

# The Taste of Sunrise

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

prepared by Patrick McCarthy and Paul Rivenberg

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**Please note:** Ideally, a team including a non-Deaf and a Deaf facilitator will use this guide to help young people understand Deaf cultural perspectives related to the play.

## About the Author

*I write because I cannot fly..... but words can. And where they land worlds appear and characters move and breathe, and audiences come together in the alchemy of the moment.*— Suzan Zeder

Suzan Zeder is one of the nation’s more prolific and influential playwrights for young and family audiences. She is Professor Emeritus at the University of Texas, Austin, where she was Head of the Playwriting/Directing Program. Her plays have been produced around the U.S., and in countries around the world. Among many awards, honors, and grants, she recently received the Campton Bell Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Alliance for Theatre and Education (2014).

In an interview with *Theater Jones North Texas Performing Arts News*, Zeder answered the question, “What position does teen material play in the development of the field of theater for young audiences?”

*I think it is wonderful and really very important. So often teens are the forgotten audience. There is a lot of material out there for young children and increasingly more for the “very young,” but teens are often left out. Potentially this is the richest of material and the most receptive of any audience. The teens are so naturally dramatic in their emotional velocity and in the quicksilver development of their own intellectual, ethical and social identities. Finding really well written material about teenagers for teens is hard. I think this is partially because teens can spot a phony a mile away, they will know if they are being talked down to or patronized.*

- Discuss your reaction to Zeder’s statements about teens and theatre. What topics would you like to see explored in a play?
- If you were to write a play, what topics would you explore? Would you write a play that would focus on your own age group, or would you prefer to write about older or younger characters?

### EXERCISE

- Write a two- or three-character scene. It can be about a topic that is important to you. You have the option of writing a scene that revolves around a student with a disability. It could be deafness, or something else. As you write try to put yourself in the shoes of the main characters. How do they view their world and the other people in the scene? Students can take parts and read the scene to the rest of the class. Students can discuss their reactions to the scene.

## About The Ware Trilogy Project

*The Taste of Sunrise* is the second in a series of three works known collectively as The Ware Trilogy. For the first time, the Trilogy is being sequentially produced in one area, so that audiences may follow the entire story. (Producing partners Emerson Stage and Central Square Theater are staging *Mother Hicks* and *The Edge of Peace*, the first and last installments of the Trilogy.) The Ware Trilogy chronicles the challenges, setbacks, and triumphs that are part of Deaf history and the forces that have influenced Deaf culture in the United States. Revolving around the central character of Tuc, a Deaf man (played by Deaf actor Elbert Joseph in all three productions), the Trilogy begins in 1917, takes us through the Depression, and ends in the final days of World War II. WFT's production of *The Taste of Sunrise*, a bilingual play performed in American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken English, is set both in Tuc's home town of Ware, Illinois, and in a school for the Deaf. Several Deaf actors appear in the ensemble, and the creative team includes a co-director, co-assistant director, and lighting designer who are Deaf.

## Plot Summary

The Ware Trilogy allows audiences to follow Tuc as he grows up in Ware, Illinois. Tuc is, at first, an outcast, but his relationship with the town changes over the years as the younger generation learns ASL in order to communicate with him. The plays in the Ware Trilogy take place in the mind and memory of the adult Tuc. They explore themes of identity, suspicion, and outcasts. In *The Taste of Sunrise*, Tuc journeys through his childhood—from the fever that took his hearing to the language of nature that he shares with his beloved father. Pressured by “experts,” Tuc's father enrolls him in a leading school for the Deaf. Founded on the belief that, through repetition, children who lose their hearing at an early age can learn to speak, the school strictly forbids sign language. ASL is perceived as a misguided crutch that forever holds students back from their vocal recovery. At the school, Tuc bonds with a cleaning girl, Maizie, who is a hearing child of Deaf parents. Teenaged and pregnant, with a head full of movie palace dreams, Maizie secretly teaches Tuc ASL. He is befriended by fellow student Roscoe, who gives Tuc his name-sign and cultural identity. Tuc also meets the mysterious Nell Hicks, a fellow outsider who heals with herbs and singing spells. After the death of his father, Tuc must navigate the perilous path of loss, love, and language as he struggles to weave a family out of wishes. The Ware Trilogy explores the moral ambiguities of our times and the cultural complexities of Deafness with humor and compassion.

**ACTIVITY:** *This activity is designed for students who are not yet familiar with American Sign Language.*

Have students experience what life is like for Tuc by trying to communicate with each other without using words.

- Give each student a piece of paper with a request written on it (for example, “Hand me the book,” “Close the door,” or “Write on the board”). Divide the class into pairs and ask students to try to get their partners to perform the task without speaking, using only

gestures. Was it relatively easy or difficult to communicate through physical actions as opposed to spoken words?

- Now have students try to convey more complicated thoughts, such as “I wonder why the sky is blue” or “What do you think of this exercise?” Discuss students’ reactions to communicating without words. What are the limitations of conversing without an agreed-upon vocabulary?

## Historical Perspective

An awareness of the social and historical context of the play will aid understanding and appreciation. For a list of significant milestones, see Appendix I.

**ACTIVITY:** Make a time line, with photos, spanning the years from 1917 to 1928. Include:

- U.S. Presidents
- Immigrants / the mills and factories of the Industrial Revolution
- The Depression
- World War I
- Three other milestones
- Three other advancements in technology that had an effect on human behaviors (such as work productivity)

## Learn about Deaf Culture

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were two major approaches to Deaf education. American Sign Language (ASL) originated in the early part of the century at the American School for the Deaf in Hartford, Connecticut. Tuc learns this approach, called *Manualism*, at school—not from his teachers, but from his friends Roscoe and Maizie. Tuc’s school teaches the other approach, *Oralism*, which was promoted by Alexander Graham Bell, whose views are echoed by the aptly named character of Dr. Alexis Graham in the play. She says, “Oral speech is the sole power to rekindle the light of intelligence.” Expressing a viewpoint in favor of teaching ASL, Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet declared, “All of the children of silence must be taught to sing their own song.”

### RESEARCH ACTIVITIES/QUESTIONS ABOUT ORALISM VS. MANUALISM

- Research and discuss Alexander Graham Bell’s method of Deaf education. How and why did he develop that particular approach?
- Research and discuss Edward Miner Gallaudet’s method of Deaf education. How and why did he develop that particular approach?
- What communication/teaching approach is used at Gallaudet University for the Deaf in Washington, D.C.? (Read the University’s Mission Statement). In addition to exploring the work of Edward Miner Gallaudet, research Laurent Clerc’s influence on the guiding philosophy of the school. Report to the class.

- Research and report on two famous or notable Deaf people: one trained in Oralism and one trained in Manualism. Try to discover (and explain in your report) how effective the Deaf person found the method to be and how he or she felt about it.
- Interview a person who is Deaf. Ask how he or she learned to communicate and how he or she feels about it.
- Why do you think the question of the appropriate method of Deaf education remains controversial?
- Debate the issue of Oralism versus Manualism, with each team explaining why its method is best. (For the purposes of the debate, students don't need to believe in the method they are promoting.) Discuss the merits of the points made in the debate.
- Extension: Ask students to write a brief opinion piece for a newspaper in support of one method over the other.

## Learn about American Sign Language (ASL)

Most people in the Deaf community today use a combination of manual signs for specific meanings, and fingerspelling is used for proper nouns (for example: Wheelock, Cheryl, Ford, and Boylston Street). The chart below provides a rudimentary introduction to fingerspelling. This chart was downloaded from [fingerspellingalphabet.com](http://www.fingerspellingalphabet.com): <http://www.fingerspellingalphabet.com/fingerspelling-chart-print-pdf-download/>

### ASL Fingerspelling Alphabet



## ACTIVITIES

- Early in the play, when Tuc is learning to sign, his friend Roscoe spells his name and gives him a name-sign. Tuc says,  
    After this night  
    Nothing ever the same.  
    This night I learn  
    I have a name
- Using the fingerspelling alphabet above, have each student learn to sign his or her own first name. Explain that, traditionally, a hearing person is given a name-sign by someone who is Deaf once the hearing person has demonstrated that he or she has a significant understanding of ASL and/or Deaf culture.
- Have students memorize the fingerspelling chart, and practice communicating with each other.
- Have students fingerspell a simple sentence, like “Thank you” or “I enjoy theatre.” Then have them learn the way they can sign the sentence using hand signs to signify each meaning instead of spelling them out. See the Signing Savvy website to learn the hand signs. <https://www.signingsavvy.com/>
- Ask students to express the above passage through abstract body movements that convey Tuc’s feelings in the moment. Students shouldn’t mime the passage literally, but should explore the emotion that the passage conveys. They can rehearse their movements and then share them with the class.

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

- Explore the origins of American Sign Language. In what year was ASL officially “born”? And where? Who invented ASL? Can one person invent a language? Why does it require a community for a language to thrive? From what language sources has ASL evolved?
- As with spoken language, sign language in other countries is different from ASL. Research one or two other sign languages (for example, British, Chinese, or German) and compare them to ASL.
- One might assume that American and British Sign Languages would be similar, since both the United States and Great Britain share a verbal language. Find out if this is true.
- Why was ASL influenced more by French Sign Language than by British?
- You Tube is full of examples of songs being signed. See if you can find one song being signed in two or more languages (try songs by the Beatles or those from the film *Frozen*). Observe the differences and discuss them. Can you understand the meaning of some of the lyrics through sign language? Demonstrate a few of the signs you understand.
- The ABC series *Switched at Birth* includes actors in the cast who are Deaf or are hard of hearing. Watch an episode of the series and discuss it. Which actors are Deaf or hard of hearing? What measures do you think need to be in place in order for Deaf actors to perform on a movie set or in a play?
- How is “Deaf” with a capital D different from “deaf” with a small d?

# Producing and Directing a Play at Wheelock Family Theatre

Every production at Wheelock Family Theatre requires consideration of inclusion: people with all degrees of physical and developmental ability are welcome at WFT and provisions must be made for their accommodation.

## QUESTIONS TO EXPLORE

- If you have seen the production, how were Deaf audiences accommodated?
- Every WFT production has open captioning on the sides of the stage, but this production integrates captioning more centrally. Discuss reasons why it might have been done this way.
- How would you, as an Inclusion Coordinator like WFT's Kristin Johnson, accommodate someone who is blind? Someone who uses a wheelchair or walker? Someone who has developmental delays?

## KRISTIN JOHNSON TALKS ABOUT INCLUSION AND CO-DIRECTING *THE TASTE OF SUNRISE* WITH WFT PRODUCER WENDY LEMENT

Having been born Deaf to hearing parents, WFT Inclusion Coordinator Kristin Johnson has a special perspective on accommodating people with disabilities or additional needs. As co-director of *The Taste of Sunrise* she also has a unique take on aspects of the drama that focus on the hearing child of Deaf adults (CODA)—her daughter, Ingrid, is a CODA. (See Ingrid's reflections later in this study guide.)

### What do you do as Inclusion Coordinator?

Are you familiar with **AD - Audio Description**? People who have any kind of visual limitations or are blind are able to come and listen to what is happening on stage, which is narrated to them by an AD team - this may include a description of the set, what the characters are wearing, what they look like, what they are doing. They can hear that through a headset so it does not interfere with the spoken dialogue. AD typically describes what is happening during some kind of down time on stage, filling in all of the gaps; it doesn't, of course, include the dialogue itself. So the AD team typically will have a script ready and they will just read live to the people who are wearing the headsets. AD and the ASL team are very similar in what they have to do. They have to prepare their work well in advance to provide the accessibility.

The **open caption system** is very similar. Open captioning has to be preprogrammed in a computer. The script that the actors are using is put into the system. They have a laptop set up that this program runs on. And the open caption operator (typically a Wheelock College student) will listen to the characters for their lines, and they will hit a button that lines up the captioning that shows up on the sides of the stage. And so they will time it up nicely. It is not a live captioning system. The operator who is there sure is live, but they have input all the information beforehand.

Now with the **ASL interpretation** that is a live sign language performance, something they have practiced long in advance. The AD system as well is a live person reading their script, something they have prepared beforehand. Those three things are what I'm involved in coordinating.

### **Is this unique to Wheelock Family Theatre?**

Yes. The services that WFT provide have been ongoing for 34 years. They are very loyal and very committed to providing accessible theatre. All of the services that are included are very visible to everyone who comes. They aren't hidden at the back of the house or the side, so everyone can see the accessibility we are providing. For *The Taste of Sunrise* we actually have our captioning system right there in the center of the stage, not off to the side. The interpreters will be on stage with the actors. It's wonderful. And Wendy has been so supportive of our services. She's very involved in the inclusivity we provide. It's just what we have been talking about – this one world of inclusion, of deafness, blindness, everything. Some other directors, other theatres really like to keep things separate. Not Wheelock.

### **Have you directed or co-directed a play before?**

I direct my own ASL team. I have been the director of our ASL performers. But I have never been a director for the whole cast. But it's truly an honor to be able to work with Wendy. She is someone who has been mentoring me. And she is my ears in this, and I am her eyes. So it's such a perfect combination of the two of us.

### **What sort of things will you do as a co-director of this production?**

The set we are using is a raked stage. And we have both been really involved in trying to figure out what we are doing for specific trap doors. We are adding real dirt, gravel. We are using real water. We are trying to do something with a little bit of fire. As well as lighting design -- whether we need certain moments to be warm, cool. I'm also involved in designing what the actual rake will look like. Right now we've decided on wooden planks. There is a Deaf artist named James Castle. He was an artist during the Depression. We've taken a lot of his moods, his textures that he used back then, and we've really incorporated them into the show. It fits very nicely.

Also, we have been influenced by how Deaf people used to react during audiological exams. You know there is an old instrument called a tuning fork. A Deaf person would sit there and an audiologist would ring it and put it all over their head. And if it is your first time experiencing something like that it's very traumatic. Of course it's something these people had to go through over and over again, with always the same result. They're still Deaf at the end of the appointment. But these kinds of things are something that I, as a co-director, bring to the table, this bit of perspective that someone who is not Deaf would not have.

### **Were your parents Deaf or hearing?**

Both of my parents were hearing. Ninety percent of Deaf people have hearing parents. Within that group of Deaf people, 10 percent will have Deaf children, but 90 percent will have hearing



children. My own daughter is one of the 90 percent of the CODAs that you will see. It's a misunderstanding that a Deaf person will always have a Deaf child. And really it's such a small amount. Ten percent.

### **How does this play speak to you?**

I've been working with Amanda Collins, who plays Maizie. I love and hate this character Maizie. I love her because she does so much for Tuc. And Tuc, he comes from a very clueless home with very limited communication and very little social background, whereas Maizie has access. She has access to movie palaces, she has access to the hearing world – everything that's spoken – and she also has access to her parents through sign language, whereas Tuc has nothing, except communicating with the birds, the wind, and the water. And having those two characters together, where Maizie introduces Tuc to the world—I'm so grateful for that in her character. Tuc does try to prove to Maizie that two worlds are OK. But it's a pretty big conflict. So yes, Maizie is a young girl, she's sixteen, and she has the mind of a child. I do understand her desire to experience the world before she is tied down with a baby.

And you have Tuc's father, who winds up passing in the show. And that is something I've also experienced, that grief of losing a parent. And Tuc is put into the Deaf School, a whole new experience for him, which is something I experienced as well. When I was four years old I was put into a residential program where I slept overnight. So I have a lot of ties to all of these characters. I can relate to almost all of them.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- Have the class read the interview with Kristin Johnson and discuss it.
- Wendy Lement, Kristin's co-director, has normal hearing but is not fluent in ASL. How do you think they went about directing actors, some of who can hear and some of whom are Deaf? If you were directing Deaf actors, how would you prepare yourself?
- How can ASL interpreters aid in communication between Deaf and hearing directors, actors, and members of the production staff?

## **Setting the Stage (Sets and Costumes)**

Scenic and costume designs are essential elements in staging a play set in a specific era. Both scenic and costume designers need to do research to communicate the feeling of the times, and to help get across the themes of the play.

- What resources would you consult to learn more about the Depression?
- *The Taste of Sunrise* takes place in the Midwest. Have students find and examine photos taken in this region between 1917 and 1928 and share what they find. Discuss the characteristics that are similar in the photos. Look closely at clothing, landscapes, and buildings. How would you use what you observe in creating a set and designing costumes for *The Taste of Sunrise*?

- How well did WFT communicate a sense of this era? Would you make any changes? How would your choices change if you were told you needed to spend less money?
- The set design was influenced by the work of Deaf artist James Castle. Research this artist, look at his art, and discuss why examining his work might be helpful to this production. Do you see his influence in the set design?
- Draw your own ideas for a set and/or costumes for this production. What elements of your research (above) do you find most helpful in your designs?

## Lighting Design

Stage lighting can be used to create mood, focus audience attention, obscure parts of the stage, project images, and more.

- How was lighting used in *The Taste of Sunrise*? Were there any lighting effects that you felt were especially interesting or well done?
- The lighting designer for this production, Annie Wiegand, is Deaf. Do you feel this gives her a special insight into lighting the play? If so, what?

## Acting

### AN INTERVIEW WITH ELBERT JOSEPH (TUC)

As a Deaf, Caribbean-American pre-teen passionately devoted to theatre and intent on making it his career, Elbert Joseph found his way to Wheelock Family Theatre. He appeared with the cast of *Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp* when he was twelve years old. He also became the Theatre's first Deaf ASL interpreter. He trained as a member of WFT's PAH! Deaf Youth Theatre and went on to appear on the Wheelock main stage in numerous productions, including in the lead role in E.B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan*, for which he earned an IRNE nomination (a Boston-based theatre award).

While a professor at Regis College, WFT Producer Wendy Lement cast Elbert in the lead role of Tuc in her production of *Mother Hicks*. Coincidentally, just at this time Suzan Zeder's prequel to *Mother Hicks*—*The Taste of Sunrise*—was released. Zeder had written it in response to the flood of requests she received from people around the world who wanted to know more about the background of the three main characters. Elbert approached WFT in hopes that the Theatre would produce it. However, given the number of Deaf characters, and the associated cost of providing interpreter support for them, WFT was unable to produce the show at that time. In the summer of 2013, Zeder's long-awaited sequel to *Mother Hicks*, *The Edge of Peace*, was published, creating a trilogy of plays revolving around the character of Tuc.

Elbert is finally realizing his dream to revisit the character of Tuc, not only in WFT's production of *The Taste of Sunrise*, but also—almost simultaneously—in the productions of *Mother Hicks* (at Emerson Stage) and *The Edge of Peace* (at Central Square Theater).

And, because of the 14 years that have passed since he first took on the role of Tuc, he is now closer to the actual age of the character.

### **When did you get interested in acting?**

I started acting when I was twelve years old. My school always took trips to see Wheelock productions, even when I was younger. When I saw *Peter Pan* I knew something inside of me said “You’re an actor, you want to be on stage, to make changes in the future of theatre worlds -- diversity and inclusion! “

The teacher asked us to pick an actor from the play and be a pen pal. I didn't know who I wanted, but I thought the actor who played Smee was excellent. I picked him, but it turned out to be “she”: it was Jane Staab, founder, casting director, and actress at Wheelock Family Theatre. She and I would write letters every week, until one day I told her I wanted to be on stage. She said the current production was already cast, but if I was planning to see any production soon to let her know. I told her that the school and I were planning to see *Tuck Everlasting*. I met her after show. She was in her costume. She told me, “Why don't you come and audition for *The Wizard of Oz*?” I did, and got cast. At the audition, I had no idea about acting or how to audition. You know what is funny? Jane and I have same birthday! After that, there is a magic.....

### **What is your history with Suzan Zeder’s work?**

I had no clue of who she was until I did the play *Mother Hicks* at Regis with Wendy (Lement), who directed that show. It was a great experience because I fell in love with the play itself, involving a Deaf character that leads and tell a story. I remember I wrote an email to Suzan Zeder, and told her how much I loved this play and hoped to meet her in person. I never thought it would be happening, that I would be meeting her.... It’s almost like she is this person I have been waiting to meet ever since I was young. I am curious what she will think of our production and of me as Tuc.

### **What is it like playing the same character in three different plays over the course of a month?**

All three plays are remarkably moving. They are such beautiful plays! Every time I read all three plays, I cry and cry again. I see Tuc’s journey as transformative. I see myself like Tuc on certain levels – in terms of which community he really fit in, and how he fits in as a man differently than when he was a young man. I really hope the audience will see through Tuc’s eyes and mind, feel his pain, his love, and his humanity.

## What is your advice to a Deaf person who wants to become an actor?

Work hard. Don't give up. Work with many Deaf and hearing actors and directors. Learn their craft. Take some training. I encourage Deaf artists to write more plays about Deaf experience in the hearing world, families, and community; more Deaf artists to become directors, designers, and acting teachers in hearing theatres; to create more awareness and more opportunities for themselves in theatre.

### QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Have students read the interview with Elbert Joseph and respond to it.
- Write a letter (like Elbert Joseph did) to someone involved the production of *The Taste of Sunrise*, responding to the play and the performance.
- There are theatres devoted to cultivating work for Deaf actors and audiences; some use Deaf and blind actors. Deaf West; the National Theatre of the Deaf; and Nalagatt (an Israeli troupe of Deaf-Blind actors) are three. Have students in the class research and report on one of these, or other such theatre groups from their research.
- Maizie loves movies, especially those featuring Rudolph Valentino, and sees them as the perfect entertainment for her Deaf parents. The Internet Archive's "Silent Hall of Fame" is a good starting point for viewing a number of silent films from the era. <https://archive.org/details/silenthallloffame>. Select films from this archive to view, or from other sources such as Black and White Movies - <http://www.blackandwhitemovies.org/silent-films>. Take note of the costumes and settings. Would they be helpful to set and costume designers for *The Taste of Sunrise*? What do you think of these films? Do you find them entertaining? What do you learn from them?
- The students in the school act out a silent movie. Why would a silent movie be popular for people who are Deaf?

### ACTIVITY

- Divide the class into groups of five or six students. Explain that they are going to create their own scene from a silent movie. Ask them to discuss what happens in the scene. Now have them rehearse their silent scene. Remind them that their movements should be exaggerated like those in the silent movies they watched.
- Share the scenes with the class. Ask the viewers to guess the plot of each scene.
- Have students create written captions for their scenes in large print—only adding captions where absolutely necessary for clarification. Rehearse scenes, incorporating captions, then present to the class. Did the captions add or detract from the scenes. How so?

## A YOUNG CODA ACTOR SHARES HER PERSPECTIVE

Ingrid Jensen O'Dell

*Ingrid Jensen O'Dell is an 8th grade student at Harborlight-Stoneridge Montessori School. In The Taste of Sunrise Ingrid plays a student at the school Tuc attends. She is the daughter of WFT Inclusion Coordinator Kristin Johnson*

Being in a unique show like *The Taste of Sunrise* is certainly an honor. As a Child of Deaf Adults, a CODA, I can relate to this play and some of its characters. One hearing character in the play, Maizie, is a CODA. In one scene she says that she can hear and speak, but she is Deaf inside. Being Deaf inside to me is having Deaf memories, having Deaf characteristics, or placing myself into the category of Deaf people. That is something that I can relate to very much.

My time is not spent entirely with Deaf people, or with hearing; half of my time I am with hearing people, and the other half I am with Deaf people. I am comfortable with that, because I can fit into hearing and Deaf culture as a whole. Maizie does not like being part of two worlds. She would rather be in one world, the hearing world. To me, it is not a scenario of two worlds; it is simply one world, with Deaf and hearing together. I feel that I am not part Deaf and part hearing, but a swirl of both. I cannot say that I would rather be Deaf or be hearing, because I am already both, and I will forever be both. In the past, when I have told someone that my parents are Deaf, that person would usually act surprised, but in a nice way. There have been a few people that have felt sorry for me, and would apologize for my having Deaf parents. When I heard what those few people said, I felt, in a way, insulted. Deaf parents are not inadequate, not in the slightest. If you discredit Deaf culture, you are doing so to me, and other CODAs. Deaf and hearing people are basically the same, but there are some differences. Deaf people notice more things visually, because they cannot hear what is going on around them. Their loss of hearing enhances their other senses, like sight. Hearing people can see and hear, so these senses are about equal. I have characteristics of a Deaf person, for instance, the one I just described. When I am watching a movie in a theatre, I often feel lost and confused, because there are no captions. To get people's attention, I tend to tap them on the shoulder or try to get their attention without speaking. I read quickly because I am used to reading the captions on television or movies, which shift very quickly.

There are a lot of bonuses with having Deaf parents. I can play loud music; they won't complain. I can sing as loudly and as obnoxiously as I want; they won't complain. I can pretend to be Deaf. I can convince people that I am. I can talk on the phone endlessly; they won't get annoyed. I can listen to music on the radio in the car, and they won't be bothered. Occasionally, my mother will put on her hearing aid and listen to the music as well. When I'm not sure if my mother has her hearing aid on, I shout or talk loudly to see if she will react. It often surprises me when she does react, because I'm not used to it.

There are some things that aren't great, like when the batteries in the smoke alarm are low and I have to hunt all over the house to stop the beeping. When I'm in the car and the turn signal is on and beeping when it shouldn't be, I tell my parent that it is on. When my dog is barking, or

the microwave is making weird sounds, I tell my parents. I am not told to tell them when these things happen, but I tell them because it bothers me, or I feel that I need to inform them.

All in all, Deaf people and hearing people are the same, but different. I am a CODA, and I am proud to be one. There is nothing wrong with being Deaf, having Deaf parents, or even just knowing Deaf people. If I ever have children, I will keep them, unlike Maizie, and I will teach them sign language. I will never be able to ignore my Deaf self, not that I will ever want to. I am Deaf and hearing, and very proud to be both.

### QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Have the class read the essay by Ingrid Jensen O’Dell, and respond to it. What parts of her story do you identify with? Discuss the concept of living in two worlds. How is Ingrid’s perspective different from Maizie’s?
- The world of our parents and their community affects and influences us. Have the class write brief essays about the world in which they were raised. What were their challenges? Did anything make them feel different from what they perceived as the “normal” family? Did they feel different from their own family?
- In the 1920s there was no professional organization of ASL interpreters. Many CODAs ended up interpreting for their parents, communicating with school personnel, employers, doctors, dentists, banks, lawyers, contractors, salespeople, families, friends, and neighbors. Have students discuss how contemporary technology might make it easier for Deaf people to communicate without depending on their family members to “translate.”

## Being an Outsider

Tuc, Maizie, and Mother Hicks all feel like outsiders – people who don’t fit neatly into the larger community.

- Discuss what makes each of them different. Would they seem like outsiders today? Why or why not?
- Discuss people or groups of people who you feel could be considered outsiders today. What is it that makes them different? How could they be welcomed into or accommodated by the greater community?
- At times in our lives we all feel like an outsider. Write a short essay about something that makes you feel different from those around you.
- Tuc’s difference and separateness are underscored by the poetic way he expresses himself. He says,

Feeling has name,  
Has shape. Has sign.  
I am angry, sad, scared, happy!  
Sign, sign, sign, sign!  
Before no deaf I ever see

Whole world hears, I think  
But me.

- Why do you think the playwright chose to have Tuc speak in poetry? Write your own poetic monologue expressing what makes you unique.
- Mother Hicks is perceived as witch-like, partly because of her herbal cures. Research herbal medications (see Appendix 2 for herbs and treatments mentioned in the play). How do you feel about herbal medicines versus drugs prescribed by a doctor? Are people or communities who have non-traditional or non-Western perspectives about medication marginalized or shamed today? Discuss.
- Ask students to move randomly around the room at a normal pace. Give the following directions: Study the people around you. Imagine that everyone in class sees you as an outsider. Let that thought affect you physically. Clap or signal to end the exercise. Discuss the students' reactions.
- Ask students to move around the room again and study the people around them. Now change the directions: Have students silently select a person in the room to view as an "outsider," imagining a reason why that person might be threatening to them. When that person is close by, direct students to let their bodies react physically to their presence. Clap or signal to end the exercise. Discuss this activity with the class and compare it to the previous one. Ask how each experience made them feel.

## Understanding and Being Understood

The theme of "understanding" and "being understood" resonates in this play on several levels.

- Discuss the different ways characters in this play are "not understood." How are they understood? Are there moments when these characters themselves do not understand someone or something?
- After Tuc's father has died, Maizie says to him, "You can hold him live inside your mind and tell him everything you want to say. In real life parents understand nothing. In your mind, everything." Have the class discuss this. Write a brief essay about a time when you did not feel understood, and how that made you feel.
- Sometimes people simply cannot bring themselves to (or refuse to) understand a difficult reality. Decide whether you feel this is true for Mother Hicks, Tuc's father, Dr. Alexis Graham, Maizie, Tuc, or other characters. How do they deny or ignore a reality?

## What Did You Think?

- What ideas will you remember from the play?
- What feelings will you remember from the play?
- Which character affected you the most? Why?
- Which character do you identify with the most? Why?
- What visual images do you remember most? Describe them.

- How were the following elements made visual in the play: earth, wind, water, and fire? Why do you think the directors chose to highlight them?
- What changes in the play do you think you might like to make? Why?

## Suggested Readings

*Alexander Graham Bell: Father of Modern Communication*, by Michael Pollard, Blackbirch Press, 2000.

*The Best of Both Worlds: (A Not-So-Silent Life)* by Lila Miller, iUniverse, 2000.

*Deaf and Unemployed in Dubuque: The DiMarcos Remember the Great Depression*, by David Shannon - <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/119> - from *The Great Depression*, by David Shannon, Prentice Hall, 1960, pp. 163-171.

*Deaf Heritage: A Narrative History of Deaf America*, by Jack Gannon, National Association of the Deaf, Silver Spring, Maryland, 1981.

*Never the Twain Shall Meet: Bell, Gallaudet, and the Communications Debate*, by Richard Winefield, Gallaudet University Press, 1987.

*Through Deaf Eyes: A Photographic History of an American Community*, by Baynton, et al, Gallaudet Press, Washington DC, 2007.

*Untitled: The Art of James Castle*, by Nicholas R. Bell, D Giles Limited, 2014



## Appendix 1 – Historical Timeline

### 1917

- President Woodrow Wilson begins second term, announces severed diplomatic relationship with Germany.
- United States enters World War I.
- October Bolshevik Revolution begins in Russia.

### 1918

- Spanish Influenza pandemic, which results in many cases of deafness, begins; the flu is first observed in Haskell Center County, Kansas. Over 30 million people die in the following six months.
- Russia's Imperial Romanov family is executed.
- World War I ends.

### 1919

- Edsel Ford succeeds his father, Henry, as head of the Ford Motor Company.
- Boston Molasses Disaster.
- The League of Nations, forerunner of the United Nations, is founded in Paris.

### 1920

- Babe Ruth is traded by the Red Sox.
- Liquor Prohibition begins with the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment.
- Adolf Hitler establishes the Nazi Party.
- The 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment is passed guaranteeing women's suffrage.
- Warren G. Harding wins the U.S. presidential election, in which women are able to vote for the first time.
- The League of Women Voters is founded in Chicago.
- The first game of the Negro National Baseball League is played in Indianapolis, Indiana.
- The United States Post Office Department rules that children may not be sent via parcel post.

### 1921

- Harding is inaugurated as the 29th President of the United States.
- The first U.S. transcontinental airmail flight arrives in New York City from San Francisco.
- Professor Albert Einstein lectures in New York City on his new Theory of Relativity.
- The Communist Party of China is founded.

### 1922

- The first successful insulin treatment of diabetes is made.
- President Harding introduces the first radio to the White House.
- The movie *Nosferatu* is released.
- Mohandas Gandhi is arrested and sentenced to six years in prison for sedition (he serves only two) in Bombay, India.
- Joseph Stalin is appointed General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party.

- The Commonwealth of Massachusetts opens all public offices to women.
- The Lincoln Memorial is dedicated in Washington, D.C.
- Hyperinflation skyrockets in Germany.
- The Mandate of Palestine is approved by the Council of the League of Nations.
- In Egypt, British archaeologist Howard Carter and his team find the entrance to the 3,000-year-old tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamen in the Valley of the Kings.
- The Irish Free State officially comes into existence.

## 1923

- *Time* magazine hits newsstands in the United States for the first time.
- Warner Bros. film studio is formally incorporated in the United States.
- The Irish Civil War ends.
- President Harding dies of a heart attack and is succeeded by Vice President Calvin Coolidge.
- Roy and Walt Disney found The Walt Disney Company.
- In Munich's Beer Hall Putsch, Adolf Hitler leads the Nazis in an unsuccessful attempt to seize power, and is then arrested.
- Hyperinflation in Germany reaches its height. One United States dollar is worth 4,200,000,000,000 Papiermark.
- Vladimir K. Zworykin files his first U.S. patent for "television systems."

## 1924

- Leader of the Soviet Union Vladimir Lenin dies; Joseph Stalin takes over.
- First state execution using gas takes place in Nevada.
- J. Edgar Hoover is appointed head of the FBI.
- President Coolidge signs the Indian Citizenship Act into law, granting citizenship to all Native Americans born within the territorial limits of the United States.
- The first Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade is held in New York City.
- Astronomer Edwin Hubble announces that Andromeda, previously believed to be a nebula, is actually another galaxy, and that the Milky Way is only one of many such galaxies in the universe.

## 1925

- Benito Mussolini (*Il Duce*) assumes dictatorial power over Italy.
- President Coolidge's inauguration is the first to be broadcast on radio.
- F. Scott Fitzgerald publishes *The Great Gatsby*.
- The "Monkey Trial" begins, with John T. Scopes, a young high school science teacher, accused of teaching evolution in violation of a Tennessee state law. Scopes is found guilty and fined \$100.
- Mount Rushmore National Memorial is dedicated in South Dakota.
- The Great Sphinx of Giza is unearthed.

## 1926

- The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon is destroyed by fire.
- Robert Goddard launches the first liquid-fuel rocket in Auburn, Massachusetts.
- The sudden death of popular Hollywood actor and sex symbol Rudolph Valentino at the age of only 31 causes worldwide grief and hysteria.

- The League of Nations abolishes all types of slavery.
- U.S. Route 66 is established.
- The NBC radio network opens with 24 stations.

## 1927

- The Academy Awards is founded.
- Charles Lindbergh makes the first solo, non-stop transatlantic airplane flight.
- CBS TV is established, with 47 stations.
- The world population reaches two billion.
- The first transatlantic telephone call is made, from New York City to London.
- Bell Telephone Company transmits an image of Herbert Hoover in the first long-distance demonstration of television.

## 1928

- Amelia Earhart becomes the first woman to make a successful transatlantic flight.
- An iron lung respirator is used for the first time at Boston's Children Hospital.
- The Red Cross and the Red Crescent are established.
- Republican Herbert Hoover wins the presidential election.
- Boston Garden opens.

## Appendix 2 – Herbs and Treatments Mentioned by Mother Hicks

**Arnica Montana.** Large yellow flower heads used for their anti-inflammatory effect on bruises and sprains.

**Bayberry.** Sometimes employed as an insect repellent.

**Bitterroot Tea.** Brewed from a root believed by the Native American Shoshone tribe to be able to ward off a bear attack.

**Chamomile Blossoms.** Flower tops of daisy-like plants used to induce sleep.

**Devil's Wort.** A liquid extracted by mashing the leaves may be fermented with brewing yeast to produce alcohol.

**Honey.** Used to bind herbs together and to soothe skin or throat irritation.

**Ox Blood Soup.** A dark purplish-brown brew that resembles in color the blood of an ox.

**Poultice of Rivermud.** A "porridge" made of mineral-rich river mud mixed with herbs and used on a bandage or cloth as a compress to relieve skin inflammation, draw out abscesses, and treat chest pain.

**Purple Sage.** Dried leaves smoked to produce a mild hallucinogenic effect.

**Shepherd's Purse.** Soft, velvety leaves used to stop bleeding.