.

The world around Hellman in 1939 paralleled the South in 1900 because Depression society was still paying its debts for the opulence and greed of the 1920s. The economic boom of the 1920s, where people threw lavish parties and built colossal mansions, was a throwback to the opulence and grandeur of the Old South as well as the ambitious social climbing of the Hubbards. The years leading up to the stock market crash in 1929 were marked by corruption and exploitation in American business and politics, while the government mostly turned a blind eye. This inaction ushered in a decade of financial depression and growing tensions abroad which were undoubtedly on Hellman's mind as she wrote

this bleak play in which greed and the lust for power seem to triumph so effortlessly. In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman indirectly critiques the inaction of both the American government and its public in the areas of the domestic economy and global politics.

The Little Foxes premiered just months before an example of global inaction was seared into the public mind. On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland, which catalyzed the Second World War. Hellman could have hardly known how applicable the themes of the play would become as the world came to realize that it had stood by while the Nazi party committed the most atrocious genocide in modern history. During the war years, Hellman wrote two anti-Fascist plays, *Watch on the Rhine* and *The Searching Wind*, which specifically criticized the United States for doing nothing as they watched Hitler and Mussolini's rise to power.

The play's theme of action and inaction have returned to relevance today. In *The Little Foxes*, the Hubbards lie, cheat, and steal in the pursuit of money, accepting no moral boundaries on their quest for wealth. Bernie Madoff and other Wall Street profiteers seem all too akin to the Hubbard siblings. Years of carelessness and *laissez-faire* have conspired to throw the United States into a crushing economic recession. Though written 70 years ago, the message of *The Little Foxes* remains all too true today, as the American people face the consequences of still more inaction.



Regina Giddens (Kathryn Meisle) cleverly manipulates her brother Benjamin Hubbard (Philip Goodwin) in *The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's* 2009 Main Stage production of *The Little Foxes*. Photo: ©Gerry Goodstein, 2009.

Of Power and Corruption: The Role of Society in *The Little Foxes*

In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman weaves a tale of greed and corruption that revolves around three siblings who are willing to stop at nothing to achieve their uttermost desires. They are unable (or simply unwilling) to examine how their actions are affecting the world around them, while the seemingly powerless, who see through to the inner corruption, must stand by and watch the others destroy themselves for the sake of money.

In the play, those in power categorize the ‘weaker’ characters as such based on their physical characteristics. Whether it is a physical deterioration, such as Horace’s illness, or a physical characteristic, such as being a woman, these characteristics are viewed by society as a type of affliction, and the possession of these characteristics allows society to lump them into the ‘unworthy’ category. However, it is often the physically afflicted characters who possess the ability to see the truth of the situation and therefore are morally complete beings, even if society has deemed them to be incomplete based on their physical characteristics.

Perhaps the earliest example of this theme is in Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Rex*. Often touted as the most perfect example of tragedy, it tells the tale of Oedipus, King of Thebes, who was prophesied to kill his father and marry his mother. The blind prophet, Teiresias, is the sole man who can reveal the truth to him. However, when he reveals this truth— that Oedipus did indeed commit the crimes prophesied— Oedipus refuses to believe Teiresias, and taunts him by claiming that his blindness impedes his ability as a seer. However, when Oedipus finally does accept the truth, he blinds himself and joins the ranks of those who are physically blind, yet newly able to see the truths of the world.

There are several characters from *The Little Foxes* who are able to see the corruption in the family, yet lack the power to make the siblings change their ways. The black servants, Cal and Addie, consistently perceive and reveal the truth about the Hubbards’ greed throughout the play. However, Southern society in the 1900s still viewed racial difference as a critical marker of status; despite the emancipation of former slaves, racism and mistreatment of blacks still abounded. Therefore, simply because of the color of their skin, Cal and Addie’s insight lends them no power or authority to influence the Hubbard siblings.

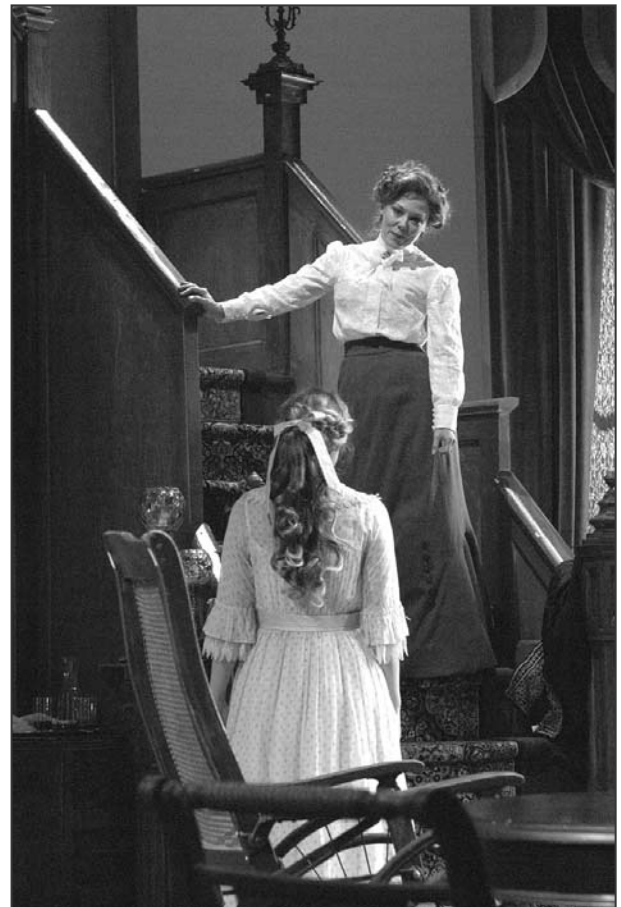
Birdie is yet another character who sees the greed of the siblings. However, her status as a woman, and more specifically a sheltered aristocratic woman, demands that she be subservient to the men in her family, and it is clear that Oscar has taken advantage of this expectation to control her. Despite her previous naiveté, she now understands the magnitude of the siblings’ actions, yet has been pulled so far into the system that she can no longer escape. Instead, she drowns her sorrows in alcohol, which everyone (including Birdie herself) refers to as her ‘headaches’. Since alcoholics have also been dismissed and disregarded, the family’s knowledge of Birdie’s illness, on top of her status as a woman, allows them to render her powerless.

Horace is perhaps the most clear and levelheaded character when it comes to dealing with the siblings’ schemes, and in keeping with this theme is the most physically afflicted. Despite the fact that he is quite ill and slowly dying, he refuses to go along with the Hubbards’ ploys and devises a plan to leave most of his money to his daughter Alexandra.

Alexandra, the youngest character of the play, lacks power and status in her society as a teenage girl. Physical youth is typically perceived to correspond to mental and emotional immaturity, and indeed it seems that Alexandra is quite naïve at the beginning of the play. However, her perception of greed strengthens over time until she finally makes the first steps towards change at the end of the play by announcing her departure from the household.

In Hellman’s play, illness, gender and race are perceived by society as a mental and emotional deficit; however these supposed deficits become a gateway to inner knowledge, a theme which harkens back to the tragedies of Ancient Greece. Unlike the ancient tragedies, however there is no clear moment of insight at the end of the play; in fact the ending is left open to interpretation. It is unclear in the end if Alexandra truly does leave her family behind and whether or not greed will triumph.

The Little Foxes was intended to be part of a trilogy that was never finished; presumably these questions would have been answered in the sequel, however Hellman never wrote one. As audience members we can only imagine and hope that wisdom will win out over greed and corruption.



Regina Giddens (Kathryn Meisle) lectures her daughter Alexandra (Lindsey Wochley) in The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey’s 2009 Main Stage production of *The Little Foxes*. Photo: © Joe Geinert, 2009.

Additional Topics for Discussion

About the Play

1. Hellman focuses on the themes of greed and corruption in *The Little Foxes*. How are these themes manifested within the setting of Southern society in 1900? How do these themes relate to Hellman's own time as she was writing, the Great Depression? Do you think the play's themes are also still relevant in American society in 2009? Why or why not?
2. Hellman once stated that she did not want to create antagonists who were pure evil. Instead, she wanted to create three-dimensional characters that the audience could relate to even as they saw their actions critically. How does Hellman accomplish this? Do you know anyone like the Hubbards?
3. Several characters are marginalized by the Hubbard siblings due to their race, their gender, their youth or their physical weakness. How does this affect the actions of these marginalized characters? Describe how they are treated by the Hubbards. Does their treatment vary in each case? How might the events of the play have changed had they not been socially marginalized?
4. Hellman got the title for her play from a verse of the *Song of Solomon* in the Bible's Old Testament, which reads, "Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vine: for our vines have tender grapes. Why might she have chosen this epigram? How does this verse relate to the themes of the play?"
5. In the play, Hellman presents a group of characters trying to break a cycle of exploitation that has previously gone unchecked. Discuss the theme of inaction versus action in *The Little Foxes*, and how it relates to other texts and historical events.

About this Production

1. In the production, costume designer Brian Russman reflects the characters' personalities in his designs, particularly for Alexandra, Regina, and Birdie. Describe how the costume design lent itself to the characters' distinctive temperaments, age, and status, as well as their emotional journeys throughout the play. Note the ways the costumes change from act to act.
2. Hellman wanted to create characters that the audience could relate to, as realistic individuals. How did the design elements (set, costumes, lights, sound, etc) help you enter the world of the play? Which elements were effective and which were ineffective? Would you have done anything differently?



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 Little Foxes*. 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. *Alternate Realities*: There are several characters in the play that are constantly driven by their greed, and multiple scenes in which these characters make decisions that negatively affect the world around them. What would happen if they had reacted differently? Choose one scene from the play and create an alternative version in which the characters choose to act differently than they do in Hellman's text.
3. *The Sequel*: Though Lillian Hellman intended *Another Part of the Forest* to be the first, and *The Little Foxes* to be the second play of a trilogy, she never wrote the final play. In fact, the ending of *The Little Foxes* is left open for interpretation. Will the characters be successful in their endeavors? Will the truth about the Hubbards' corruption get out? Will Birdie and Zan escape? Create your own sequel in the form of a short story or play, using what you already know about the characters and their personalities.
4. *Hubbards on Trial*: In *The Little Foxes*, Hellman leaves the circumstances of Horace's death up to interpretation. When Horace has a heart attack as he and Regina are arguing, he is unable to reach his medicine, and Regina does not lift a finger to help him. Should Regina be held responsible for his death? Is there anyone else that could have indirectly been involved in causing Horace's death? Imagine you are a lawyer either defending Regina's innocence or proving her guilt. What evidence would you present to prove your case? Hold a mock trial and argue your case.
5. *Author's Reflection*: Lillian Hellman was often very critical of her own work, and also skeptical of the reviews that she received. Pretend you are Lillian Hellman, and write a journal entry about how you think the final, published version of *The Little Foxes* came out. What parts of the play have holes that could be fixed? Which sections were most effective?
6. Secrets and unspoken feelings trouble many of the relationships in *The Little Foxes*. What if these characters had been able to speak their minds openly? Write letters in the voices of the characters confronting one another, or stage an improvisational "group therapy" session where the Hubbards can try to work out their issues.

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 JBGrant@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

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Oscar Hubbard (Brian Dykstra) and his brother Benjamin (Philip Goodwin) conspire to force their sister Regina out of a business deal worth millions in The Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey's 2009 Main Stage production of *The Little Foxes*. Photo: ©Gerry Goodstein, 2009.

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 CORPS 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 *Shakespeare: 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 and American Airlines, 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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