

# Harvey

By **Mary Chase**  
Directed by **KJ Sanchez**  
Executive Producer **Judy Hansen**

This Teacher's Guide is designed to be used in the classroom along with The Rep's Play Guide for *Harvey*. These are some suggested activities for your classroom. The Play Guide is available online at <http://www.milwaukeeep.com/Tickets/2014-15-Season/Harvey-Play-Guide/>

## TEACHER'S GUIDE

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Teacher Guide written by Deanie Vallone, Education Intern, with contributions by Lindsey Hoel-Neds, Education Associate, and Hope Parow, Education Assistant

### SUGGESTED TEACHING TOPICS

- 1.) Family & Relationships
- 2.) Reality vs. Fantasy
- 3.) Changing Identities & Perspectives

### FAMILY & RELATIONSHIPS

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- *Harvey's* plot revolves around the Dowd family and how they interact with each other. Over the course of the play they learn to make sacrifices for each other, and they redefine how they view one another. How do you define family? What kind of exceptions do you make for family? How do you treat your family members differently from other people?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- *Harvey* depicts one type of family from the 1940s. How have family dynamics changed since that time period? How is your family similar to or different from the Dowd family in *Harvey*?

#### PERFORM: Family Portrait Tableaus

Have students create tableaus (frozen images that tell a story) to illustrate family as a central theme. Their tableaus should be candid in the sense that they are not depicting a traditional formal family portrait, but families engaged in daily life. Break students up into groups of four to six students, making sure to have at least four different groups. Each group should be given a few minutes to discuss how they want to interpret the idea of family. They should consider levels (whether they are standing, sitting, kneeling, etc.), facial expressions, "frozen" action or gestures, and which family members they choose to depict. Have each group take turns presenting their tableaus to the class.

To debrief, ask the audience members to describe what they saw: *Who is present in the family? How do the members relate to each other? Who is the central focus and who holds power? What kind of action is occurring in the tableau?* Encourage students to refer directly to specifics they saw in the tableaus. After the observing students have discussed the scene, ask the performing students to explain their intentions for the scene and their justifications behind their tableau. After all the tableaus have been performed, discuss the similarities and differences they saw in the scenes.



Scenes from the 1949 Broadway production of *Harvey*.  
Photo courtesy of Program Publishing Company.

### REALITY VS. FANTASY

#### DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- Read about the pooka myth in the *Harvey* Play Guide. This Irish folklore influenced playwright Mary Chase's development of the pooka, Harvey. What roles do myths or legends play in our culture? Are there any myths or legends that your particular family or society values?
- Throughout the play, characters question what is real and what is not, and the existence of Harvey is one of the play's largest questions. How do we determine the difference between reality and fantasy?

#### DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- Why do you think Elwood has a pooka? What is the significance of this particular mythological character in the story?
- The original pooka legends most likely developed as a warning against travelling alone or indulging in inappropriate behavior. Harvey, however, seems to be a genial pooka who empowers Elwood as well as others around him, yet he still works as a warning against being judgmental or narrow-minded. How does Harvey interact with and affect the other characters in the play?
- How are the lines between fantasy and reality blurred during the production, both in the script and in the technical elements? How does theater as an art form challenge these divisions between the real and unreal?

See the *Harvey* Play Guide page 9 for more information on pooka folklore.

#### WRITE: Legendary Readers Theater

Legends and myths often serve as warnings, and though Harvey appears to be a well-meaning pooka, he, too, warns people against close-mindedness and being overly serious. Have students write their own legends inspired by the characterization of Harvey. Their legends should work as a warning against a negative trait, while emphasizing a positive one.

Once the students have written their legends, they should adapt the stories into Readers Theater scripts. [See <http://www.thebestclass.org/rtscripts.html> for examples.] In groups, students should assign roles and perform their stories for the class, considering movement, voice, gestures, and basic staging options.

To debrief, after the performances have the students discuss what their legends symbolize, and how the fantasy of the story teaches a lesson about reality. *In what ways do these contrasting elements of real and unreal interact or overlap?*

# CHANGING IDENTITIES & PERSPECTIVES

See the *Harvey* Play Guide page 10 for more information about America during the war.

## DISCUSS: Pre-Show Questions

- We are constantly shaping and reshaping our identities as we age, and our country has also reshaped its identity over the decades. How have our mindsets socially and culturally changed over the past fifty years? Are we more or less accepting of people who are different than us? Will we improve our attitudes in another fifty years?

## DISCUSS: Post-Show Questions

- In what ways did the characters in *Harvey* change over the course of the play? How did they redefine their ideas about family, reality, and acceptance?
- How would this play have been different had it been set in another time period?

## RESEARCH: Historical Analysis

Break students into groups and have each group research the topics listed on the "America in the 1940s" page in the Play Guide. They should gather historical facts, as well as any relevant images or videos. In their analysis, have students note major differences they see between the 1940s and today. Then have each group present their topic as a creative project (ex: visual timeline, performance piece, PowerPoint presentation, etc.) to educate the rest of the class.

To debrief: *Regarding their specific topics, what has changed since this time period? In their opinion, are these changes positive or negative, and why? Upon which aspects of our culture have these changes touched? How are their identities defined by the modern-day society in which they live? Do they think they would have different identities had they lived in the 1940s? What would change and what would not?*



Jimmy Stewart as Elwood in the 1950 film adaptation of *Harvey*. Photo courtesy of Cinetext/Allstar.



Carol Kane as Betty Chumley and Jim Parsons as Elwood in Roundabout Theatre Company's 2012 production of *Harvey*. Photo by Joan Marcus.

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- 1.) The Impact of World War II on America
- 2.) Farce in Theater & Other Art Forms
- 3.) Female Playwrights in American History

## STANDARDS

### Common Core State Standards:

#### English Language Arts

RL.8-12.2 THEMES

W.8-12.3 NARRATIVE WRITING

SL.8-12.1 COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSIONS

W.8-12.7 INFORMATIVE WRITING

W.8-12.7 RESEARCH

### Wisconsin Model Academic Standards:

#### Theater

A.12.1 ATTEND & EVALUATE THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

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