

STUDY GUIDE

Every Brilliant Thing

By Duncan Macmillan
With Jonny Donahoe

In association with Talk Is Free Theatre
Directed by Steven Schipper

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Every Brilliant Thing

STUDY GUIDE

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PLAYWRIGHT

In the *Author's Note*, Duncan Macmillan acknowledges that *Every Brilliant Thing* was a collaborative effort between himself, George Perrin and Jonny Donahoe. It was adapted from his short story "Sleeve Notes." First, he and George worked for a decade to turn it into a full-length play, which George directed. Then, since the play inherently varies every night (or matinee), Jonny co-authored the play while performing it.



Photo Credit: [Phoebe Cheong](#)

Jonny Donahoe is a British comedian, writer, performer, and self-professed "capable swimmer." He was the original man in the one-man show he co-wrote, "Every Brilliant Thing." He performed it over three hundred times. Macmillan credits him with "an incredible talent, really rare talent, for making people very safe to make mistakes...for making people laugh. He's incredibly quick. Every performance is different because he improvises and responds to everything in the room." For his performance, he was nominated for a *Drama Desk Award* for "Outstanding Solo Performance," *Lucille Lortel Award* for "Outstanding Solo Show," and an *Off-Broadway Alliance Award* for "Best Solo Performance." He is the namesake of

the musical-comedy-satirists duo Jonny and the Baptists, regularly appearing on television and radio, and at festivals and comedy clubs on their UK tours. Jonny and the Baptists partnered with Rachel Parris to put on *Thirty Christmases*, which Lyn Gardner from *The Guardian* describes as "a merry little comedy about festive stress." He recently released a twelve-part series on parenthood with "real-life partner" and fellow comedian Josie Long in anticipation of the arrival of their first child called "Josie and Jonny Are Having a Baby (With You)" for the American Podcast Network, *Sticher*.



[Photo credit link](#)

George Perrin is the former joint Artistic Director of Paines Plough. Since assuming the role in 2010, he and James Grieve staged forty-five world premiers across the United Kingdom. Paines Plough is praised as being "the UK's national theatre of new plays;" it was founded in 1974 over a pint of Paines Bitter in the Plough pub. In 2014, Perrin and Grieve launched Roundabout, the UK's first pop-up theatre. In January 2019, Perrin and Grieve announced that, after ten years, they were stepping down as the Artistic Directors of the company in

order to pursue new projects. He was also former co-founder and Joint Artistic Director of nabokov. *Every Brilliant Thing* was not the first play of Duncan Macmillan's that George directed; before that he directed *Lungs*.



Photo Credit: [Geraint Lewis](#)

Duncan Macmillan is an award-winning British writer and director. He grew up watching a lot of classic plays but admits to having assumed that all playwrights were dead; it wasn't until he read *Far Away* by Caryl Churchill that he began writing his own. Besides Churchill, playwrights Wallace Shawn, Robert Holman, Martin Crimp, Arthur Miller, Samuel Beckett, Bertolt Brecht, Anton Chekhov, William Shakespeare, Katie Mitchell, Complicite, and Pina Bausch have influenced Macmillan.

Macmillan's plays address contemporary socio-political issues, including addiction, depression, and climate change. In an interview for the Perth Festival, Macmillan stated, "Everything I've written I've written because... I'm looking for something in our culture and I'm not seeing it." He is a former Writer-in-Residence at Paines Plough and the Royal Exchange Theatre. He also happens to be a former DJ and music collector. He's most known for *Lungs* (2011), *People, Places, and Things* (2015), and his adaptation of George Orwell's *1984* (2013). He's the recipient of the Best New Play at the Off West End Awards 2013 for *Lungs*. He, along with Robert Icke, won the UK Theatre Award for Best Director for *1984*; the show was also nominated as Best New Play at the Olivier Awards in 2014.

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

And, played by various audience members:

- VET
- DAD
- AUDIENCE
- SOCK
- LECTURER
- SAM
- MRS. PATTERSON

SETTING

In the script for *Every Brilliant Thing*, the stage directions read: *The houselights are on full and will remain so throughout. There is no set. The audience are seated in the most democratic way possible, ideally in the round. It is vital that everyone can see and hear each other.* Theatre-in-the-round refers to the configuration in which the acting area is completely surrounding by the audience. There is no upstage, downstage, stage left, or stage right in the round. All actors have to move so that everyone can see everything.

In an interview for the 2016 Perth International Arts Festival, Jonny Donahoe explains, “The benefit of being in the round is that you see other people’s responses...we have a tendency as a big corporate society to forget that people suffer and that people go through pain...and we forget to share and to look after people.” In a democracy, all eligible citizens have the right to participate. Macmillan specifies that the audience be seated in a *democratic* way to support the communal experience he aims to create through the play. The staging is “related to the gesture of what we wanted to do...let’s all be here together...talking about something like adults.” The in-the-round configuration is intended to heighten audience awareness and engagement. While there is no set per se, the Narrator utilizes (casts) audience members to recreate scenes at his childhood home, a veterinary clinic, his dad’s vehicle, the school counsellor’s office, a lecture hall, the hospital, the library at university, the park near his parents’ house, and a hall in which his wedding reception is held. These are all every day locations that the audience can easily visualize. In the show, the Narrator’s Dad claims, “...imagination are what make life bearable.” Thus, it seems fitting that the audience must use their imagination in the show.

SYNOPSIS

Ice cream, water fights, staying up past your bedtime and being allowed to watch TV, the colour yellow, things with stripes—these are among the things on a list of “Every Brilliant Thing”. A six-year-old boy begins this list in attempt to prevent his mother, who is battling chronic depression, from trying to commit suicide again. Throughout the production, every member of the audience is invited to read aloud a “brilliant thing” from the list. The list is the backdrop (sometimes literal wallpaper) as the boy matures and experiences his own challenges.

Playwright Duncan Macmillan summarizes it as “essentially a story about a child who tries to comprehend from a very child-like perspective their parent’s suicidal depression and in doing so generates a list of things or reasons to live for.”

CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

Depression & Suicide

Depression and suicidal depression affects everyone, a fact of which Duncan Macmillan is acutely aware. “When it comes to deciding whether or not to carry on living or to take your own life, that’s something I think theatre should be talking about and addressing,” said Macmillan. He expanded, “the way we talk about it really impacts behaviour. We have a responsibility to talk about it in a responsible way.” He then elaborated, “Suicide and depression is often either stigmatized and ignored or it’s almost glamorized and fetishized.” Comedian Jonny Donahoe said, “I’ve always thought the best way to talk about things, to communicate, share, is through humour.” He thinks “it’s a wonderful thing to talk about mental health issues with a smile on your face...and hopefully make people feel that there is less stigma and that it’s easy to talk about and that you can laugh about some of the darkest thing in life.” Donahoe explained that the audience is guided through the play in a way that makes them feel like they’re not doing anything outside of their comfort zone. He enthused, “I was delighted to get to work on something that I felt might somehow help some people.” While the show’s power can certainly help people, Macmillan emphasized that the play is “not a philosophy for living; it’s not a solution to depression; it’s just a way of talking about it and talking about strategies as a way to combat it in your own life.”

Everyone goes through “ups and downs” or “highs and lows,” and we occasionally use the word “depressed” to describe these feelings, we should not confuse those experiences with the medical illness, Depression. It is a mood disorder, and mood disorders are one of the most common mental illnesses. Mental illness is characterized “by alterations in thinking, mood, or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning.” This is in contrast to mental health, which is defined as “the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think, and act in

ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face.” Depression presents itself differently with each person, but common symptoms include:

Common symptoms of depression include:

- Depressed mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness or hopelessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in usually-enjoyed activities
- Change in weight or appetite
- Sleep disturbances
- Decreased energy or fatigue (without significant physical exertion)
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Poor concentration or difficulty making decisions
- Aches and pains
- Fatigue or lack of energy

Depression can be triggered by a major life event such as the loss of a job or loved one, the accumulation of everyday stresses, or nothing specific at all. Genetic, biological, personality, and environmental factors can all contribute to mental illnesses such as depression.

Depression can directly affect anybody, and mental illness does at least indirectly affect all Canadians at some time. One out of every five Canadians will personally experience a mental health issue or problem. By the age of forty, approximately fifty percent of all Canadians will have or have had a mental illness. It is estimated that 10-20% of Canadian youth are affected by a mental illness or disorder, and the total number of 12-19 year olds in Canada at risk for developing depression is 3.2 million. Depression can be hard to identify in youth since symptoms such as mood swings and irritability are also often typical adolescent behaviour.

It is imperative to remember that it is not possible for someone struggling with depression to simply “snap out of it,” as it is a real illness. Common treatments for depression include but are not limited to counselling, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), medication, and self-help.

Depression is the leading cause of suicide. In Canada, approximately 11 people die by suicide each day and there about 4 000 deaths by suicide per year. Suicide accounts for twenty-four percent of all deaths among 15-24 year olds and 16% among 25-44 year olds. One third of deaths by suicide are among people 45-59 years old. It is the second leading cause of death among youth and young adults (15-34 years).

GLOSSARY

Andre Agassi: A retired professional tennis player. He is 316 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Adrenaline: A stress hormone.

Albert Ayler: A jazz saxophonist, singer, and composer. The Narrator lists Albery Ayler as one of the amazing musicians who took their own lives.

Anaesthetic: A medication that causes loss of sensation, or insensitivity. The Narrator describes the Vet administering a needle containing an anaesthetic called pentobarbital to his dog, Sherlock Bones.

Bill Evans: An American jazz pianist and composer. The script suggests Bill Evans when it indicates that some melodic instrumental jazz should be played.

Border Collie: A breed of dog initially developed along the Scottish borders to herd sheep. The Narrator's childhood dog, Sherlock Bones, is a cross between a Border Collie and a Doberman.

Cab Calloway: An American jazz singer and bandleader. The script suggests Cab Calloway when it indicates that upbeat jazz should play as the audience is seated.

Cannonball Adderley: An American jazz musician, best known for his work on alto-saxophone. The script suggests Cannonball Adderley when it indicates that upbeat jazz should play as the audience is seated.

CDs: A CD is a Compact Disc, which stores and plays sound recordings. CDs replaced audiotapes. The Narrator doesn't like that you can skip songs on CDs; he prefers records, which you have to listen to from, start to finish.

Christopher Walken: An Academy Award-winning actor. On the list of Brilliant Things, his voice is number 1654 and his hair is 1655.

Cortisol: A stress hormone. The Narrator explains that when something bad happens, the stress hormones cortisol and adrenaline flood your system. It's nature's alarm system and survival mechanism.

Danger Mouse: A British animated television series. It is number 23 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Doberman: A breed of dog that originated in Germany. The Narrator's childhood dog, Sherlock Bones, is a cross between a Border Collie and a Doberman.

Donny Hathaway: An American soul arranger, songwriter, pianist, and producer. Amazing musicians who took their own lives. The Narrator lists Donny Hathaway as one of the amazing musicians who took their own lives.

Duke Ellington: An American jazz composer, pianist, and bandleader. The script suggests Duke Ellington when it indicates that upbeat jazz should play as the audience is seated.

Gustav Mahler: An Austrian composer and conductor. Sam shares with the Narrator that Beyonce is Gustav Mahler's eighth cousin, four times removed. This fact is number 826 979 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Hank Mobley: An American jazz tenor saxophonist. The script suggests Hank Mobley when it indicates that upbeat jazz should play as the audience is seated.

Into Each Life Some Rain Must Fall by Ella Fitzgerald and the Ink Spots: A 1944 song performed as a duet. The script suggests this song when it indicates that a melancholy, but upbeat jazz song should play at the end of the play.

John Coltrane: An American jazz saxophonist, bandleader, and composer. The script suggests John Coltrane when it indicates that some melodic instrumental jazz plays.

Marilyn Monroe: An American actress, model, and singer. Marilyn Monroe is one of Hollywood's most famous actresses and the world's biggest sex symbols. She died of a drug overdose in 1962 at the age of 36. The Narrator states that in the month after Marilyn Monroe's death by overdose, the number of suicides in the U.S. increased by twelve percent.

Marlon Brando: An American Academy Award-winning motion picture and stage actor known for his application of the Stanislavski system of Method Acting. He is number 654 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Mork & Mindy: An American sitcom that aired on ABC from 1978 to 1982 about an alien on a mission to study human behaviour who befriends a young journalist. Mork & Mindy is on the list of Brilliant Things.

MP3s: An abbreviation for MPEG Audio Layer-3. It is a coding format for digital audio. Most audio files are in this format. The Narrator is resentful of the fact that CDs and MP3 have replaced Vinyls.

Nina Simone: A jazz, blues, and folk performer in the 1950s and 60s. She is number 324 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Palindromes: A word, phrase, number or sequence that reads the same backward as forward. Examples include “Wow” and “Radar.” Palindromes are number 123 321 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Pentobarbital: A barbiturate that slows the activity of the brain and nervous system. The Narrator describes the Vet administering a needle containing an anaesthetic called pentobarbital to his dog, Sherlock Bones.

Plinth: A heavy base supporting a statue or vase. It is number 521 on the list of Brilliant Things.

Précis: A concise summary of essential points, statements, or facts, often of a book or a text or speech. The Narrator illustrates how, at university, the Lecturer would give a very accurate and detailed précis of the novel.

Ray Charles: A legendary musician who pioneered the genre of soul music during the 1950s. The Narrator’s mum would always sing Ray Charles when they sang songs at the kitchen piano.

Ronnie Singer: An American jazz guitarist. The Narrator lists Ronnie Singer as one of the amazing musicians who took their own lives.

Samaritans: A charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection that can lead to suicide. The Narrator states that he found that the Samaritans published a set of guidelines for how the media can report suicide intelligently.

Star Trek: An American media franchise based on the science fiction television series initially called *Star Trek*, now referred to as “The Original Series,” that follows the expeditions of the starship U.S.S. Enterprise and its crew. It is number 317 on the list.

The Sorrows of Young Werther by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: A novel published in 1774. At university, the Narrator attends a lecture series on the Victorian novella that culminated with this book. In the play, he provides the following summary: *Visiting an idyllic German village, Werther, a sensitive young man, meets and falls in love with sweet-natured Lotte. Although he*

realises that she is to marry Albert, he is unable to subdue his passion and his infatuation torments him to the point of despair.

Vinyl: Refers to a phonograph record (also known as a gramophone record), shortened to record, which is a sound storage medium. Vinyl is number 2005 on the list of Brilliant Things. The Narrator believes the sound quality of records is superior to CDs or MP3s because it isn't compressed; it's tactile; and you get to feel the weight of it in your hand.

Weldon Irvine: An American composer, pianist, and organist who performed various genres of music, including jazz, hip-hop, funk, and blues. The Narrator lists Weldon Irvine as one of the amazing musicians who took their own lives.

Werther Effect: The mimicry of suicide after a highly publicized suicide. It is named after, as the Narrator highlights, Goethe's protagonist in "The Sorrows of Young Werther." It suggests, as the Narrator emphasizes, that suicide is contagious.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Drama (Senior Years)	Creating (CR): The learner generates, develops, and communicates ideas for creating drama/theatre.	DR-1: The learner generates ideas from a variety of sources for creating drama/theatre.
	Connecting (C): The learner develops understanding about the significance of the dramatic arts by making connections to various times, places, social groups, and cultures.	DR-C1: The learner develops understandings about people and practices in the dramatic arts.
		DR-C2: The learner develops understanding about the influence and impact of the dramatic arts.
	Responding (R): The learner uses critical reflection to inform drama/theatre learning and to develop agency and identity.	DR-R1: The learner generates initial reactions to drama/theatre experiences.
		DR-R2: The learner critically observes and describes drama/theatre experiences.
		DR-RW: The learner analyzes and interprets drama/theatre experiences.
		DR-R4: The learner applies new understandings about drama/theatre to construct identity and to act in transformative ways.
English Language Arts	Explore Thoughts, Ideas, Feelings, and Experiences	1.1.1: Express Ideas- Question and reflect on personal responses, predictions, and interpretations; apply personal viewpoints to diverse situations or

		circumstances.
Comprehend and Respond Personally and Critically to Oral, Print, and Other Media Texts		2.1.1: Prior Knowledge- Analyze and explain connections between previous experiences, prior knowledge, and a variety of texts.
		2.2.1: Experience Various Texts- Experience texts from a variety of forms and genres and cultural traditions; explain various interpretations of the same text.
		2.2.2: Connects Self, Texts, and Culture- Examine how personal experiences, community traditions, and Canadian perspectives are presented in oral, literary, and media texts.
		2.2.3: Appreciate the Artistry of Texts- Discuss how word choice and supporting details in oral, literary, and media texts [including books, drama, and oral presentations] affect purpose and audience.
Experiment with Language		2.3.4: Examine creative uses of language in popular culture, recognize how figurative language and techniques create a dominant interpretation, mood, tone, and style.
Manage Ideas and Information		3.2.5: Make Sense of Information- Identify a

		<p>variety of factors that affect meaning; scan to locate specific information quickly; summarize, report, and record main ideas of extended oral, visual, and written texts.</p>
	<p>Celebrate and Build Community</p>	<p>5.2.2: Relate Texts to Culture- Explain ways in which oral, literary, and media texts relate topics and themes in life.</p>
		<p>5.2.3: Appreciate Diversity- Reflect on ways in which the choices and motives of individuals encountered in oral, literary, and media texts provide insight into those of self and others; discuss personal participation and responsibilities in a variety of communities.</p>

ACTIVITIES FOR EDUCATORS

Prior to Seeing the Play

Making Predictions

Show the students the following trailer and ask them to make as many specific predictions as possible about the play:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hR5WAQyCNUw>

You may then choose to show them this second trailer and see if it confirms or changes any of their predictions:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ObxJ0GJfywQ>

Alternatively or additionally, after seeing the show you could play the two above trailers as well as the two following trailers and ask them questions such as: *Which trailer intrigues you the most? Which trailer most accurately represents the show? Do any of the trailers give away too much? What could we piece together about the show by watching all of the trailers?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x05GdzkYdXc>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVF_unosz0Q

To Go In or Not to Go In

In the play, the Narrator follows his dad up the stairs until they reach his study, where he goes inside and closes the door before the Narrator could follow him any further. He waits to see what music he puts on:

I knew the rules. If it was this woman singing I could go into the room.

A jazz standard by an iconic female vocalist plays.

If it was the sort of music you could sing and dance to, it was okay to go in, but I ran the risk of being hugged and spun around his chair.

Some upbeat vocal jazz plays - Cab Calloway perhaps.

If no one was singing it meant Dad was working, so I could be quiet.

Some melodic instrumental jazz plays, John Coltrane or Bill Evans perhaps.

And if it sounded like all the instruments were just falling down the stairs, it meant I should leave him alone.

Free jazz plays - loud and chaotic. After a moment, it fades to silence.

So standing outside his door, I waited to see what he put on.

It's the free jazz. After a moment it fades.

Activity: Sherlock Bones, Dictionary Detective

To ensure students understand various references made throughout the show, have them match any potentially unfamiliar terms from the glossary with their corresponding definition.

Ask the students to imagine they are outside of their father's study. The music he is playing indicates whether or not they should enter. Play each of the following types of music for a couple of minutes:

- *A jazz standard by an iconic female vocalist plays.*
- *Some upbeat vocal jazz plays - Cab Calloway perhaps.*
- *Some melodic instrumental jazz plays, John Coltrane or Bill Evans perhaps.*
- *Free jazz plays- loud and chaotic. After a moment it fades to silence.*

Ask them which songs made them feel like they could enter the room.

Alternatively, you could play the above music and ask them what mood they think someone listening to that music is in.

Thinking About the Play

The following questions can be used for class discussion, responses, or in some cases, essay topics:

1. Would you be surprised to learn that Duncan Macmillan is a former DJ and obsessive music collector? What evidence is there to suggest that he is passionate about music?
2. Why would the script dictate that the several props used during the play be sourced from the audience?
3. What is the joke in the name “Sherlock Bones”?
4. What skills does a comedian have that are required to fill this role?
5. When at the hospital, the Narrator’s Mum saw him and said, “Not him.” Why?
6. What would have to change if the Narrator was female?
7. *Danger Mouse* is number 23 on the list. *Danger Mouse* could refer to a British animated television series or an American musician, DJ, and producer. Which of these do you think is more likely? Why?
8. Do you think the Narrator’s Mum read the list?
9. How did the list change as the Narrator aged?
10. What surprised you about the play?
11. In what ways is the Narrator similar to his Dad? In what ways is he similar to his Mum?
12. Was there anything on the list that you disagreed with? Was there anything on the list that made you think, “YES?”
13. Is this a show you would want to see twice?
14. What are the advantages of a pop-up theatre?
15. Why were the lights left on?
16. Why is it that the show can get away with no set?
17. How did you feel about reading out a list item?
18. Would you feel comfortable playing a role?
19. Duncan Macmillan said, “there’s nothing I can do in my life to compensate for the fact that the world would be better without me in it.” This bleak statement is grounded in climate science, as each of us, with our carbon footprints, is a drain on the planet’s resources. How can we rectify that in our minds after watching a play by the same author about suicide?
20. Why is there no interval in this show?
21. How is it that they can get away with relying on the audience to fill in the blanks? What does it say about these scenarios?
22. Why is “with Jonny Donahoe” on the script?
23. Have you listened to records? Compare and contrast the similarities and differences with records, CDs, and portable personal audio devices such as iPods.
24. Why is this show described as an interactive monologue?

25. Do you agree with the Narrator's Dad when he says, "If you were able to know everything then life would be unliveable Because then there would be no mystery, no curiosity, no creativity, no conversation, no discovery. Nothing would be new and we'd have no need to use our imaginations and our imaginations are what make life bearable"?
26. When asked what the best thing about theatre is, Duncan Macmillan replied, "at its best it's a workout for our imaginations and our compassion, and it happens *collectively* which is increasingly rare and important." How is this belief reflected in *Every Brilliant Thing*?
27. Do you think this play would be easy to produce? Why or why not?
28. The Narrator reflects, "and that was my experience of death. A loved one, becoming an object..." In what ways do loved one who have passed away become objects in our lives?
29. When asked about expecting the audience to participate Donahoe said, "I've never had anyone say no." Does this surprise you?
30. Do you think it's appropriate to explore "serious" or "controversial" topics through comedy? How can comedy support us in exploring "serious" or "controversial" topics?
31. How does one responsibly create a show about suicide?
32. What do you think is the intended message of the show? What did you take away from the show? (In an interview Macmillan stated, the message is "you're not alone, you're not weird, you will get through it, and you've just got to hold on. That's a very uncool, unfashionable thing for someone to say, but I really mean it.")
33. Why do you think the Narrator didn't want too many of his list items to be "material"?
34. What are social contagions beside suicide?
35. In Canada, approximately 11 people die by suicide each day and there about 4 000 deaths by suicide per year. Suicide accounts for twenty-four percent of all deaths among 15-24 year olds and 16% among 25-44 year olds. One third of deaths by suicide are among people 45-59 years old. Are you surprised by the statistics on suicide in Canada?

123 321

Palindromes are number 123 321 on the list. A Palindrome is a word, phrase, number or sequence that reads the same backward as forward, such as “wow” or “radar.” Ask students: Why do you think palindromes were number 123 321? Have students generate a list of as many palindromes as they can think of. You may want to challenge them to see who can come up with the most in a set period of time (perhaps two to five minutes).

Media Guidelines

In an interview, playwright Duncan Macmillan said, “the way we talk about [deciding whether or not to carry on living or take your own life] really impacts behaviour. We have a responsibility to talk about it in a responsible way.” In the play, the Narrator discovers that the Samaritans had published a set of guidelines for how the media can report suicide intelligently. They are as follows:

- Don’t provide technical details.
- Never suggest that a method is quick, easy, painless, or certain to result in death.
- Avoid dramatic headlines, terms like “suicide epidemic” or “hot spot.”
- Avoid sensationalist pictures or video.
- Avoid excessive detail.
- Avoid using the word “commit.”
- Don’t describe deaths by suicide as “successful.”
- Don’t publish suicide notes.
- Don’t publish on the front page.
- Don’t ignore the complex realities of suicide and its impacts on those left behind.
- Include references to support groups, such as the Samaritans.
- Don’t speculate on the reason. That’s crucial.
- Don’t supply simplistic reasons such as “he’d lost his job or “she’d recently become bankrupt.”

Have students choose one (or more) of these guidelines. Ask them to analyze why the Samaritans have made the recommendation.

Wordsmith

The word “Plinth” is number 521 on the list. Have students look up and record the definition, draw a picture, and use the word in a sentence.

Talk to the Sock

Mrs. Patterson would take off her sock and put it on her hand and talk to the Narrator through her little sock-dog. Have students make their own sock dogs. You could have them use the socks off their feet or use it as an art project (it may also be an opportunity to make connections to repurposing used items - climate science is an issue Duncan Macmillan is passionate about, after all). They can talk to themselves and/or each other with the sock dog. Invite them to reflect upon the experience by asking guiding questions such as: *Did you feel comfortable talking to the sock dog? Was it easier to talk to the sock dog than another person? Why do you think that is? Why is it important to talk to someone?*

Making a List and Checking it Twice

The teacher is at the door to the classroom as the students enter, talking to them and giving them scraps of paper, each with its own number. Begin the lesson by asking students to write their own brilliant thing on the piece of paper next to the number. Throughout the lesson you can call out numbers and ask them to share. This could also be used as a method to see who is engaged and listening attentively.

AND/OR

You can develop a class list of Brilliant Things during a lesson or over the course of the unit/ semester/ year. You could have everyone add one thing every day systematically, or you could post a long piece of paper on which students are invited to add an item when they feel compelled.

Inference Making

Distribute or create stations with various list items, resembling those compiled by the Narrator. The script indicates that the pieces of paper should look like authentic parts of the list - ones written during childhood could be written in crayon for instance, others should be written on napkins, beer mats, and the backs of envelopes. Have students make inferences as to the age (or other characteristics) of the person who wrote the entry.

HBO Film Adaptation

Before or after attending the production, watch the HBO film adaptation. Be advised that you will require an HBO subscription or have to pay a rental fee of \$3.99. Ask students to compare and contrast that production with Royal MTC's show. You may want to focus on the similarities and differences between the portrayals, or on a live production versus a film adaptation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OU56HZUnkK0>

Précis

The Narrator describes how at the start of the lecture, the lecturer would hold the book aloft and give a very accurate and detailed précis of the novel. If the students have an independent novel study, ask them to write a summary and present it this way.

Staged

Arrange your desks so as to create three different spaces: Proscenium Stage, Thrust Stage, and Theatre in the Round. Have students perform the same selection of text from the play and get them to reflect on how the staging affects the experience.

Interviews

Show the interviews with Duncan Macmillan and Jonny Donahoe conducted during the 2016 Perth International Arts Festival and answer the following questions: *What influenced this production of this play? Do you think Macmillan and Donahoe accomplished their aims?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKxDFSI-LKA>

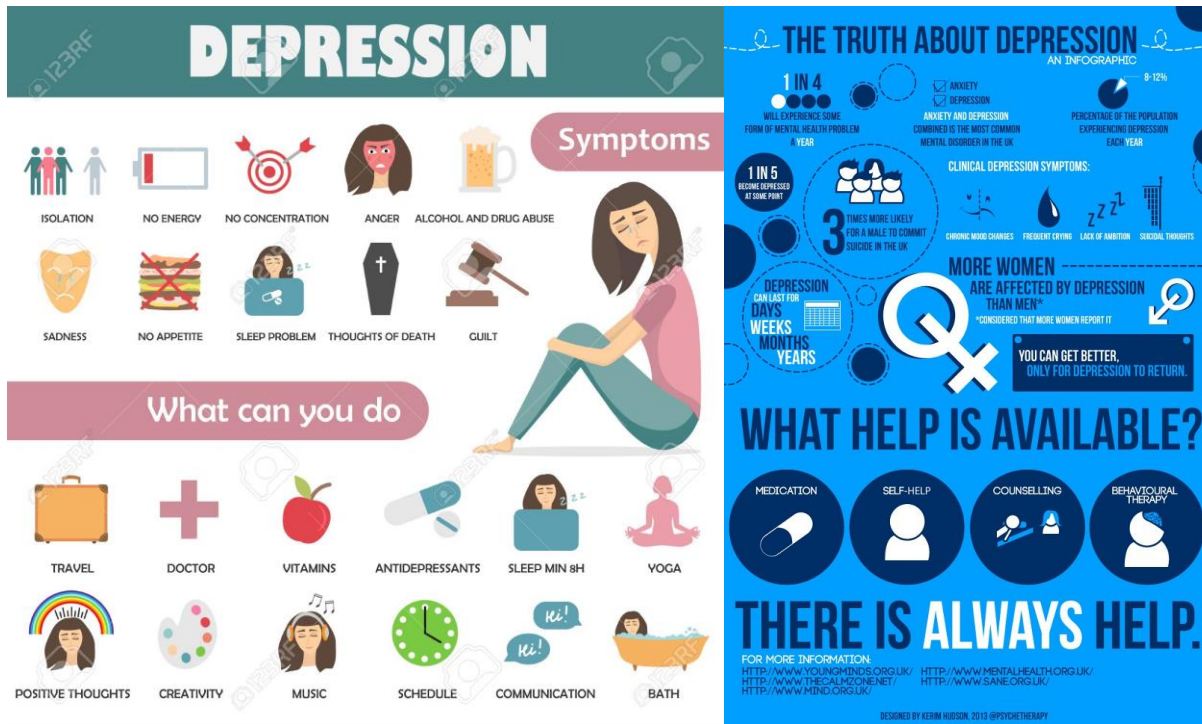
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlkUx3C-1tk&t=8s>

Facts vs. Opinions

Ask students to read the review, "Every Brilliant Thing: Jonny Donahoe and Duncan Macmillan on the show that charmed the world." Next, ask them to underline the facts in the article and highlight the opinions. Then ask them to choose one of the opinions and explain whether or not they agree with it after seeing Royal MTC's production (keeping in mind that it is a different production).

<https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/every-brilliant-thing-jonny-donahoe-and-duncan-macmillan-on-the-show-that-charmed-the-world-a3656001.html>

Infographic



First, have students examine the above infographics on depression and generate a list of the characteristics of an infographic, considering what makes it attractive and informative. Then conduct research on another mental illness and create an infographic to educate others.

You may want to consider having them use sites such as <https://piktochart.com/> or <https://www.canva.com/create/infographics/> to execute this.

Image Association



Ask students to examine the above images and answer: *What message is being portrayed in the image? How does it relate to the play?*

A Picture of 1000 Words



Ask students to examine the above image and reflect on what defines us.

Let's Talk About It



In an interview, Duncan Macmillan said, “when it comes to deciding whether or not to carry on living or to take your own life, that’s something theatre should be talking about and addressing.” Yet, as this graphic conveys, we sometimes struggle to converse about mental health. Ask students to examine the above image and reflect on the importance of talking about mental health by considering the following questions: *Do you think these are common thoughts and feelings? Do you relate to any of these thoughts and feelings? Do you feel comfortable talking about your thoughts and feelings? Do you consider yourself educated on mental health issues?* Through the “Let’s Talk” campaign, Bell is encouraging us to end the stigma around mental illness. There are five individuals with five different fears, but there are also five ways you can help! Present this resource to your students and support them in implementing this initiative at school.

<https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/ways-to-help>

Depression: A Student’s Perspective

Ask your students to watch the following video and analyze it by answering the following questions: Who is the intended audience of the video? What was the purpose of the video? Did it achieve its purpose? Do you feel like you better understand what it’s like to experience depression after watching the video?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOx0Q273AsQ&t=262s>

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

(compiled by Ksenia Broda – Milian)

Anxiety Disorders Association of Manitoba - <http://www.adam.mb.ca>

Canadian Mental Health Association - <https://mbwpg.cmha.ca/?lang=2>

KLINIC Community Health - <http://klinik.mb.ca>

Provides health care, counselling, and education as well as a crisis line (suicide as well as sexual assault) for people of every age, background, ethnicity, gender identity, and socio-economic circumstance.

Klinik's crisis lines" open to people of all ages, genders and backgrounds. **You do not have to be in crisis or suicidal to call.** Calling the Crisis Lines can be a good place to start when trying to sort out a problem.

Klinik can also refer you to other services or programs.

Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba - <http://www.mooddordersmanitoba.ca>

Support groups, resources, education, and other services.

Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support - www.reasonstolive.ca

A project of Klinik Community Health, this website has resources for getting help, helping someone else, and dealing with loss as well as running a crisis and support line.

Mental Health Education Resource Centre of Manitoba - <http://www.mherc.mb.ca>

A provincial resource promoting the exchange of knowledge including reducing mental illness stigma.

Electronic resources, an online catalogue and free library, and links to various specialized services within Manitoba and across Canada.

MB Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services offers free, confidential, non-judgemental counselling for anyone living on a Manitoba farm or in a rural or northern community: 1-866-367-3276 or 204-571-4180. Live chat and resources online at <https://supportline.ca>

Suicide Prevention, Education, Awareness, Knowledge - <http://www.speak-out.ca>

Material about depression and suicide for survivors and their loved ones. Not for those in immediate danger.

Mental Health America - <https://www.mhanational.org/live-b4stage4>

Information and tips on living a mentally healthy life, recovery and support for yourself, and others, and mental wellness tools.

For immediate help in mental health crisis:

KLINIC Crisis Line: 204-786-8686 or 1-888-322-3019

Manitoba Suicide Prevention and Support Line:
1-877-435-7170

Crisis Stabilization Unit: 204-940-3633

Mobile Crisis Service: 204-940-1781

Youth Mobile Crisis Team: 204-949-4777

Seneca House: 204-942-9276 (7 pm to 11 pm)

Kids Help Phone: 1-800-668-6868

STUDY GUIDE RESOURCES

- <https://www.tennisfame.com/hall-of-famers/inductees/andre-agassi>
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Albert-Ayler>
- <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/anaesthesia/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Bill-Evans>
- <https://dogtime.com/dog-breeds/border-collie>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/cab-calloway>
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Cannonball-Adderley>
- <https://techterms.com/definition/cd>
- <https://www.biography.com/actor/christopher-walken>
- <https://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/what-is-cortisol#1>
- <https://dogtime.com/dog-breeds/berman-pinscher#/slide/1>
- <https://www.allmusic.com/artist/donny-hathaway-mn0000182360/biography>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/duke-ellington>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/gustav-mahler>
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Hank-Mobley>
- <https://genius.com/The-ink-spots-into-each-life-some-rain-must-fall-lyrics>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/john-coltrane>
- <https://www.biography.com/actor/marilyn-monroe>
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Marlon-Brando>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mork_%26_Mindy
- <https://www.howtogeek.com/361516/what-is-an-mp3-file-and-how-do-i-open-one/>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/nina-simone>

- <https://examples.yourdictionary.com/palindrome-examples.html>
- <https://www.drugs.com/mtm/pentobarbital-injection.html>
- <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/plinth>
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/pr%C3%A9cis>
- <https://www.biography.com/musician/ray-charles>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ronnie_Singer
- <https://www.samaritans.org/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Star_Trek
- <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Sorrows-of-Young-Werther>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phonograph_record
- <https://thevinylrevivers.com/a-brief-history-of-vinyl-records/>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weldon_Irvine
- <https://www.openaccessgovernment.org/the-werther-effect/42915/>
- <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/news/danger-mouse-to-return-with-new-series-on-bbc-9542367.html>
- <https://www.theatrefolk.com/blog/theatre-in-the-round-staging/>
- <https://www.britannica.com/art/theatre-in-the-round>
- <https://stageagent.com/writers/8834/duncan-macmillan>
- <http://www.jdpnyc.com/duncan-macmillan>
- <https://www.jigsaw-online.com/blog/uncategorized/in-conversation-with-playwright-duncan-macmillan.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/sep/23/duncan-macmillan-theatre-every-brilliant-thing-lungs-2071>
- <http://www.jonnydonahoe.co.uk/>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/dec/13/thirty-christmases-review-new-diorama-london>

- <https://chalkandblade.com/2019/01/17/new-show-josie-jonny-are-having-a-baby-with-you/>
- <http://avalonuk.com/clients/jonny-and-the-baptists/>
- <https://www.painesplough.com/>
- <http://www.idpnyc.com/georgeperrin>
- <https://www.whatsonstage.com/london-theatre/news/george-perrin-james-grieve-step-down-paines-plough-48399.html>
- <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/play-talk-duncan-macmillan-on-writing-impossible-adaptations-and-theatre-as-a-workout-for-the-a3518401.html>
- <https://www.bard.org/study-guides/brilliant-playwrites-3ep9w>
- <https://3puuzj4cgp0w1zze71361rza-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/every-brilliant-thing-program.pdf>
- <https://americanrepertorytheater.org/bio/duncan-macmillan/>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEbv1bGZhX0>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlkUx3C-1tk>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKxDFSI-LKA>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/schedule-for-thursday-december-22-2016-1.3906624/jonny-donahoe-s-every-brilliant-thing-has-the-audience-sharing-personal-stories-about-depression-1.3906628>
- <http://www.theatretrust.org.uk/discover-theatres/theatre-faqs/170-what-are-the-types-of-theatre-stages-and-auditoria>
- <https://www.standard.co.uk/go/london/theatre/every-brilliant-thing-jonny-donahoe-and-duncan-macmillan-on-the-show-that-charmed-the-world-a3656001.html>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/chronic-diseases/mental-illness/what-depression.html>
- <https://cmha.ca/fast-facts-about-mental-illness>

- <https://www.camh.ca/en/driving-change/the-crisis-is-real/mental-health-statistics>
- <http://depressionhurts.ca/en/default.aspx>
- <https://cmha.bc.ca/documents/depression-2/>
- <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/healthy-living/suicide-canada-key-statistics-infographic.html>
- <https://www.123rf.com/photo-109722346-stock-vector-depression-symptoms-and-treatment-icons-infographic-concept-about-mental-health-vector-illustration.html>
- <https://www.dailyinfographic.com/truth-about-depression>
- <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2019/07-08/cover-prevent-suicide>
- <https://www.themedicalstation.com/site/blog-doctor-north-york/2017/09/28/comedy-and-depression-the-hidden-symptom>
- <https://medium.com/@gabriella-evang/mental-illness-is-more-visible-than-ever-yet-the-stigma-remains-the-same-af69327af7dd>
- <https://www.burnabynow.com/news/burnaby-s-ride-don-t-hide-event-puts-the-pedal-to-mental-illness-1.23858794>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOx0Q273AsQ&t=262s>
- <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/ways-to-help>

STUDY GUIDE CREATOR BIOGRAPHY

Sarah Farrant is thrilled to be maintaining a long-distance relationship as a study guide creator with the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre from her hometown in Ontario. She is very passionate about the incorporation of arts in education, as she graduated from Western University with an Honours Specialization in English and Drama, as well as a Bachelor of Education. Sarah has been involved with a number of theatrical productions, both on and off stage. She has experience working with youth in a variety of capacities, including at a childcare centre, tutoring service, and day camp, as well as in elementary and secondary schools locally and overseas. When she is not creating activities for other educators, she is planning lessons for her Grade 7 class.

ROYAL MTC THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Arrive Early: Latecomers may not be admitted to a performance. Please ensure you arrive with enough time to find your seat before the performance starts.

Cell Phones and Other Electronic Devices: Please **TURN OFF** your cell phones/iPods/gaming systems/cameras. We have seen an increase in texting, surfing, and gaming during performances, which is very distracting for the performers and other audience members. The use of cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.

Talking During the Performance: You can be heard (even when whispering) by the actors onstage and the audience around you. Disruptive patrons will be removed from the theatre. Please wait to share your thoughts and opinions with others until after the performance.

Food/Drinks: Food and outside drinks are not allowed in the theatre. Where there is an intermission, concessions may be open for purchase of snacks and drinks. There is complimentary water in the lobby.

Dress: There is no dress code at the Royal Manitoba Theatre Centre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats in the theatre. We also strive to be a scent-free environment, and thank all patrons for their cooperation.

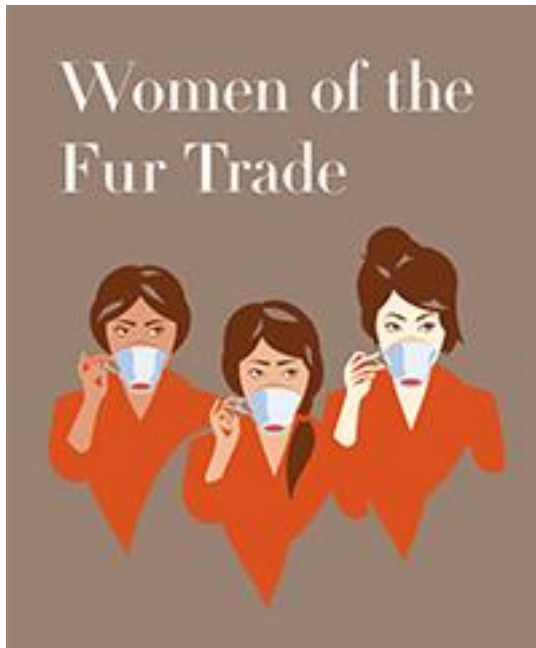
Leaving During the Performance: If an audience member leaves the theatre during a performance, they will be readmitted at the discretion of our Front of House staff. Should they be readmitted, they will not be ushered back to their original seat, but placed in a vacant seat at the back of the auditorium.

Being Asked to Leave: The theatre staff has, and will exercise, the right to ask any member of the audience to leave the performance if that person is being disruptive. Inappropriate and disruptive behaviour includes, but is not limited to: talking, using electronic devices, cameras, laser pointers, or other light- or sound-emitting devices, and deliberately interfering with an actor or the performance (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.).

Talkbacks: All Tuesday evening performances, student matinees and final matinees at Royal MTC feature a talkback with members of the cast following the show. While watching the performance, make a mental note of questions to ask the actors. Questions can be about the story, the interpretation, life in the theatre, etc.

Enjoy the show: Laugh, applaud, cheer and respond to the performance appropriately. Make sure to thank all the artists for their hard work with applause during the curtain call.

UP NEXT AT ROYAL MTC

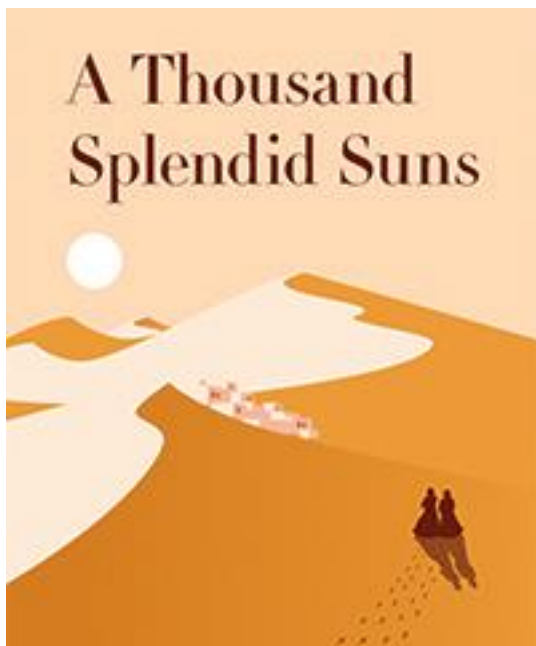


Women of the Fur Trade

By Frances Koncan
Tom Hendry Warehouse

Feb 27 – Mar 14, 2020
11:30AM Student Matinee Mar 11
ASL Interpreted Performance Mar 12
Grade 9+

Topics: Red River Valley First Nations and Metis people, Riel Rebellion, feminism, gender relations, identity, friendship
Advisory: Strong language, some suggestive sexual content, Louis Riel's execution is discussed and symbolically depicted



A Thousand Splendid Things

By Ursula Rani Sarma
Based on the book by Khaled Hosseini
John Hirsch Mainstage

Mar 19 – Apr 11, 2020
11:30AM Student Matinee Apr 9
Grade 10+

Topics: Afghanistan, perseverance, reputation, love, loyalty, belonging, gender relations, friendship
Advisory: Mature content, physical violence, domestic violence

Book your tickets today!

Phone 204 954 6413

Email Thomas turish@royalmtc.ca