

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



KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

We are excited to welcome you to The National Theatre through our *Teens Behind the Scenes* program! Whether you're a new theatre-goer or a seasoned veteran, here are a few things to bear in mind.

WHAT WILL I BE SEEING?

Over the course of its long history, The National Theatre has hosted many memorable productions. These days, the shows you are most likely to see here are Broadway tours. A Broadway tour grows out of a production that is currently running or recently ran on Broadway in New York City. The touring version uses the same script, musical score, choreography, and direction. The production elements, such as the sets and costumes, are largely the same, too, though many have been adapted so they can be transported across the country. The actors you see onstage are also traveling all over the country, often for a year or more at a time. In other words, the show you see in Washington, DC is the same show that folks in Baltimore, Philadelphia, or Atlanta might have just seen, too.

In addition to Broadway tours, you may also see the occasional pre-Broadway tryout. This is when producers debut a show in a major city outside of New York in order to test new or revised material in front of a paying audience. Oftentimes, the creative team adjusts the show based on audience reactions before moving on to New York, usually with much of the same cast and crew in tow.

HOW CAN I MAXIMIZE MY EXPERIENCE?

Historically, audience members' behavior at the theatre has been guided, and sometimes constrained, by unspoken norms or "rules." Over time, certain norms like formal dress codes have gradually relaxed, allowing for a more inclusive environment. Rather than list other "rules," we want to share some considerations that will help you enjoy your time at The National.

- **Arrive early and look for the ushers.** This gives you time to grab refreshments and use the restroom. If you are late and the show has already started, you may have to wait to be seated. The ushers can direct you to your seat and answer any questions you have.
- **Respect the space and your fellow audience members.** Consume any food and drink you bring into the auditorium carefully. Keep the aisles and rows clear by putting your belongings under your seat. Be mindful of your neighbor's personal bubble and stand to let them pass if need be. Generally, avoid talking during a performance; if you must, keep it to a whisper or briefly share your thoughts during laughter or applause.
- **Take a break from your screen.** Cellphones and tablets shine brightly in the dark and their noises can distract from the experience. Be sure to silence your devices and put them away. An exception is a closed captioning app like GalaPro, which you can use on your device; you can also request a special device from the theatre.
- **Show your appreciation.** If you enjoyed that big musical number, applaud and cheer! If something shocks or surprises you, feel free to gasp! Laugh if the moment calls for it; nothing kills a comedy like a quiet auditorium. While courtesy is important, it shouldn't stop you from having a good time.

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.

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM!



WAYNE KIRKPATRICK (*music and lyrics*) is an American songwriter and musician who has worked with artists such as Babyface and Eric Clapton. Over the last 30 years, he has recorded over 200 songs. He is also co-creator and co-composer/lyricist of the Broadway musical *Something Rotten!*, nominated for 10 Tony Awards and currently touring the country. He just recently finished writing songs for the Warner Bros. animated feature *Smallfoot*, and was inducted into the Nashville Songwriters Hall of Fame for 2018.



KAREY KIRKPATRICK (*music and lyrics; book*) began his career as a screen and songwriter for Walt Disney Feature Animation, where he worked on *The Rescuers Down Under* and *James and the Giant Peach*. Additional film credits include *Chicken Run*, *Charlotte's Web*, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Spiderwick Chronicles*, and *Over the Hedge*, which he also co-directed. He received Tony Award nominations for co-writing the book, music, and lyrics for *Something Rotten!* Most recently, Karey directed and co-wrote the screenplay and the songs for the new Warner Brothers animated musical *Smallfoot*.



JOHN O'FARRELL (*book*) is one of the U.K.'s best-known comic authors and script writers. He received a Tony Award nomination for co-writing *Something Rotten!* He has written a number of books across genres, including *The Best a Man Can Get*, *An Utterly Impartial History of Britain*, and collections of satirical columns for *The Guardian* newspaper. O'Farrell's books have been translated into 30 languages and adapted for BBC Radio and television. Previously a staff writer and later panelist on the BBC's "Have I Got News For You," he was a lead writer on 10 series of ITV's "Spitting Image." He is currently writing the sequel to *Chicken Run* and adapting one of his novels for Sony International Pictures.



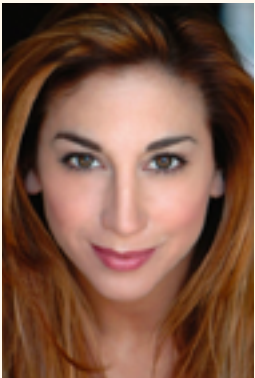
JERRY ZAKS (*director*) most recently worked on Broadway's *Hello, Dolly!* and *A Bronx Tale: The Musical*. He has directed more than 30 productions in New York and received four Tony Awards having been nominated eight times. His credits include *Meteor Shower*, *Shows for Days*, *Sister Act*, *The Addams Family*, *Guys and Dolls*, and the original production of *Assassins*, among others. He is a founding member and serves on the board of the Ensemble Studio Theatre. He received the SDC's George Abbott Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Theatre. He graduated from Dartmouth in 1967, received an M.F.A. from Smith College in 1969, and was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Fine Arts from Dartmouth in 1999. He is a 2013 inductee to the Theater Hall of Fame.

continued

MEET THE CREATIVE TEAM!



ETHAN POPP (*music supervision, arrangement, and orchestrations*) is a Grammy Award-nominated music producer and Tony Award-nominated orchestrator whose work has been seen and heard worldwide. He has served as music supervisor, arranger, and orchestrator for the 2008 Tony Award-nominated Best Musical *Rock of Ages*, for which he also co-produced the highly acclaimed Original Broadway Cast Recording. Ethan is the orchestrator of the hit West End musical *Tina: The Tina Turner Musical*, and collaborated with Glen Ballard and Alan Silvestri as orchestrator for the Broadway musical *Back to the Future*. On television, Ethan has served as a music producer, arranger, and orchestrator on NBCUniversal's "Smash," and as composer, music producer, arranger, and orchestrator on HBO's "Last Week Tonight with John Oliver."



LORIN LATARRO (*choreography*) is a director and one of the leading choreographers in the theatrical world today. On Broadway, she choreographed *Waitress*; *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*; and *Waiting for Godot*, starring Patrick Stewart and Ian McKellen. As director and choreographer, Lorin's regional theatre and touring credits include *A Taste of Things to Come*, *#DateMe*, *Waitress*, *Superhero*, *Merrily We Roll Along*, *La Traviata*, *Chess*, *The Heart of Rock & Roll*, *Assassins*, *God Bless You*, *Mr. Rosewater*, *Kiss Me, Kate*, and *The Best Is Yet to Come*. Lorin has performed in 12 Broadway shows and danced for Tharp, Momix, and Graham. She is a Bucks County Artistic Associate and Juilliard graduate.



Original Broadway Cast
of *Mrs. Doubtfire*

Photo by Jean Marcus

From the Silver Screen to the Stage

From *The Lion King* (1990) to *Mean Girls* (2004) and from *Beetlejuice* (1988) to *High School Musical* (2006), some of the most beloved films in Hollywood have been adapted for the theatrical stage. In fact, many Broadway shows are adapted from other source materials, providing a blueprint for the story or the music itself. The musical version of *Mrs. Doubtfire* is no exception!

Mrs. Doubtfire is a 1993 comedy-drama about a man who dresses as an elderly woman in order to see his kids again. In the film, Daniel Hillard (Robin Williams) is an unemployed actor and a devoted father loved by his three children Chris (Matthew Lawrence), Lydia (Lisa Jakub), and Natalie (Mara Wilson). However, his marriage to his workaholic wife Miranda (Sally Field) is strained by his immature behavior. The last straw sees Daniel hire a mobile petting zoo for Chris's birthday despite knowing Miranda would not approve. Miranda

demands a divorce, and seeing as Daniel has no steady source of income or home, she also gets primary custody of their children. Miranda agrees to consider a joint custody arrangement only if Daniel can hold down a job and create a suitable home within three months.

While struggling to get his life sorted out, Daniel learns that Miranda intends to hire a housekeeper. Daniel uses his acting talents and enlists the help of his brother Frank (Harvey Fierstein), a makeup artist, and Frank's partner Jack (Scott Capurro) to transform him into Mrs. Euphegenia Doubtfire, a 60-year-old Scottish nanny, so he can apply for the position in disguise. Miranda is delighted with "Mrs. Doubtfire" and hires her on the spot. Daniel, as Mrs. Doubtfire, is now able to see his kids every day. Eventually the children start to respond favorably to Mrs. Doubtfire, and Miranda is able to heal her rocky relationship with them and with Daniel, whose alter ego is slowly helping him become a better father.

For a while, Daniel is able to keep up the charade, despite nearly being discovered by his caseworker Mrs. Sellner (Anne Haney), and attempting to break up his ex-wife's relationship with new boyfriend Stuart Denmey (Pierce Brosnan). He realizes he has trapped himself in this charade when he asks Miranda if he can take care of the children instead and she responds that she could never get rid of Mrs. Doubtfire, as she has made their lives so much better. Eventually, Daniel is discovered by Lydia and Chris and forced to explain that he dresses as Mrs. Doubtfire only to see them. The children are happy to have their father back in their lives, and agree to keep his secret.



Later, at the TV station where Daniel works, CEO Jonathan Lundy (Robert Prosky) sees him playing with toy dinosaurs on the set of a children’s program and is impressed enough to schedule a dinner meeting to hear his ideas. Meanwhile, Stuart plans to celebrate Miranda’s birthday by taking the family out to the same restaurant at the same time, and invites Mrs. Doubtfire to join them. Daniel tries to postpone his dinner with Lundy, but Lundy is fully booked, and Daniel realizes he cannot cancel the appointment. He now has to find a way to be both himself *and* Mrs. Doubtfire almost simultaneously!

At the restaurant, Daniel constantly excuses himself to the bathroom in order to change costume and keep his act going. That task is complicated when he drinks too much and forgets to remove his costume before returning to Lundy’s table. He covers for the mistake by explaining to Lundy that his alter ego is merely his idea for a new TV persona. Lundy is once again impressed, and agrees to develop the character into a television program. Meanwhile, Stuart starts to choke at their table, and Daniel intervenes to save him, tearing off his mask in the process. Horrified and outraged, Miranda storms out with the children.

At the later court hearing, Daniel makes an impassioned plea to the judge saying he created the disguise merely to spend time with his children. Nevertheless, the judge gives Miranda full custody of the children while limiting Daniel to supervised visitation rights once a week. Without Mrs. Doubtfire, the children again are withdrawn and depressed, and Miranda admits that their lives were so much better with Mrs. Doubtfire.

However, they are surprised and delighted to see Mrs. Doubtfire is the star of Lundy’s new television



program, “Euphegenia’s House,” which quickly becomes the highest-rated program in its time-slot. Upon realizing how unhappy the children are—and she herself is—with Mrs. Doubtfire, Miranda pays Daniel a visit on the set and tells him that she doesn’t want to keep hurting the children over the custody issues. She forgives him for his deceit and sorts things out with the courts, allowing Daniel unlimited access to the children, and the two make up.

Later, Miranda watches an episode of Daniel’s show in which Mrs. Doubtfire answers a letter from another child of divorce asking for advice. In the program, Mrs. Doubtfire explains that no matter what type of living arrangement such children may have, love will maintain the bond of the family.

As you watch the musical, you may find that many of these plot elements are taken directly from the movie. Others may have been changed, as often happens when artists adapt works from other original source material.



Activity: When you’re watching the musical, be on the lookout for how the story is similar to the plot provided here and how it’s different. Have the characters changed? Are parts of the story different? How does that affect your reaction to the show? If you have the study guide handy, use the margins in this section to make notes.

Playing a Part:

DRAG AND GENDER BENDING PERFORMANCE THROUGHOUT THEATRE HISTORY

Pretty much as long as there's been theatre there's been characters dressing up as another gender, a practice we often refer to today as performing in drag. Specifically, the tradition of men in drag portraying women on public stages—as happens in *Mrs. Doubtfire*—dates back to the theatre of the Ancient Greeks. The reasons for the development of these traditions are deeply connected to how concepts of gender and sex, and specifically the role of women in society, were understood. Throughout history, the idea of dressing up as a different gender and performing on stage was met with varying degrees of acceptance. What was a normalized practice in Shakespeare's plays in Renaissance era England reads differently in our society today as our ideas about gender continually evolve.

From the early days in Ancient Greece through the liberating drag performances of today, here are a few ways this performance tradition developed throughout history:

Ancient Greece

Much of theatre history, at least as it is often understood in the West, traces its roots back to Ancient Greece, and drag can certainly do the same. In Greek society, women were considered vastly inferior to men and unfit for the theatrical stage, one of the Greek society's most respected art forms. During this time, women's roles were always played by men. This was not without controversy: Plato and Socrates, two leading philosophers of the era, worried about the “damaging effects” of male actors degrading themselves by representing female emotions and characteristics.



Mark Rylance performing as a woman in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* on Broadway

Shakespeare

With all the dynamic female roles in Shakespeare, it's hard to believe his canon was once the exclusive domain of men. In Elizabethan times, women had limited freedom or social status and could not participate in any professional discipline, including most theatrical performances. Adolescent boys played the female roles, perhaps looking relatively more plausible in women's clothing with narrower shoulders, softer faces, and shorter statures than their adult counterparts.

Kabuki

Kabuki is a classical form of Japanese theatre, mixing dramatic performance with traditional dance. Kabuki theatre is known for its heavily stylized performances, its highly decorated costumes, and the elaborate make-up worn by its performers. In Japan, Kabuki actually began as a female-only discipline (with women playing roles of both genders), but in the 16th century, women were banned from performing and so a new, all-male Kabuki was born. Later, as Japan opened up to the West, there was a movement to legitimize Kabuki with more respect among the upper classes and solidify its place as an indigenous art amidst all the cultural integration. The success of these efforts assured the lasting legacy of Kabuki in Japan and allowed women in some companies.



Japanese Kabuki actor Shichinosuke Nakamura performs *Renjishi* in Madrid, Spain.

Opera

In opera, there are traditions of cross-gender casting in both directions. Relatively unique to opera is the practice of having “breeches roles” or male characters played by women, such as Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* and Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*. Perhaps due to the heightened reality of operatic music, this type of reverse casting has been generally accepted by audiences for centuries, moreso than in the theatre.



Mary Martin as Peter Pan in the 1960 Film

Victorian Era

It was during the Victorian era that the term “drag” is believed to have been coined, as the long and heavy skirts of the day literally dragged along the stage. During this time, plays tended to be written in a more “natural” style in which actors generally portrayed characters of their own gender. However, there were notable exceptions including Lady Bracknell in Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* and the title role in *Peter Pan*. In *Peter Pan*, audiences not only accepted that this role could be played by a woman, but they came to expect it.



Drag performer RuPaul

Modern Drag

While still a vibrant aspect of some theatre, drag has also evolved into an art form unto itself. Largely, 20th-century queer men and women experimented with cross-dressing to express their individuality apart from traditional society, with generations of drag kings and queens walking the line between heightened performance and society’s expectations of gender. Since the beginning of the LGBT liberation movement and the 1969 uprising at the Stonewall Inn, drag has been as closely linked to political action as it has been to entertainment. Famous actor and drag performer RuPaul began his career as a fringe artist, but today hosts one of the most successful reality competitions on TV, *RuPaul’s Drag Race*.

Drag on Broadway

Some of the most notable instances of men performing as women on stage in Broadway musicals occurred in the last 25 years. When *Hairspray* became one of the biggest musical hits of the 2000s, it began a long line of men in the role of Edna Turnblad. Today, shows like *Hedwig And The Angry Inch* and *Kinky Boots* challenge socially defined gender roles by depicting a progressive perspective on trans issues, and drag in a broader sense.



Actor Harvey Fierstein playing the role of Edna Turnblad in the Broadway musical *Hairspray*.

EXERCISES & ACTIVITIES

Have you seen other works (movies, TV shows, plays, etc.) where the practice of men dressing up as women was integral to the plot? If so, think about how watching the story made you feel. Then, take a look at the common tropes below and consider which ones apply.

- 1. Did the male character dress up as a woman to disguise themselves?** Perhaps they do it to get something they want, escape from pursuers, or generally play a trick on someone.
- 2. Did the male character learn something about themselves, society, or their own gender expression through the experience of dressing in drag?** Consider if there is a genuine lesson one can learn from this practice or if the character could have come to this realization some other way.
- 3. Does the male character get discovered at some point, and if so, how do the other characters respond?** How the other characters respond has a lot to say about who they are and how the story reflects the world around it. Can you detect certain beliefs, values, or prejudices based on these reactions?

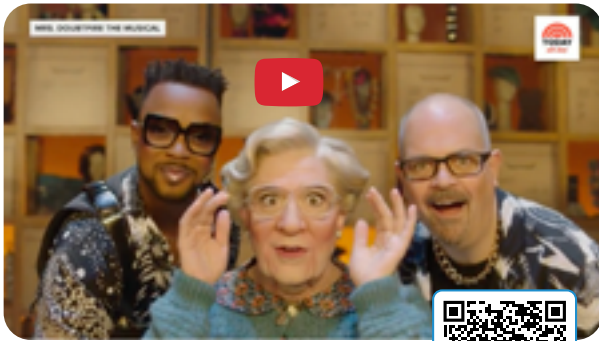


Write down your answers below and discuss them with your class or teacher. Be mindful of your own responses and considerate of others. Gender expression and dynamics are deeply-felt and complex, so they should be approached with care.

EXTRA RESOURCES & CONTENT



Today Show Interview:
'Mrs. Doubtfire' stars talk
Broadway show and why the
movie was 'radical'



Interview: Rob McClure
Talks MRS. DOUBTFIRE,
Broadway Shutdown, Working
with Jerry Zaks and More



Go Inside the
Rehearsal Room with the
Cast of MRS. DOUBTFIRE



BIBLIOGRAPHY/WORKS CITED

Abel, Samuel D. *Opera in the Flesh: Sexuality in Operatic Performances*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996.

Case, Sue-Ellen. "Classic Drag: The Greek Creation of Female Parts." *Theatre Journal* 37, no. 3 (1985): 317–27.

Clum, John M. "'A Little More Mascara': Drag and the Broadway Musical from *La Cage aux Folles* to *Kinky Boots*." In *The Routledge Companion to the Contemporary Musical*, pp. 173-181. Routledge, 2019.

Edgar, Eir-Anne. "'Xtravaganza!': Drag Representation and Articulation in 'RuPaul's Drag Race.'" *Studies in Popular Culture* 34, no. 1 (2011): 133–46.

Ferris, Lesley, and Diane; Stephen Torr; Bottoms. "Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance." *Theatre Research International* 36, no. 3 (2011).

Lublin, Robert I. *Costuming the Shakespearean Stage Visual Codes of Representation in Early Modern Theatre and Culture*. Farnham, Surrey, England, Ashgate, 2011.

Mrs. Doubtfire (1993), entry in *AFI Catalog of Feature Films*. Accessed on September 29, 2023: <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/59605>.

Yang, Yeeun, and Hyunzin Ko. "A Study on the Expression Characteristics of Drag in Oriental Traditional Theater: Focusing on the Peking Opera and Kabuki." *Journal of the Korean Society of Costume*, 72, no. 4 (2022): 26–47.

