

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY



directed by
EMILY MANN

by **HAROLD PINTER**,
winner of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature

SEPTEMBER 8 - OCTOBER 15, 2006

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Introduction

McCarter Theatre is pleased to present a new production of Nobel-prize winning playwright Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*, a spine-chilling comic riff on free-floating menace, directed by Artistic Director Emily Mann.

In his book *Pinter in the Theatre* Ian Smith describes the "dramatic Pinteresque" - "tension and threatened violence are mediated by irony, humour and literary seriousness, underpinned by an unmistakable readiness to stand and fight if necessary." It's an apt description of a writer whose work reflects elements of modernism and absurdism, along with carefully conceived structure, characters, and, remarkably, commercial success. A master of the pause and subtext, Pinter's plays challenge actors, directors, and audience to engage with his text and ideas, and ponder all the questions Pinter leaves unanswered. McCarter is thrilled to be producing this timely canonical work.

Plot Synopsis



Meg and Petey, a working-class couple in their mid-sixties, run a boarding house in a washed-up English seaside town. They begin their routine morning conversation while she prepares breakfast. Petey mentions two strangers seeking a room who approached him as he was collecting chairs on the beach the previous night. Stanley, a scraggly man and their sole tenant, comes downstairs for his meal. After Petey leaves for work, Meg mentions the potential boarders to Stanley who becomes upset and suspicious. A neighbor, Lulu, comes to call and tries to convince Stanley to take a walk, but he declines. Just after she leaves, Stanley spots the two men arriving and sneaks out the back door. Meg greets the strangers, Goldberg and McCann. She tells them that it is Stanley's birthday, but he does not know yet. The wheels are set in motion for a party for him. As the two men settle in, Stanley returns and he and Meg quarrel about whether Goldberg and McCann

should stay. Meg attempts to placate Stanley by giving him his birthday present— a toy drum. He begins playing it tentatively, but eventually it becomes an erratic, uncontrolled banging.

That evening, McCann tells Stanley about the birthday party, which Stanley doesn't want. Stanley moves to go out, but McCann waylays him. Their conversation moves from small talk to a more antagonistic confrontation, as Stanley becomes increasingly paranoid and frantic. Goldberg swoops into the conversation, as it becomes a vaguely menacing interrogation of Stanley. Just as the confrontation turns physical, Meg appears, ready for the birthday party to begin. Lulu also arrives and they decide to play blind man's bluff, which turns ugly.

The next morning Meg and Petey are having their morning conversation. Their chat this morning concerns the conversation Meg overheard the previous night between Goldberg, McCann and Stanley. Meg assumes they must have been friends in the past. Goldberg enters and sits and joins Petey explaining that Stanley has had a nervous breakdown. Petey, concerned, decides to skip work for the day, and wait for Stanley. When Stanley does come down for breakfast, he is clean shaven, but barely coherent. As Petey tries to talk with Stanley, the two strangers are preparing to leave. They inform Petey that Stanley is coming with them. Petey protests, but is unable to prevent them from leaving. When Meg returns home she asks after Stanley. Petey tells Meg that he is sleeping. Meg ends the play by regaling a sorrowful Petey about her fond memories of the birthday party the night before.

Character Profiles

Stanley - An emotionally troubled man in his thirties. Paranoid, dark, and very clever. Stanley's disposition suddenly turns sullen at the news of new boarders in the boarding house where he resides. He claims to be an accomplished pianist who is trying to get back on his feet, but his reliability is unclear. It may or may not be his birthday.

You know what? To look at me, I bet you wouldn't think I'd led such a quiet life. The lines on my face, eh?

Goldberg - An attractive, charismatic and charming leader. His past is vague, but he clearly has a dark history, and his presence brings a sense of menace. He is a brilliant manipulator, with a sinister and charming side.

At all events, McCann, I can assure you that the assignment will be carried out and the mission accomplished with no excessive aggravation to you or myself. Satisfied?

McCann - Goldberg's Irish henchman. He's a bit of a thug, and an imposing figure who serves as the muscle of the operation. Good at what he does, but oddly nervous about it in anticipation.

McCann: This job-no, listen-this job, is it going to be like anything we've ever done before?

Goldberg: Tch, tch, tch.

McCann: No, just tell me that. Just that, and I won't ask any more.

Petey - A working class man in his sixties who owns a boarding house with his wife, Meg. Petey is a deck

chair attendant at a nearby beach. He is a gentle man. When pushed, though, he will try to stand up for what he believes.

What a night. Came in the front door and all the lights were out. Put a shilling in the slot, came in here and the party was over.

Meg - Petey's wife. She is sweet, dotty, and deeply and inexplicably attached to Stanley. She appears to be oblivious to the underlying menace of the situation.

Meg: It's his birthday today.

Goldberg: His birthday?

Meg: Yes. Today. But I'm not going to tell him until tonight.

Lulu - Working class neighbor. Pretty, common and extremely vulnerable.

I've always liked older men. They can soothe you.

Glossary

Ibigensenist heresy: A religious movement with dualistic and Gnostic elements that originated around the middle of the 12th century. Branded by the contemporary Roman Catholic Church as either a heretical Christian sect or sometimes as a non-Christian religion. It holds that the spiritual realm was the realm of God and the temporal realm was the realm of Satan, and both worlds were co-equal.

Arsenic: A highly toxic poison.

Bayswater: One of London's most cosmopolitan areas.

Bird: British slang for "woman".

Black and Tan: A member of a paramilitary force recruited in Britain and sent to Ireland as part of the Royal Irish Constabulary to suppress the Sinn Fein rebellion of 1919-1921.

Blind man's buff: Known as blind man's bluff in the US, a variant of tag, in which one player, designated as "It," is either blindfolded or closes his or her eyes. "It" gropes around blindly and attempts to touch the

other players without being able to see them, while the other players scatter and try to avoid "It."

Bloke: British slang for "man."

Bonhomie: Easy, good nature.

Bracing: Enervating.

Brighton: A town on the south coast of England. Brighton is one of the largest and most famous seaside resorts in England.

Constitutional: A habit that helps to sustain, most often a physical activity like walking or a drink at the end of the day.

Enos or Andrews salts: Supplements that promote digestive regularity.

Fenian: An Irish nationalist who espouses or is perceived to espouse violence against British rule.

Fingerstall: A covering for protecting the finger, a thimble.

Gefilte fish: A traditional Jewish dish where de-boned kosher fish is boiled with carrots and onions.

Get on my breasts: British slang for "annoying me."

In the pudding club: British slang for "pregnant."

King's Cross: An inner city district in the London borough of Camden. Location of a large railway station.

Leper: A person stricken with Leprosy, an infectious disease that causes the skin to become incredibly scaly

and loose.

Mountains of Mourne: A song by William Percy French; also the granite mountains in the southeast of Northern Ireland.

Oliver Plunkett (1629-1681): Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland. Canonized in 1975. He is the last Catholic martyr to die in England.

Prayer wheel: A drum wrapped in strips of paper inscribed with prayers which are believed to be proffered when the drum is turned.

Rock Cake: Cookie served at tea-time.

Rottingdean: A costal village in the City of Brighton, more genteel than Brighton proper.

Recapitulate: To repeat or summarize.

Rollmop: A Jewish delicacy, pickled herring fillet rolled into a cylindrical shape around a piece of pickled cucumber or an onion, held together with two small wooden skewers.

Schnorrer: A person who uses and manipulates others; freeloader, beggar.

Scuttle a liner: British slang meaning, "to sink a ship."

Shabbus: The Jewish Sabbath, or Shabbat. Saturday.

Simchahs: Joyous occasions or celebrations.

Smart: To feel acute pain and or suffering.

Succulent: Very enjoyable, especially dealing with taste.

Taking the Michael: British slang meaning, "to making fun of."

Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?: The controversial watering of the wicket (the ground before the batsman) at the World Series cricket game in 1955. The wet wicket jeopardized the game, which the Australians lost. Watering the wicket is not allowed during the game.

Why are you getting on everybody's wick: British slang meaning, "Why are you irritating everyone?"

Why are you driving that old lady off her conk: British slang meaning, "Why are driving that old lady nuts?"

You're beginning to get on my breasts: British slang meaning, "You're getting on my nerves."

Who's Who in the Production

ACTING COMPANY



Meg
Barbara Bryne



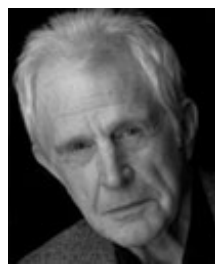
Goldberg
Allan Corduner



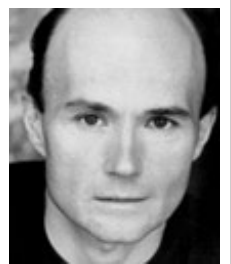
McCann
Randall Newsome



Lulu
Charlotte Parry



Petey
James A. Stephens



Stanley
Henry Stram

ARTISTIC STAFF

<i>Written by</i>	Harold Pinter
<i>Directed by</i>	Emily Mann
<i>Set Design</i>	Eugene Lee
<i>Costume Design</i>	Jennifer von Mayrhauser
<i>Lighting Design</i>	Jeff Croiter
<i>Sound Design</i>	Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen
<i>Fight Consultant</i>	Rick Sordelet
<i>Dialect Coach</i>	Gordon A. Jacoby
<i>Producing Director</i>	Mara Isaacs
<i>Director of Production</i>	David York
<i>Production Stage Manager</i>	Cheryl Mintz
<i>Stage Manager</i>	Alison Cote

A Play is Born - by Doug Langworthy

When Harold Pinter was asked to name which writers had influenced him most, he answered Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka. He said that he felt Beckett was the best prose writer living, and it's not difficult to hear Beckett's spare cadences in Pinter's. But Kafka? Well, both men create disjointed worlds in which everything seems familiar, and yet not. Actions often lack discernable motivation, and characters often appear without any reliable history. With both writers there is an air of mystery, an atmosphere of paranoia shrouding the events. To be honest, Beckett's plays also share many of the same qualities. But if we compare *The Birthday Party* with Kafka's short story "The Trial", the parallels seem particularly striking. In both Pinter's play and Kafka's story, a lodger in a rooming house is surprised one day when two strangers show up for him. It is not clear why the strangers have come for him. The day the intrusion happens is the lodger's birthday. The lodger has a landlady who treats him with great affection. The similarities are tantalizing, although Pinter's own description of his play's evolution is rooted more in the real world and makes no mention of Kafka.

While on tour as an actor with a traveling repertory company, Pinter arrived in a seaside resort where there were no rooms to be had. Pinter describes meeting a man in a pub who offered him a place to stay:

He said, "I can take you to some digs, but I wouldn't recommend them exactly." I had no where else to go and I said, "I don't care where they are." I went to these digs and found, in short, a very big woman who was the landlady and a little man, the landlord. There was no one else there, apart from this solitary lodger, and the digs were really quite filthy...

He later described the boarding house in more colorful terms: "I have filthy insane digs, a great bulging scrag of a woman with breasts rolling at her belly, an obscene household, cats, dogs, filth, tea-strainers, mess..." He ended up sharing a room with the man from the pub. When he asked him what he did for a living, he said: "Oh well, I used to be...I'm a pianist. I used to play in the concert-party here and I gave that up...I used to play in London, but I gave that up."

That image of the filthy boarding house, larger than life landlady and ex-pianist lodger stayed with Pinter for a number of years. "Then, I thought, what would happen if two people knocked on his door? The knock was the knowledge of the Gestapo. I'll never forget: it was 1953 or 1954. The war had been over less than ten years. It was very much on my mind."

So from a little life experience and a little imagination, Pinter found the basic ingredients of *The Birthday Party*. Oh yes, and perhaps with a little help from Kafka, another Jewish writer who knew something about the fear of a knock in the night.

Pinter Critical Overview - By Adam Immerwahr

Harold Pinter was born on October 10, 1930 in Hackney, North London, to working-class Jewish parents. This set of facts would be enormously inconsequential if they did not serve to create a group of circumstances that would soon have a profound influence on Pinter's life. Before he would be able to enter the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts at the age of eighteen, before he was able to perform his first roles in school productions at Hackney Downs Grammar School, Pinter would be evacuated from London on the threat of anti-Semitic violence during World War II. Even after returning to a much safer London, Pinter would never forget the menace and the fear that had plagued his family during his early years.

Pinter was never able to finish his tenure at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts; he was expelled after registering as a conscientious objector to the war, thus avoiding military service. He began writing poetry and acting professionally, and soon decided to combine the two fields and become a playwright. In 1957, Pinter's *The Room* was produced at Bristol University Drama Department, and by 1958 he had written *The Birthday Party*, which opened in London on May 19th of that year to horrid reviews. But the day after the show closed, *Sunday Times* critic Harold Hobson declared that Pinter "possesses the most original, disturbing and arresting talent in theatrical London."

Less than eight years after the London production of *The Birthday Party*, Pinter was created a Commander of the Order of the British Empire, and he has just recently been awarded the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature. In between, Pinter was nominated for two Oscars, four Tony Awards (winning for *The Homecoming*), had the word "Pinteresque" adopted by the Oxford English Dictionary, refused a knighthood by Queen Elizabeth II, and received the great privilege of having a Seinfeld episode written based on one of his plays ("The Betrayal," first aired on November 20th, 1997, was based on Pinter's *Betrayal* and features a character named "Pinter").

Pinter's plays, though not - for the most part - biographical, are filled with influences from his life. His background as a poet has undoubtedly informed his brilliant use of language, and his continuing experience as a performer has trained him to find theatrically thrilling situations. His political views can be seen throughout his plays, as in *The Birthday Party*, in which a nebulous and dangerous state serves as an oppressive force. His language bears the marks of his early childhood, spent in a London that had grown dangerous for a young Jewish child. Underneath the surface of his words lies a wealth of unspoken communication. This "subtext" can turn even the most demotic phrase into a threat, or a plea. "So often," Pinter said, "below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken." Pinter's characters choose to use the most everyday speech to mask the most extraordinary emotions. As Pinter said in 1962, "There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed."

Pinter Plays and Screenplays

Harold Pinter's Plays

The Room (1957)
The Birthday Party (1957)
The Dumb Waiter (1957)
A Slight Ache (1958)
The Hothouse (1958)
The Caretaker (1959)
A Night Out (1959)
Night School (1960)
The Dwarfs (1960)
The Collection (1961)
The Lover (1962)
Tea Party (1964)
The Homecoming (1964)
The Basement (1966)
Landscape (1967)
Silence (1968)
Old Times (1970)
Monologue (1972)
No Man's Land (1974)
Betrayal (1978)
Family Voices (1980)
Other Places (1982)
A Kind of Alaska (1982)
Victoria Station (1982)
One for the Road (1984)
Mountain Language (1988)
The New World Order (1991)
Party Time (1991)
Moonlight (1993)
Ashes to Ashes (1996)
Celebration (1999)
Remembrance of Things Past (2000)

Harold Pinter's Screenplays

The Caretaker (1963)
The Servant (1963)
The Pumpkin Eater (1963)
The Quiller Memorandum (1965)
Accident (1966)
The Birthday Party (1967)
The Go-Between (1969)
The Homecoming (1969)
The French Lieutenant's
Langrishe Go Down (1970)
The Proust Screenplay (1972)
The Last Tycoon (1974)
The French Lieutenant's Woman (1980)
Betrayal (1981)
Victory (1982)
Turtle Diary (1984)
The Handmaid's Tale (1987)
Reunion (1988)
Heat of the Day (1988)
Comfort of Strangers (1989)
The Dreaming Child (1997)
The Tragedy of King Lear (2000)

Pinter on Pinter

"I think that the plays like *The Birthday Party*, *The Dumb Waiter* and *Hothouse* are metaphors, really. When you look at them, they're much closer to an extremely critical look at authoritarian postures—state power, family power, religious power, power used to undermine, if not destroy, the individual, or the questioning voice, or the voice which simply went away from the mainstream and refused to become part of an easily recognizable set of standards and social values."

"A play is not an essay, nor should a playwright under any exhortation damage the



consistency of his characters by injecting a remedy or apology for their actions into the last act, simply because we have been brought up to expect, rain or sunshine, the last act 'resolution.' To supply an explicit moral tag to an evolving and compulsive dramatic image seems to be facile, impertinent and dishonest. Where this takes place it is not theatre but a crossword puzzle. The audience holds the paper. The play fills in the blanks. Everyone's happy."

"What goes on in my plays is realistic, but what I'm doing is not realism."

"Language...is a highly ambiguous business. So often, below the word spoken, is the thing known and unspoken. My characters tell me so much and no more, with reference to their experience, their aspirations, their motives, their history.

Between my lack of biographical data about them and the ambiguity of what they say lies a territory which is not only worthy of exploration, but which is compulsory to explore."



"So language in art remains a highly ambiguous transaction, a quicksand, a trampoline, a frozen pool which might give way under you, the author, at any time."

"There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false."

"Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task. More often than not you stumble upon the truth in the dark, colliding with it or just glimpsing an image or a shape which seems to correspond to the truth, often without realising that you have done so. But the real truth is that there never is any such thing as one truth to be found in dramatic art. There are many. These truths challenge each other, recoil from each other, reflect each other, ignore each other, tease each other, are blind to each other. Sometimes you feel you have the truth of a moment in your hand, then it slips through your fingers and is lost."

Emily Mann on Pinter and *The Birthday Party*



A few weeks before rehearsals began, McCarter's artistic director and Birthday Party director Emily Mann sat down to discuss her perspective on Harold Pinter.

A few years ago I had the very good fortune to finally meet Harold Pinter, who had been an idol of mine as I think he was for almost all my generation of theater artists. It was right after *Betrayal* opened, another Pinter play that I directed here. He heard it was a great success. He did a reading at Princeton of some of his plays. We met afterwards and it was one of those electric meetings--we couldn't stop talking to each other.

He comes from working class Jews in London's East End, a very, very tough neighborhood. He was 15 years old when World War II ended, so he was very much aware of what was going on then. He was always afraid of a knock on the door and being taken away. He knew that people like him were dying in concentration camps. He knew his relatives on the continent were being killed. That informed his whole understanding of what it was to be alive, that he could be killed for just being who he was. He was very aware of the question of genocide, very aware of the question of violence.

When I was in England recently I picked up a wonderful book in the National Theatre Bookstore called *Pinter and the Theatre*. In it, an interviewer asked him what prompted him to write his play *Ashes to Ashes*. And Pinter says, "From my point of view, the woman is simply haunted by the world she's been born into, by all the atrocities that have happened, in fact they seem to have become part of her own experience, although in my view she hasn't actually experienced them herself. I have myself been haunted by these images for many years, and I'm sure I'm not alone in that. I was brought up during the Second World War-- I was about 15 when the war ended. I could listen and hear, and add two and two. So these images of horror and man's inhumanity to man were very strong in my mind as a young man. They've been with me all my life really. You can't avoid them because they're around you simply, all the time." When I reread *The Birthday Party* recently I realized that this is what it's all about. It's not just a fun little noir comedy about paranoia. Some people dismiss it as such. It is about a man dealing with the terror of being misunderstood, taken away and destroyed by forces bigger than himself. Meeting Pinter, coming face to face with his passion and rage, his savage sense of humor and his fierce intelligence particularized the play for me.

If you haven't read *The Birthday Party*, the story takes place in a seaside working class town in England, in a so-called bed and breakfast or boarding house. Pinter started out as an actor, and while he was traveling with a repertory company, he ended up in a little seaside town where he could find nowhere to stay. He was in a bar late one night and this very seedy looking guy said to him "You can crash where I'm staying, in this crummy bed and breakfast." He warned him that it was filthy and the woman who took care of it was a terrible housekeeper, but Pinter was desperate for a place to sleep and went and spent the night there. He says it was even worse than he could have possibly imagined. The leaves were just left to sit in the teapot for days, the proprietress hadn't really dusted or cleaned in months, and she was this sort of dotty old lady who seemed to have a kind of weird attraction to her boarder, whether it was treating him like a baby boy or as a lover, it was just very odd and inappropriate. So that stuck in his head and became a seed for the setting of this play.

So we're there in this seaside town with Meg, the proprietress, and her husband, Petey, who is very quiet and sweet. Two strangers come to town, Goldberg and McCann. They arrive in a very snazzy car and decide to stay in this rooming house. They have come to get Stanley who is the boarder and take him away. We don't know why. Stanley has either been hiding out there, or has just been living there, we don't know. In the course of this event there is a birthday party that Meg throws for Stanley. He says it isn't his birthday, but we don't know if that's true or not. In the end McCann and Goldberg have broken Stanley and they take him away. That's basically the story of the play.

But this is Harold Pinter, and what he's done that no one else had done up to this point in English-speaking theatre is to use language in an entirely new way, and to use the question of mystery in an entirely new way. Rehearsing Pinter, the key is to find the truth in the secret play beneath the words, so that the actors know exactly what they're doing, and yet the ambiguities their specific work engenders makes the play a fascinating mystery trip for the audience.. With this play you don't ever know for sure who Goldberg and McCann are. Although Goldberg is clearly a Jewish character, working class, East End, is he involved with organized crime? Is he a member of a political organization? A religious organization, a mental hospital? Why are he and McCann together? Why do they want to get Stanley? There's no simple answer. You don't know why Stanley has been singled out, but you do know that Goldberg is an important man, that Stanley's done something he and McCann consider very wrong, and without Stanley necessarily understanding why, he will be taken away. All of his fears about being taken away and destroyed do come true.

In terms of Pinter's language, everyone talks about the pauses, the famous Pinter pauses. Pinter says in the beginning he put in the pauses because he just didn't want the actors to run on. He has had to admit there is much more to it, that there is as much eloquence in the silences as there is in the language, and what is going on during them is compulsory to understand, and so that's a great challenge for actors--to find out what's being said when they're not speaking. It's a very active play for the audience; it's as if the audience must become a kind of sleuth, piecing together the clues. In Pinter, there's never an extra syllable, there's never an extra word. He uses language as a weapon; he uses language as a seduction; he uses language as a way to upset or amuse an audience in an altogether new way. His craft is extraordinary, so deft it appears effortless. He's a master.

Spotlight on Fight Choreographer: Rick Sordelet

Let's start easy; what do you do? What is the role of a Fight Choreographer/Director?

My role is to facilitate the directors vision concerning the illusions of violence in their story.

What are some of the measures you take, from first rehearsals, all of the way through performance, to ensure the safety of the combatants?

First is to establish an atmosphere of trust between the actors and myself. I want them to feel confident that they can perform the illusions of violence safely and truthfully under their imaginary circumstances. Once that is accomplished I will ask them to do the choreography every day so it becomes second nature.

Do your actors usually have special training to participate in the fights? What does their training entail?

No actor has to have special training. The professional ones have all been in shows where they have had to do Stage Combat. Most come from training conservatories of universities. I find the whole certification process useless in professional theater. I appreciate the training and highly encourage it, but some actors think their certificate is the ticket in. It's not. Knowing how to craft is the gold standard in professional theater.

How do you, in a play like The Birthday Party, whose conflict is wrought with a kind of enigmatic angst, match or sustain that tone throughout the moments of physical struggle?

Just tell the truth in the moment. The truth will match the arc of the story and the audience will see the style.

How different is it to choreograph or direct a "fight" which employs traditional weaponry, such as broadswords or rapiers, versus a "hand-to-hand" combat, which may use only the actors' bodies, or whatever props happen to be within arms' reach?

Using swords or other edged weapons requires a different set of skills than hand to hand. In both cases I still rely on the basics for the actors and see how well they accomplish them. The more skilled the actor the more we can do with the choreography. I still craft the story based on the director's vision. I will push the actor to help me create choreography that is truthful to the moment and seems like the most natural thing to happen.

Can you talk about the kind of training someone needs to be a professional Fight Director/Choreographer?

Movement background. Understanding how the body works. Being a people person, understanding the craft of acting, directing and being able to speak the language of other designers. One must be very flexible and kind. Understanding and yet firm.

Can you give any advice to a young person who is interested in entering your profession?

Study everything. All of life is applicable. Know everything about everything. Study history and human behavior. Learn how to tell stories. Train everyday.

Drama Praxis



This resource guide enables teachers and leaders to explore drama as a mode of learning. Through this collaborative art form, teachers and students can act out, reflect upon and transform the story of *The Birthday Party*, allowing them to gain a better appreciation of the material through their own individual experience of it. In addition, by engaging with one another, students utilize skills that are vital to communication and interpretive skills in the school setting.

Drama-in-Education seeks to synthesize the activities of creative drama, arts-based curricula and theater convention into experiences aimed at developing imagination, awareness of self and others, aesthetic taste and life skills. Often these goals are achieved through the examination of a particular theme or topic, which contributes to critical thinking about the world in which we live. By providing structures and contexts, which both excite the interest of participants and call for creative problem-solving, Drama-in-Education promotes deeper thinking about a wide variety of issues.

This guide has been designed for teachers to utilize drama methods in an exploration of the themes and situations presented in the play. We encourage you to adapt these lessons and activities to your individual teaching situations, and thereby to discover the importance and power of drama in the classroom.

The following questions and activities are designed to help students prepare for the performance, and then build on their impressions and interpretations afterwards. While most of the exercises provide specific instructions, please feel free to adapt these activities to accommodate your own teaching strategies and curricular needs.

Core Curriculum Standards

According to the NJ Department of Education, "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." Our production of *The Birthday Party* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students' education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

1.1	All students will acquire knowledge and skills that increase aesthetic awareness in dance, music, theater and visual arts.
1.2	All students will refine perceptual, intellectual, physical and technical skills through creating dance, music, theater and/or visual arts.
1.4	All students will demonstrate knowledge of the process of critique
1.5	All students will identify the various historical, social and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.
1.6	All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sounds and events.

Viewing *The Birthday Party* and then participating in the pre and post-show discussions suggested in this resource guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

3.3	All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
3.4	All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
3.5	All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources

In addition, the production of *The Birthday Party* as well as the resource guide activities will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

6.1	All students will identify the various historical, social and cultural influences and traditions which have generated artistic accomplishments throughout the ages and which continue to shape contemporary arts.
6.6	All students will develop design skills for planning the form and function of space, structures, objects, sounds and events.

Pre-Show Discussion Questions

- Pinter's plays are full of with unanswered questions; it is up to the directors/actors/audience to speculate why characters behave in the manner they do. Have your students research recent current events to find a story where someone does something inexplicable, e.g. commits a crime, performs an act of extreme altruism, a court decision, etc. Have your students divide into groups and choose one story for their group. Next, have them make a list of possible reasons the subject of the story behaved as he or she did. Was it something that happened in his or her childhood? Could the act, however out of the ordinary, be justified? Discuss the list of suppositions with your class.
- Stanley is afraid of being taken away against his will. Research different historical events where people were taken from their homes/communities against their will. Try and find testimonies of tales of survivors from that time period. What was it like to be exiled or imprisoned against their own wishes? What was it like for those who lived in anticipation of abduction? How did it affect their families, friends or neighbors?
- Look over the "Character Profiles" in this guide. Choose one character and have your students write a monologue from his or her point of view explaining feelings and thoughts about his or her past. Ask your students how they imagine each character will look, act and speak. Have a discussion with your students and determine which celebrities you would cast, if you could produce your dream version of *The Birthday Party*.




4. Offer your students background information about playwright Harold Pinter. Discuss what expectations they might have of *The Birthday Party*.
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Post-Show Discussion Questions

1. What surprised you most when you saw *The Birthday Party* at McCarter? How did this production compare to your expectations?
 2. Compare and contrast two breakfast ritual scenes in *The Birthday Party*. What do we learn by seeing essentially the same scene on two different days? What is revealed in what is said and not said, and contrast between the two? Think about the first scene of the play, which we assume to be the status quo in Petey and Meg's life. How is their everyday life affected by the presence of McCann and Goldberg in the second? Has the tone of the breakfast changed on the surface? Is there a tension between Meg and Petey? Why doesn't Meg mention any recollection of the previous night's conflict? Does this make you question the first breakfast?
 3. In 1958, the year after *The Birthday Party* premiered, Harold Pinter said, "There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. A thing is not necessarily either true or false; it can be both true and false." Recently, in Harold Pinter's Nobel prize acceptance speech he asserted that this quote applies to his perception of art, and not of reality. What, in *The Birthday Party*, can we accept as truth? What is in question? Make a list of facts presented in the play which we can assume are true, and those which we question as false. Examine the above Pinter quote and compare the examples you and your students came up with. How does Pinter's quote affect the way you feel about your list? Do some things become less true or false than you originally presumed?
 4. It is important for the actors and director to make conjectures about the reality their characters are living in. Having seen the play, what are some possibilities about who McCann and Goldberg are? What is their relationship to Stanley? What does Petey know about why they are there? Is Stanley guilty of something, or is he a victim? Are Goldberg and McCann justified in their actions? Have your students write a diary entry about of them which reveals what his "true" intentions are. Read them aloud and compare scenarios with the rest of the class.
 5. Often, critics or scholars describe other writing as being "Pinteresque". Based on what you have seen, what do you think "Pinteresque" writing is? Who are other writers who can be described as "Pinteresque?"
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Enhance the Performance

1. **Quiet on the set!:** What is not said in Pinter's plays is often as important as the written lines. Pair your students up and have them write some lines of dialogue, maybe four each. Make sure the emotional stakes are very high, perhaps one person desperately wants something and the other won't give it to them, e.g. forgiveness, a prom date, the keys to the car for the night. Picking the relationship of the two characters will help spur them along. When they have finished, ask them to rehearse their scene for performance, except that one character is not allowed to speak. They must use their physical actions to communicate the lines they have written for one character. After performance, discuss with the audience whether or not the situation was clear. Brainstorm a list of physical actions people typically employ to communicate with one another
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2. **Hot-Seating:** Choose one student to take on the role of one of the characters. Have the other students question and interrogate this character on the actions and choices this character has made throughout the play. Have the class come up with several statements about this character and the choices they made.
 3. **Secondary Sourcing:** Having seen the play, have each student create his or her own character descriptions for the cast of characters: Petey, Meg, Stanley, Goldberg, McCann, and Lulu. Start with a physical description, but also try to encapsulate something of their personalities. Imagine that this piece of writing has to be included in a future edition of the script of *The Birthday Party*. Ask your students to be as descriptive as possible, and try to capture these people's characteristics and mannerisms.
 4. **Happy Birthday to you, Happy Birthday to who...?:** Meg insists that it is Stanley's birthday, even though he emphatically denies it. As an exercise, let us assume Meg is lying. What are the repercussions of such a fabrication? Imagine someone makes up a lie about your own life, however innocuous it may seem, e.g. you passed a difficult test, you love baseball more than anything, you were just declared valedictorian, etc. Discuss how this could alter people's perception of you. Why do you think Pinter chose to focus his play on something as harmless as a birthday party, which may or may not be bogus? Is there a possible metaphor in a birthday? How does the seemingly innocuous event serve the sinister subtext which pervades the entire story?
 5. **From the Page to the Stage:** Divide students into small groups of four or five. Assign each group a scene from the text to stage. Each group needs to decide how to cast and block the scene in preparation for performing in front of the class. Give the students sufficient time to work on this project in class; also allow them at least one night to find and bring in rudimentary props, costumes and music from home. Have a scene festival as each group performs its version in front of the class. After all the groups have performed, discuss. How was the staging similar or different? Discuss different adaptations of this text and how each director has a different effect on their audience. Have a discussion with the class about different ways to direct this play and unique interpretation that they may have seen or read.
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Additional Resources for The Birthday Party

- Armstrong, Raymond. *Kafka and Pinter: Shadowboxing: The Struggle between Father and Son*. St. Martin's Press, London and New York, 1998.
 - Billington, Michael. *The Life and Work of Harold Pinter*. Faber and Faber, London, 1996.
 - Esslin, Martin. *Pinter, the playwright*. Methuen Drama, London, 1992.
 - Knowles, Ronald. *Understanding Harold Pinter*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia, S.C., 1995.
 - Page, Malcolm. *File on Pinter*. Methuen Drama, London, 1993.
 - Peacock, D. Keith. *Harold Pinter and the New British Theatre*. Greenwood Press, 1997.
 - Pinter, Harold. *Conversations with Pinter* by Mel Gussow. Limelight Editions, New York, 1994.
 - Raby, Peter. *The Cambridge Companion to Harold Pinter*. Cambridge University Press, 2001.
 - Regal, Martin S. *Harold Pinter: A Question of timing*. St. Martin's Press, 1995.
 - Smith, Ian. *Pinter in the Theatre*. Nick Hern Press, 2005.
 - Thompson, David T. *Pinter, the Player's Playwright*. Schocken Books, New York, 1985.
 - Diamond, Elin. *Pinter's Comic Play*. Associated University Presses, Cranbury, NJ, 1985.
 - www.haroldpinter.org
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