

Study Guide



Mrs. Doubtfire

The New Musical Comedy



THE
NATIONAL THEATRE
FOUNDATION

Mrs. Doubtfire

The New Musical Comedy

The National Theatre
October 10–15, 2023
Broadway, December 2021
London, June 2023
Music and Lyrics by Karey Kirkpatrick and Wayne Kirkpatrick
Book by Karey Kirkpatrick and John O’Farrell
Directed by Jerry Zaks
Choreographed by Lorin Latarro
Packet prepared by Lindsey R. Barr

Everyone’s favorite Scottish nanny is headed to Washington, DC! Rob McClure will reprise his Tony-nominated Broadway performance on tour alongside co-star (and real wife!) Maggie Lakis in this internationally acclaimed hit musical critics call “wonderful, heart-warming, and laugh-out-loud funny” (*Manchester Evening News*) and “a feel-good, family-friendly comedy that delivers” (*The Hollywood Reporter*). Based on the beloved film and directed by four-time Tony Award® winner Jerry Zaks, *Mrs. Doubtfire* tells the hysterical and heartfelt story of an out-of-work actor who will do anything for his kids. It’s ‘the lovable, big-hearted musical comedy we need right now,’ raves the *Chicago Tribune*—one that proves we’re better together.



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
Olivia Kosciusko Tritschler, Interim Executive Director
Jared Strange, Director of Education and Community Programs
Lizzie Taylor, Senior Development Manager
Madeline Meszaros, Administration Manager

Written and Curated by Lindsey R. Barr, Dramaturg
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

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

DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY

Growing up my family took long road trips across the country every summer. My parents would gather our luggage and pack up everything they needed to take themselves and their three children to various locations—national parks, roadside attractions, and amusement parks were oft-visited on these treks. One of the most coveted items they never forgot to bring was a suitcase full of VHS tapes that they'd pop into a portable television set to keep me, my brother, and my sister occupied on these long journeys. While we often argued over what films to watch and when, there was one story full of witty dialogue and slapstick comedy that we could always agree on: *Mrs. Doubtfire*, starring Robin Williams.

As I think back to that time, I'm overwhelmed with the sense of nostalgia it provides. It brings back happy memories of traveling with my family. But at the same time, as I reminisce and revisit the movie, and now the Broadway musical, I am struck by how many complicated dynamics are at play: troubling representations of gender, the challenge of working through divorce, and difficult family relationships. In thinking about the Broadway musical today, we might consider why, in 1993, the movie held such cultural sway. Perhaps its popularity was due in part to its star-studded cast, with Williams at the helm. Maybe it was because comedies offer an escape from the everyday that resonates with people. Regardless of the reasons underpinning its popularity, how we might react to it today is informed by a 2023 lens.



At the center of the story is a father who dresses as a woman in order to spend time with his children after a contentious divorce. This practice—men dressing up as women solely for comedic effect—is not a new practice in film or on the stage. Indeed, it has occurred both for the sake of comedy and for more serious purposes as long as we've been putting stories on stage. As we are better able to articulate as a society now than we were 30 years ago, men dressing as women solely to get a laugh often trades on simplistic ideas of gender and undermines the lived experience of nonbinary, trans, and gender non-conforming people.

It can be a complicated experience watching something that houses both humor and questionable representations. But, as we sit together and take in *Mrs. Doubtfire*, perhaps we can hold these two realities at the same time and come out asking questions of both the show itself and how we can make sense of where it sits within today's discourses about gender.