The Age of Innocence

By EDITH WHARTON

Adapted for the stage by DOUGLAS McGrath

Directed by DOUG HUGHES

SEPTMBER 7–OCTOBER 7, 2018

"AN ENTRANCING, LYRICAL LOVE STORY."
—Hartford Courant

McCarter THEATRE CENTER

Resource Guide

With Alignments to the National Core Arts Standards and the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content State Standards

Created by McCarter Theater Education and Engagement. 2018.
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Alignments to the Common Core Curriculum Standards and NJ Core Curriculum Content State Standards

McCarte’s production of *The Age of Innocence* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich students’ educational experiences by addressing many Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening Common Core Anchor Standards as well as specific New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards for Visual and Performing Arts.

**Pre-Show Prep**
RI.11-12.2. Determine two or more central ideas of a text, and analyze their development and how they interact to provide a complex analysis; provide an objective summary of the text.

SL.11-12.1.A. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

**In Context: Research Activity**
W.11-12.7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

W.11-12.9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

**Reading Comprehension and Analysis Activity: Routledge’s Manual of Etiquette**
RI.11-12.4. Determine the meanings of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text.

RI.11-12.9. Analyze and reflect on documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes and rhetorical features, including primary source documents relevant to U.S. and/or global history.

**The Mount**
W.11-12.3.D. Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

NCAS. Connecting Anchor Standards #10. Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

**A Theater Reviewer Prepares**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.

NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #8. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work.

NJSLSA.R3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Created by McCarter Theatre. 2018.
**Back to School Babble**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #8. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work

**Performance Discussion and Reflection**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #8. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work.

**Analyzing Adaptation**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #8. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work.
RL.11-12.7. Analyze multiple interpretations of a story, drama, or poem, evaluating how each version interprets the source text.

**Older and Wiser: Creative Writing Activity**
W.11-12.3.B. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
NCAS. Creating Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

**Primary and Secondary Source Analysis**
RI.11-12.9. Analyze and reflect on documents of historical and literary significance for their themes, purposes and rhetorical features, including primary source documents relevant to U.S. and/or global history.
SL.11-12.4. Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically. The content, organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**Four Corners**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work.
SL.11-12.4. Present information, findings and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically. The content, organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

**The Review**
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and Analyze Artistic Work
NCAS. Responding Anchor Standard #8. Interpret Intent and Meaning in Artistic Work
NJSLSA.R3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
The Age of Innocence
Pre-Show Resource Guide

Members of the company in rehearsal for The Age of Innocence. Photo by Tom Miller.
Pre-Show Prep

Explore the 

**synopsis** and **character profiles** located in the **Appendix** of the McCarter Pre-Show guide with students, preferably as a class or in small groups, to provide intellectual and creative context for Douglas McGrath’s adaptation of Edith Wharton’s Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Age of Innocence*.

Visit McCarter’s website to explore the production photos of *The Age of Innocence*.


After engaging with the synopsis, character profiles, and production photos, ask students to journal about their reactions to the materials with any of the following prompts:

**Did anything you read particularly pique your interest about the play or the characters it features?**

*Explain your response.*

**In the production photos, there is a picture of a pianist.**

*What role might music play in the production?*

**In the production photos, pay close attention to the costumes. What do they tell you about the characters? More specifically, what do they say about the status of the characters?**

In small groups or as a class discuss your responses. Possible follow up questions might include:

**Based on the character profiles do these characters sound like any people you know in real life?**

*Of whom do they remind you and why?*

**What incident, idea, or issue outlined in the synopsis or character profiles most concerns or engages you intellectually? Emotionally?**
In Context: *The Age of Innocence*

In order to deepen your class’ knowledge and level of understanding of the play’s world and its characters, its playwright, and his influences, have them research, either in groups or individually, the following topics:

**Historical and Cultural Context of *The Age of Innocence***
The Gilded Age of America
French fashion vs. American fashion in the late 1800s
Newport, Rhode Island in the late 1800s
The Panic of 1873

**The Age of Innocence Background and Inspiration**
Edith Wharton
Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence*
Life after World War I in Europe and the USA
Hartford Stage production of *The Age of Innocence* & reviews

**The Age of Innocence in Production Today**
Biography of Douglas McGrath (adaptor)
Biography of Doug Hughes (director)
Biography of Mark Bennett (original music & sound design)
Biography of Linda Cho (costume designer)
Biography of Peter Pucci (choreographer)
Biography of Sierra Boggess (the actress playing Countess Ellen Olenska)

Encourage students to use a variety of resources (i.e. Encyclopedias, books, magazines, the internet, etc.) to conduct their research. After the students have conducted their research, ask them to compile their findings into a short essay, PowerPoint, or Prezi presentation. Following the presentations, ask students to reflect upon their research process and discoveries.
Reading Comprehension and Analysis Activity: 
*Routledge’s Manual of Etiquette*

In preparation for experiencing *The Age of Innocence*, have students read an excerpt from the book *Routledge’s Manual of Etiquette* (1875) by George Routledge, which can be found in the Appendix. This document informed the readers at that time of appropriate behavior for all different situations but it can also provide insight into the world of the play and its characters, as well as the expectations that existed for people within high society. This excerpt is located in the Appendix of this guide. After reading aloud as a class or independently, utilize the Reading Comprehension and Analysis Questions also found in the Appendix.

Helen Cespedes as May. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.
The Mount

The Mount was Edith Wharton’s home, workspace, and retreat in Massachusetts, which she designed herself. Today, it is a monument to her life and work, offering visitors a chance to learn more about Wharton while also hosting cultural events for the public. Have students take a look at edithwharton.org. Give them some time to explore the site, specifically Wharton’s biography and the descriptions of the grounds of The Mount. Lead a discussion about what was found on the website. Some example questions include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What are some aspects of the house that stand out to you?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does the design of The Mount tell you about Edith Wharton’s personality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did she value in her life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does the use of the space today reflect Wharton’s personality?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the unique aspects of the estate is how personal it was to Edith Wharton’s interests and preferences. Have students design their own house and challenge them to think about the details as they pertain to their own personality and what is important to them. Students can choose how they want to represent their house (as a model, blueprint, collage, etc.). Some questions that might help spark their creativity are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How big will the house be? Why is it that size?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the general atmosphere of the house? Is this a place for you to host people and large parties or is this a space for you to escape and decompress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the space need to have? A garden, a stable? Why is important for you to include these various spaces within your home?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What would the interior design look like? Any specific styles that you enjoy? How does that reflect your own personality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the important elements of the space that would make it uniquely yours?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you like your home to be used when you are gone?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the completion of the assignment, have students share their homes and justify the choices that they made.
A Theater Reviewer Prepares

A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a “professional audience member,” whose job is to report the news, in detail, of a play’s production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community, or those interested in the Arts). To prepare students to write an accurate, insightful and compelling theater review following their attendance at the performance of Douglas McGrath’s adaptation of The Age of Innocence, prime them for the task by discussing in advance the three basic elements of a theatrical review: reportage, analysis and judgment.

- **Reportage** is concerned with the basic information of the production, or the journalist’s “four w’s” (i.e., who, what, where, when), as well as the elements of production, which include the text, setting, costumes, lighting, sound, acting and directing (see the Theater Reviewer’s Checklist in the Appendix). When reporting upon these observable phenomena of production, the reviewer’s approach should be factual, descriptive and objective; any reference to quality or effectiveness should be reserved for the analysis section of the review.

- With **analysis** the theater reviewer segues into the realm of the subjective and attempts to interpret the artistic choices made by the director and designers and the effectiveness not of these choices; specific moments, ideas and images from the production are considered in the analysis.

- **Judgment** involves the reviewer’s opinion as to whether the director’s and designers’ intentions were realized, and if their collaborative, artistic endeavor was ultimately a worthwhile one. Theater reviewers always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.

Remind students that the goal of a theater reviewer is “to see accurately, describe fully, think clearly, and then (and only then) to judge fairly the merits of the work” (Thaiss and Davis, Writing for the Theatre, 1999). Proper analytical preparation before the show and active listening and viewing during will result in the effective writing and crafting of their reviews.
The Age of Innocence
Post-Show Resource Guide

Sierra Boggess as Ellen. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.
Post-Show Questions for Discussion

Use the following questions as a means for students to evaluate their experience of the performance of *The Age of Innocence*, as well as to encourage their own imaginative and artistic response. Consider also that some of the Pre-Show activities might enhance students’ appreciation of both the play and its playwright post-performance.

*The Age of Innocence* Back to School Babble

On the bus returning from the theatre, have students write down 5 words to describe the feelings and thoughts they have about the production they just saw. For homework, ask students to elaborate on two of their chosen words either as a journaling assignment, a school-based online forum, or via social media, using #AgeofInnocencePlay and @mccartertheatre on Instagram and Twitter.

Questions to Ask Students about the Production

- What was your overall reaction to *The Age of Innocence*? Did you find the production compelling? Challenging? Memorable? Unique? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.
- What themes of the play especially stood out in production? [Themes might include: forbidden love, the loss of innocence, rejecting society’s expectations etc.] What themes were made even more apparent or especially provocative in performance? Explain your responses.
- Is there a moment in the play that specifically resonated with you either intellectually or emotionally? Which moment was it and why do you think it affected you?
- Was there anything about the play—for example, its story, structure, characters, language, dramatic style—that felt new or different to you in relation to your experience of other plays (either on the page or in performance)?
- Did you personally identify with any of the characters who were portrayed in *The Age of Innocence*? If so, which one?
- Would you say that this show is more of a love story or a piece of social commentary? Explain your choice.
- What pieces of information about the motives and desires of the characters were revealed by the musical numbers in this play?
- This show looks at the loss of innocence of the various characters. How did each of the characters lose their innocence? Did they ever have innocence to begin with?

Questions to Ask Students about the Style and Design of the Production

- Was there a moment in *The Age of Innocence* that was so entertaining or engaging that it remains with you? Write a vivid description of that moment. As you write your description, pretend that you are writing about the moment for someone who was unable to experience the performance.
- The director of a show is the person who is charge of executing a vision for the production. The directorial vision is what the director wants the play to communicate to the viewers.
Summarize director Doug Hughes’ directorial vision. What do you think he hoped the audience would take away?

- Think back to the scenes that included dance and movement. How did choreographer Peter Pucci utilize different styles of movement to further enhance the story?
- What did you notice about John Lee Beatty’s scenic design? Did it provide an appropriate, effective, and/or evocative setting for the story of The Age of Innocence? How and why, or why not? What considerations do you think went into his design choices?
- What happened with the lights in the show? How did Ben Stanton’s lighting design affect the show? In what moments did the lighting design especially enhance the world of the play?
- What did you notice about the costume designs by Linda Cho? What do you think were the artistic and practical decisions that went into the creation of the costumes for this production?
- What did you notice about the original music composition and sound design by Mark Bennett? Can you remember what you heard and describe it in words? How did the consistent presence of music affect the entire show? Was it distracting or did it support the action taking place?
- How did the overall production elements (costumes, set, lights, sound, etc.) suit the story, inform the characters, and reflect the central themes of The Age of Innocence? How did these choices support or compete with the directorial vision?

Helen Cespedes as May and Andrew Veenstra (foreground) as Newland with Boyd Gaines as the Old Gentleman in rehearsal. Photo by Tom Miller.
Analyzing Adaptation: Reflection and Discussion

Challenge students to recall the final scene of the show. These responses can be written or shared aloud with the class. Ask students to think about:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did Newland not want to go into the house to see Ellen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who has the power in this scene?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did the final song symbolize?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you categorize this as a happy or sad ending to the show? For whom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following a reflection on the ending of the show, have students read a part of the final chapter of the novel, *The Age of Innocence*, found in the Appendix. Once they have read the selection, lead them in a discussion about the repercussions of this change and how it affects the overall message of the story. Some questions to consider include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How does this differ from what you saw in the show?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why might playwright Douglas McGrath have changed details about the ending?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is there a shift in power as compared to the show?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does this final scene affect your understanding of the play? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this tell you about what might happen when a show is adapted for the stage?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you categorize this as a happy or sad ending to the story? For whom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How does this align with your response to the end of the play?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Older and Wiser: Creative Writing Activity

When Douglas McGrath was adapting *The Age of Innocence*, he changed the story’s point of view from omniscient narration to an older Newland, first person narration. By doing so, he allowed the character to have the space to reflect on his past experiences and comment on what he had learned since then while moving throughout the world of the play.

For this activity, ask students to think about an experience that has some significance to them; perhaps it is a moment of sadness or of great pride. Nevertheless, it should be an experience where they learned something or that they grew from having gone through it. Ask students to spend 5-10 minutes writing down all of the details about that moment. You may choose to guide students in their writing using the following prompts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What happened? What went wrong? What went right?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you remember most?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Include details and be specific: what did you see, smell, and hear?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How did you feel in that moment and how did you react?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you feel about the situation now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think your life has or hasn’t changed because of your reaction to that situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why is this experience important to you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following this brainstorming session, encourage students to imagine that they have been commissioned, or paid, to write a play about this event by McCarter Theater. McCarter would like to see a draft of the opening monologue of the play before they write the rest. Lead students in a 20-25 minute free write of a monologue where they introduce themselves as narrator and the context regarding the play that is focused on. Encourage them to think of this as a space for them to talk directly to an audience at the beginning of a play.

After students have finished their creative writing piece, ask them to find a classmate and share their monologue. They can read their own pieces out loud or they may choose to trade papers, reading one another’s so that the write can hear his/her monologue aloud.
Primary and Secondary Source Analysis

When World War I broke out, Edith Wharton was living in the United States and preparing for her summer vacation in Paris. Instead of canceling or changing destinations, Edith Wharton decided to move permanently to Paris and support the French war effort. Throughout the war, Wharton worked with organizations that provided support for refugees, the injured, the unemployed and the displaced. When the war ended, she wrote *The Age of Innocence* and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. Have students complete the the primary and secondary worksheet included in the Appendix.

Following the students’ completion of the worksheet, challenge them to discuss their response in pairs or small groups. Ask them to reflect on:

**How might WWI, living in Europe and the things that Wharton saw have influenced her writing and choice of subject matter?**

**How do you think Wharton classified her work? What message do you think she hoped the reader might take away?**

**Is this story relevant to audiences today? Why should we continue to interact with this story now? Where do you see connections to society as you know it?**

Boyd Gaines as the Old Gentleman. Photo by T. Charles Erickson.
Four Corners – Character Edition

Lead students in a four corners activity. When you ask a question, you will assign an answer to each of the room’s corners and ask the students to go to the corner representing the answer they most firmly agree with. Challenge students to choose one answer/corner for each of the questions that you ask. If they are struggling to choose only one or feel particularly passionate about multiple corners, they can stand between them. If they don’t agree with any of the corners, they can choose to stand in the middle of the room but they must explain their answer. When students arrive in their various corners, encourage them to discuss with one another why they believe that the answer attached to their corner is correct.

Following these small group discussions, have each of the corners present a summary of their conversation. This can take the shape of a debate between the various corners. Allow students to challenge one another’s assertions or change corners in light of a particularly compelling response.

Four Corners Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who was your favorite character: the Old Gentleman, Newland, Ellen, or May?</td>
<td>Another character? Stand in the center!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was the protagonist: the Old Gentlemen, Newland, Ellen, or May?</td>
<td>Why were they the protagonist?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who was in the wrong in the show or the antagonist: Newland, Ellen, May, or society?</td>
<td>How? Who were they wronging?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose responsibility was it to stop the affair: Newland, Ellen, May, or no one?</td>
<td>Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who should’ve been the narrator of the story: Ellen, May, Edith Wharton, or the Old Gentleman?</td>
<td>Explain your choice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who changed the most over the course of the story: Newland, May, Ellen, Mrs. Manson-Mingott?</td>
<td>How did they change? What caused this change?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Age of Innocence: The Review

A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a “professional audience member,” whose job is to provide reportage of a play’s production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community, or those interested in the arts).

To start, have students research online for theatrical reviews of *The Age of Innocence* production at McCarter Theatre and/or Hartford Stage. Once a number of reviews have been culled from online, break students up in to pairs and ask them to analyze and critique the review both for their critical perspective and for their quality of writing. Ask them to consider:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the reviewer use active and descriptive language? What words or phrases particularly stood out in the review?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the reviewer consider/discuss all of the elements of production (i.e. scenic elements, costumes, lighting, music, acting and direction)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the reviewer seem to understand and articulate the intentions of the play and provide a personal judgment as to whether or not the production succeeded?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Then, have students take on the role of theater critic by writing a review of the production. Reviewers often ask themselves:

What is the playwright and this production attempting to do?

Just like the ones that the students read, the critic also offers personal judgment as to whether the artistic intentions of a production were achieved, effective and worthwhile. Things to consider before writing:

Student reviewers may want to use words generated from the “Back to School Bus Babble” exercise located on page 12 of this guide.

Theater critics/reviewers always back up their opinions with evidence and details.

The elements of production that can be discussed in a theatrical review are the play text or script (and its themes, plot, characters, etc.), scenic elements, costumes, lighting, sound, music, acting and direction (i.e., how all of these elements are put together). [See the Theater Reviewer’s Checklist located in the Appendix.]

Encourage students to submit their reviews to the school newspaper for publication, and ask them to email them to us at palekson@mccarter.org!
The Age of Innocence
Resource Guide Appendix

The company of The Age of Innocence. Photo by Tom Miller.
A. McCarter’s *The Age of Innocence* Synopsis

1. An Old Gentleman of the 1920s introduces New York City and describes the rigid expectations of high society as he looks back on the social conventions of the 1870s. At the Academy of Music, Mrs. Manson Mingott, an older woman, sits in a box with female family members. Young men in another box, notice Countess Olenska—Mrs. Mingott’s granddaughter, known familiarly as Ellen—with the women. Larry Lefferts, one of the men in the box, explains that Ellen left her family in New York City to marry a Count in Europe, then ran away with the Count’s secretary. According to Lefferts, the relationship did not last and Lovell Mingott, Ellen’s aunt, brought her scandal-drenched niece home. Newland Archer, a bright young man of New York’s elite, interrupts the gossiping and stands up for the women. The Old Gentleman explains that he himself is Newland, and in this moment he was distressed by his companion’s talk because of his as-yet-unannounced engagement to May Welland, Mrs. Mingott’s other granddaughter and Countess Olenska’s cousin.

2. Newland visits the ladies’ box, imploring May to announce their engagement at an upcoming ball so their family unity can be known. May introduces Newland and Ellen, since the two have not seen each other since they were children.

3. The night of the ball arrives and Newland declares his engagement to May. When visiting Mrs. Mingott to tell her personally of the engagement, May, Newland, and May’s mother Mrs. Welland are surprised by Ellen entering the house with the host, Julius Beaufort. Ellen congratulates Newland on his engagement as May, Mrs. Welland and Newland leave.

4. At Mrs. Mingott’s home, Mrs. Welland and Mrs. Mingott discuss how all the invitations to a dinner they had planned for Ellen were declined. Mrs. Welland insists they must ask Newland for assistance. He enlists the help of his mother Mrs. Archer, to convince Mr. and Mrs. van der Luyden, her cousins and social influencers, to turn a dinner party they are hosting into an exclusive event intended to repair Ellen’s reputation. At the dinner party, Ellen boldly approaches Newland, shocking him both by her assertiveness in conversation and by speaking openly about her marital issues.

5. On a subsequent morning, Newland arrives late for work at the Law Office of Letterblain, Lamson, and Low. He apologizes and explains that his daily custom of ordering lilies-of-the-valley for his fiancé took longer than usual that morning. Newland is assigned to the Countess’s divorce case. Her family, opposed to her divorcing the Count, has asked specifically for Newland to represent her so that the particulars of the case stay within the family. Newland goes to Ellen’s home to talk her out of filing for a divorce due to the social disaster it would create, and comforts her in the process. Ellen sadly agrees to stay married. She plays Newland “Beautiful Dreamer,” a new song from a salon that she and Julius Beaufort attend together, to defuse the tension. Ellen insists that Newland sing with her, and she gives him the sheet music to “Beautiful Dreamer” as a gift.

6. Newland later walks to the florist to order lilies for May. Impulsively, he also decides to send yellow roses without a note to Ellen. May intercepts Newland exiting the shop and he updates her on his discouragement of Ellen’s divorce, and ponders aloud about her cousin’s elusive
character. Newland then urgently declares to May that he wants to get married sooner. May
dismisses his idea because she and her parents leave for St. Augustine in a week, and she voices
her hope that he will watch over Ellen while they are away; the sole idea causes Newland worry.

7 When attending the Academy of Music alone, Newland is approached by Ellen who references
the anonymously sent yellow roses, which she holds in her hand. Julius Beaufort interrupts their
conversation to take Ellen home, leaving Lefferts the opportunity to say snide comments about
Ellen’s new living arrangements in an unfashionable neighborhood he deems a slum. Newland
reacts angrily, asserting her social independence much to the surprise of Lefferts. A week later,
Newland enters the florist shop again, this time to send yellow roses to Ellen only, which he
justifies by telling the florist that May is away. He includes a note with the roses indicating to Ellen
that he must see her. His note goes unanswered, until a few days later when, while at home,
Newland receives letters from both May and Ellen; the letter from Ellen distracts him and explains
that she has gone away to the countryside with his cousins, the van der Luydens. Newland rushes to
visit Ellen and expresses his growing feelings for her. They are close to kissing when Julius
Beaufort appears. Newland jealously presumes that she’s solicited other men to visit her and
angrily leaves.

8 Newland next goes to May in St. Augustine and asks her again to move up the wedding. May
startles Newland by accusing him of being in love with another woman but much to Newland’s
relief, it is not Ellen that May suspects. May offers him a chance to leave her if he is in love with
someone else, which he declines. Newland decides to convince Mrs. Mingott to support his desire
for an earlier marriage to her granddaughter. At Mrs. Mingott’s house, Newland learns that the
Count is attempting to court Ellen anew and Newland tells Ellen that May knows his heart belongs
to another woman. Newland confesses to Ellen that he loves her but that he also implored May to
move up the wedding - a suggestion May refused based on suspicion of his loyalty to her. A
telegram then arrives from May; Ellen reads that Mrs. Mingott has successfully convinced May’s
parents to move up the wedding.

9 May and Newland marry, but Newland immediately emotionally disconnects from May on their
honeymoon in Europe. After having dinner in Paris with Monsieur Riviere, a French tutor who lives
for more than his career, Newland finds himself inspired by Riviere’s free spirit and lifestyle. May,
FAILING TO UNDERSTAND HIS EXPERIENCE, dismisses the Frenchman as common.

10 Time passes. One day, Ellen sees Newland on the street in New York, but decides not to go to
him. Newland then sees Ellen from afar, which surprises him because she now lives in Washington
D.C. In that moment, he resolves to wait for her to look at him, interpreting it as a personal sign
for them to be together. She does not look his way.

11 Later, sitting together at their house, Newland persuades May to sing the song Ellen gave
him. She is so uncomfortable she stops. He finishes singing by himself, further estranging
them. Accordingly, Newland decides he must see Ellen before she returns to Washington D.C. He
waits for her outside of Mrs. Mingott’s house, where she is staying, and follows her to Central
Park. They sit together and talk. Ellen shares that she’s refused the Count again and says she
wants a life with Newland, but only as distant friends. Ellen leaves Newland unsatisfied with the
outcome of their conversation. He resolves he must travel to Washington D.C. to see Ellen again, telling May work requires his travel.

12 At the law firm before departing, Newland learns that Julius Beaufort’s firm had to close its doors that morning, due to massive business failure. A clerk brings Newland a note from May that Mrs. Mingott has suffered a small stroke. Newland rushes to May at her grandmother’s side to learn that Mrs. Mingott’s stroke was brought on by Regina Beaufort, Julius’ wife, petitioning for money to stop the dishonorable closure of the Beaufort bank. The request so upset Mrs. Mingott that she had a stroke upon Regina’s departure. Mrs. Mingott requests that Ellen be contacted to return from Washington D.C. May points out to Newland that he will miss Ellen’s visit because of his work in Washington D.C. Newland later tells May he no longer needs to go to Washington D.C., which she characterizes as “awfully convenient.”

**Spoiler Alert! If you don’t want to know what happens at the end of the show, STOP HERE!**

13 Newland picks up Ellen from the train in a carriage, and tells her of his desire to be with her. Ellen confesses that she loves him too and they kiss, but she insists she cannot hurt her family. The Old Gentleman recalls that back at this time he wanted to tell May the truth of his love for Ellen, so they could be together. At Newland’s house, May informs Newland that Ellen will officially divorce her husband and move back to Europe. May and Newland throw Ellen a farewell party at which he tells Ellen of his future plans to travel to Europe, news that gives her a moment of pause. They do not speak further and Ellen leaves.

14 After the party, Newland tells May that he is tired and needs a break—from work she assumes—and that he wants to take an extensive trip to see the world. May says she will check with her doctor to ask if she can go, thus revealing to him that she is pregnant—information she had already confided in Ellen. May feels she has achieved a victory.

15 The Old Gentleman summarizes the rest of his years with May—their three children together, May’s devotion to family, and her untimely death from pneumonia after nursing their third child through it. In addition to missing May, he confesses that he also missed “the flower of life,” and he hasn’t seen Ellen since her farewell party.

16 Back in 1920, Newland’s oldest son Dallas invites him on a trip to Italy and Paris before Dallas gets married. Once in Paris, Dallas informs the Old Gentleman that he has made dinner plans for them with the Countess Olenska. Dallas shares that May told him of his father’s love for Ellen, thus revealing that May knew the truth of Newland’s feelings all along. They arrive at Ellen’s house for dinner but the Old Gentleman decides to sit outside for a moment. He encourages Dallas to go in to meet Ellen. From outside the Old Gentleman hears Ellen play and sing “Beautiful Dreamer” for Dallas. The Old Gentleman listens wistfully for a time and then rises, and, with resignation, walks away.
First Steps in Courtship –

At this point we venture to give him a word of serious advice. We urge him, before he ventures to take any step towards the pursuit of this object, to consider well his position and prospects in life, and reflect whether they are such as to justify him in deliberately seeking to win the young lady’s affections, with the view of making her his wife at no distant period. Should he after such a review of his affairs feel satisfied that he can proceed honourably, he may then use fair opportunities to ascertain the estimation in which the young lady, as well as her family, is held by friends. It is perhaps needless to add, that all possible delicacy and caution must be observed in making such inquiries, so as to avoid compromising the lady herself in the slightest degree. When he has satisfied himself on this head, and found no insurmountable impediment in his way, his next endeavour will be, through the mediation of a common friend, to procure an introduction to the lady’s family. Those who undertake such an office incur no slight responsibility, and are, of course, expected to be scrupulously careful in performing it, and to communicate all they happen to know affecting the character and circumstances of the individual they introduce.

First let us hope that the inclination is mutual; at all events, that the lady views her admirer with preference, that she deems him not unworthy of her favourable regard, and that his attentions are agreeable to her. It is true her heart may not yet be won: she has to be wooed... She has probably first met the gentleman at a ball, or other festive occasion, where the excitement of the scene has reflected on every object around a roseeate tint. We are to suppose, of course, that in looks, manner, and address, her incipient admirer is not below her ideal standard in gentlemanly attributes. His respectful approaches to her—in soliciting her hand as a partner in the dance, &c.—have first awakened on her part a slight feeling of interest towards him. This mutual feeling of interest, once established, soon "grows by what it feeds on." ... Whatever may eventually come of it, the fair one is conscious for the nonce of being unusually happy. This emotion is not likely to be diminished when she finds herself the object of general attention—accompained, it may be, by the display of a little envy among rival beauties—owing to the assiduous homage of her admirer. At length, prudence whispers that he is to her, as yet, but a comparative stranger; and with a modest reserve she endeavours to retire from his observation, so as not to seem to encourage his attentions. The gentleman’s ardour, however, is not to be thus checked; he again solicits her to be his partner in a dance. She finds it hard, very hard, to refuse him; and both, yielding at last to the alluring influences by which they are surrounded, discover at the moment of parting that a new and delightful sensation has been awakened in their hearts.
D. Reading Comprehension Questions

Complete the following questions based off of the excerpt that you just read.

1. Based on this excerpt, what do you think it means to court someone? _________________________

2. What is the first piece of advice that the author gives to the men he is addressing? ____________

3. What does the author think is the most important thing to keep in mind throughout the beginning of a courtship? ________________

4. True or False: The author believes that talking to a woman on behalf of a friend is an easy task that should be taken lightly? ______________

5. List two locations or events where the woman might have met the man who is interested in courting her? _________________________

6. What does the word “address” in Line 20 mean in this particular context? _______________________

7. Who is the “fair one” as seen in Line 24? _________________________

8. Why is it important that the woman “retires from his observation” as seen in Line 28? _________________________
E. Reading Analysis Questions
Complete the following questions based off of your understanding of the excerpt that you just read. Feel free to use a separate page if you need more space.

1. What does the author mean when he says that the man needs to consider his “position and prospect in life” (Line 2)?

2. What do you think a person who is talking to a woman on behalf of their friend might do to prepare for that conversation? What might they talk about?

3. Do you think that the “common friends” that men enlisted to help talk to a woman were male or female? Why do you think that?

4. Do you think that courting a person has changed in the last hundred years? What similarities can you find between the “rules” of this time and modern day?

5. What differences in the language used to describe the man’s experience versus the woman’s in this excerpt do you notice? What do these differences tell you about male and female roles in society in 1875?

6. If these are the rules for courting someone, what other rules do you think might have been in place within society at this time?
F. Analyzing Adaptation:

Please read the excerpt from the last chapter of *The Age of Innocence*. Be prepared for a class discussion on what you have read.

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**Excerpt from *The Age of Innocence*, Chapter XXXIV**

1. [Newland] sat down on the bench and continued to gaze at the awninged balcony. He calculated the time it would take his son to be carried up in the lift on the fifth floor, to ring the bell, and be admitted to the hall, and then ushered into the drawing-room. He pictured Dallas entering that room with his quick assured step and high delightful smile, and wondered if the people were right who said that his boy ‘took after him’.

Then he tried to see the persons already in the room – for probably at that sociable hour there would be more than one – and among them a dark lady, pale and dark, who would look up quickly, half rise, and hold out a long thin hand with three rings on it… He thought she would be sitting in a sofa-corner near the fire, with azaleas banked behind her on a table.

‘It’s more real to me here than if I went up,’ he suddenly heard himself say; and the fear lest that last shadow of reality should lose its edge kept him rooted to his seat as the minutes succeeded each other.

He sat for a long time on the bench in the thickening dusk, his eyes never turning from the balcony. At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment later a man-servant came out on the balcony, drew up the awnings, and closed the shutters.

At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel.

End of Book
G. Primary and Secondary Source Worksheet

In order to better understand *The Age of Innocence* and author Edith Wharton’s intentions, we’ll be looking at a primary source and secondary source. A primary source offers insight into the author’s thoughts directly; a secondary source is a scholar commenting on another’s work. To start, please read, either aloud or on your own, an excerpt of a letter from Edith Wharton to Sinclair Lewis, author of *Main Street*, a satirical novel that criticized the American ideal of a small-town life. *Main Street* was the book that Wharton’s *Age of Innocence* beat out to win the 1921 Pulitzer Prize, formerly known as “the Columbia Prize.”

“As for the Columbia Prize … when I discovered that I was being rewarded – by one of our leading Universities – for uplifting Americans morals, I confess I did despair. Subsequently, when I found the prize should really be yours, but was withdrawn because your book (I quote from memory) had ‘offended a number of prominent persons in the Middle West,’ disgust was added to despair.”

Answer the following questions about the primary source that you just read. Please feel free to use an additional sheet of paper if you need more space for your responses.

In your words, how did Edith Wharton feel about receiving this award? ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Why do you think she felt this way? How do you know? ____________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

What does Wharton’s reaction to the award tell you about her intentions behind the book?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

Why might Wharton have stressed the fact that this award was coming from one of the “leading Universities”?

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________

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Now, we are going to spend some time looking at what modern scholars believe the message is in *The Age of Innocence*. Read the following excerpt from Edward Wagenknecht’s analysis of *The Age of Innocence*.

“In 1920 came one of Mrs. Wharton’s fine achievements, *The Age of Innocence*, in which she managed to give a nostalgic picture of fashionable New York in the 1870s and at the same time to satirize it. The stability of society, which is more important than the happiness of any individual, is successfully upheld by May Archer, who does not even scruple to save her husband from running off with Ellen Olenska by whispering that she is about to bear his child. But the emancipated Countess, whom an unhappy European marriage had made an off-color member of the Newland clan (at the same time freeing her from most of the prejudices of the time) would have taken care of the matter, if necessary, quite without May’s help, for she knows that honor is much more important than love, and that a human being cannot build on the pain of others and survive herself.”

Answer the following questions about the secondary source that you just read.

Wagenknecht states that Wharton paints “a nostalgic picture of fashionable New York” but also that she satirizes it. Where do you see elements of nostalgia or romanticized time? Where did you see satire? What might Wharton have been criticizing?

What does Wagenknecht mean by “Countess … would have taken care of the matter”? What is the matter that he speaks of? What is he implying Countess would have done if May had not acted?

---

2 Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the American Novel: From the Birth of the Nation to the Middle of the Twentieth Century*. (Holt 1952) 259.
Theater Reviewer’s Checklist

Use this form as an aid to heighten your awareness before the play and prompt your memory after it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Production:</th>
<th>Date of Production:</th>
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<td>Playwright:</td>
<td>Venue: McCarter Theatre Center</td>
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### Text

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<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
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<tr>
<td>Major characters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main ideas/themes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effectiveness of language</td>
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<td>Other textual elements</td>
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### Setting

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials</td>
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<tr>
<td>Style</td>
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<tr>
<td>Color</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship to theater’s architecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship to world of the play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other scenic elements</td>
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### Costumes

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<tr>
<td>Choice of period</td>
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<td>Materials</td>
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<td>Relationship to characters of the play</td>
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<td>Other costume elements</td>
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Adapted from Christopher Thais’s and Rick Davis’ Writing for the Theatre (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1999), p. 45
<table>
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<td>Style</td>
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<td>Enhancement of/detraction from mood</td>
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<td>Specific effects that support or compete with action of play</td>
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<td>Other sonic elements</td>
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<td>Clarity of characterization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Vocal and physical work</td>
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<td>Notable moments in the performance</td>
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<td>Sense of ensemble playing/acting</td>
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<td>Other acting elements</td>
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<td>Casting choices</td>
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<td>Tempo and rhythm of performance</td>
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<td>Composition of stage images</td>
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<td>Other directorial elements</td>
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