

STUDY GUIDE



Annie[®]



THE
NATIONAL THEATRE
FOUNDATION

Annie®

The National Theatre
January 23–28, 2024

Book by Thomas Meehan
Lyrics by Martin Charnin
Music by Charles Strouse
Directed by Jenn Thompson
Choreography by Patricia Wilcox
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Leayne C. Dempsey

Holding onto hope when times are tough can take an awful lot of determination, and sometimes, an awful lot of determination comes in a surprisingly small package. Little Orphan Annie has reminded generations of theatergoers that sunshine is always right around the corner, and now the best-loved musical of all time is set to return in a new production—just as you remember it and just when we need it most.

Annie, directed by Jenn Thompson, features the iconic book and score, written by Tony Award®-winners Thomas Meehan, Charles Strouse and Martin Charnin. This celebration of family, optimism and the American spirit remains the ultimate cure for all the hard knocks life throws your way.



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—“America’s Main Street”—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION
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Written and Curated by Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

1321 Pennsylvania Avenue NW Washington, DC 20004
www.nationaltheatre.org

DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY

"YESTERDAY WAS PLAIN AWFUL, BUT THAT'S NOT NOW, THAT'S THEN."

Annie debuted on Broadway in 1977. The story was inspired by Harold Gray's comic strip "Little Orphan Annie," and lyricist Martin Charnin pitched the idea to book writer Thomas Meehan to turn the comic into a musical. The team set the show in the 1930s, a nostalgic time reminiscent of their own childhoods. Thus, a Broadway classic was born. The show thrived, playing 2,377 performances on Broadway and winning seven Tony Awards.

There is no doubt that when you watch this production you will immediately fall in love with Annie. Her red hair and her classic solos are sure to make you glad that you came to the theater. Yet, I'd like to point out another aspect of the story that makes Annie so profound. It isn't just her charming smile or her indiscriminate kindness that makes her so lovable: it is her ability to be so kind and joyous during a time in history that very often inspired the opposite response.

Annie takes place during the early years of The Great Depression in the U.S. The 1930s was a time full of panic, economic decline, and the threat of war. And yet, throughout the show we find ourselves watching a hopeful orphan. How so? How can someone have joy in depression? It seems improbable, even impossible.

In her journey to find her long lost parents, Annie keeps a relentless grasp on hope for a better day tomorrow. Somehow, a child who seems to have all the cards stacked against her manages to remain optimistic and hopeful despite it all. Her story is ultimately about staying positive even in dire circumstances; it's not only timeless, but *timely* for today's audience.

So, will you dare to have hope for tomorrow, too?

Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg

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