

NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

STUDY GUIDE



PREPARED BY
NORTHLIGHT THEATRE

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MEET THE TEAM



John Patrick Shanley (playwright) is a Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award–winning American playwright, an Oscar winning screenwriter, and a theatre and film director. His theatrical work is performed extensively across the United States and around the world. For his play, *Doubt*, he received both the Tony Award and the Pulitzer Prize. In the arena of screenwriting, he has ten films to his credit, most recently *Wild Mountain Thyme*, with Emily Blunt, Jamie Dornan, and Christopher Walken. His film of *Doubt*, with Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams, and Viola Davis, which he also directed, was nominated for five Academy Awards, including Best Adapted Screenplay. For his script of *Moonstruck* he received both the Writers Guild of America Award and an Academy Award for best original screenplay. In 2009, The Writers Guild of America awarded Mr. Shanley the Lifetime Achievement In Writing.



BJ Jones (director) is in his 25th season as Artistic Director of Northlight. Mr. Jones is a two–time Joseph Jefferson Award Winning actor and a three–time nominated director. He’s directed the world premieres of *Charm*, (Jeff Award Best New Play), *The Outgoing Tide* (Jeff Award Best New Play), *White Guy on the Bus* (Nominated – Jeff Award Best New Play), *Chapatti* (Nominated – Jeff Award Best New Play), *Better Late*, and *Rounding Third*. Additional directorial credits include *Pitmen Painters* (Timeline, Jeff Award Best Production); *100 Saints You Should Know* (Steppenwolf); *Glengarry Glen Ross* (Alliance Theatre, Atlanta, Suzi Bass nomination Best Director); *The Lady with All the Answers* (Cherry Lane, New York); *Animal Crackers* (Baltimore Center Stage); *Three Musketeers*, *The Tempest*, *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Utah Shakespeare Festival), and four productions at the Galway International Arts Festival. As a performer, he has appeared at Northlight, Goodman, Steppenwolf, Court and other theatres throughout Chicago. Film/TV credits include *The Fugitive*, *Body Double*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, *Early Edition*, *Cupid*, and *Turks*, among others.

MEET THE TEAM

Jeffrey D. Kmiec
Scenic Design

Izumi Inaba
Costume Design

JR Lederle
Lighting Design

Lindsay Jones
Original Music & Sound Design

Katie Klemme
Stage Manager

Kristen Waagner
Assistant Director

Nick Bartleson
Props Design

MEET THE CAST



**Cassidy
Slaughter-Mason**
as Fran



**Mark L.
Montgomery**
as Owen



Marika Mashburn
as Trish



Sandra Delgado
as Susie

[Read full
artist bios](#)



AN INTERVIEW WITH THE PLAYWRIGHT



In a life of feeling things incredibly deeply, John Patrick Shanley has experienced some thrilling highs: the rapturous audience response in 1984 to *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, his first success as a playwright; accepting an Academy Award in 1988 for best screenplay for *Moonstruck*.

Add to that list the thrill of discovering the luxury of drop-off laundry. “I was like 35 years old, and I was in Poughkeepsie,” Shanley said in a phone interview during a rehearsal break last month. “I went in to do my laundry, and after a couple of questions, I realized that they would do it for me, fold it and give it back to me. And I was like, ‘This is the greatest thing that’s ever happened in my life.’”

Shanley’s latest play, *Brooklyn Laundry*, is about sacrifice and everyday heroism that begins with a character placing her “bag of rags” on the scale at a laundromat.

Brooklyn Laundry is a part of an unofficial triptych of Shanley plays in New York this season. In January, an Off Broadway revival of *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, starring Aubrey Plaza and Christopher Abbott, concluded a successful run at the Lucille Lortel Theater. On March 7, the first Broadway revival of his Pulitzer Prize-winning 2004 play, *Doubt*, opens in a Roundabout Theater Company production led by Liev Schreiber and Amy Ryan.

How does it feel to have three shows — spanning over 40 years of your career — staged in quick succession?

I didn’t engineer it, but it certainly invites reflection on my life as an artist. You see how you’ve changed, how you remain the same, and whether or not what you were talking about is still relevant 20 years after, 40 years after, to the moment that you’re living in.

When I heard that I’m doing *Danny and the Deep Blue Sea*, *Doubt* and *Brooklyn Laundry*, I thought, well, I’m going to Paris, I’m going to live it up because I’m getting older. So I went to Paris. And I got a phone call the night I arrived: “You have melanoma. And it didn’t start where we found it. We don’t know where it started.” I hung up the phone. I’m like, that’s it. I got back to New York and I had two melanomas on my scalp. The first one had migrated to a second location. It looks bad. But after three and a half hours of surgery, I’m out of the woods.

Three plays, two melanomas, one existential crisis. I’m reminded of something the director Norman Jewison said about you and your script for *Moonstruck*: Do you believe coincidences play an important role in our lives?

Anybody who’s paying attention will notice that there are these confluences — these karma spots that come up from time to time. This is certainly one. All of this happened right before I went into rehearsal with *Brooklyn Laundry*, which is a play that deals with a family that is having very, very serious health issues. That informed things in a way that I can’t even explain. I have to be so careful what I write about.

VIDEO



Writing Advice

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR



What inspired you to bring *Brooklyn Laundry* to Northlight?

We had done *Outside Mullingar* by John Patrick Shanley some years ago and I got to know him then. I reached out to see if he had an interest in working on a new play here at Northlight and within a few weeks he sent me *Brooklyn Laundry*. I asked him if he would want to direct and he told me he would prefer me to direct. It was a very personal piece with elements inspired by his family and that touched me.

Given the play's exploration of love, family, and difficult life choices, what message or reflection do you hope the audience takes away after experiencing *Brooklyn Laundry*?

In my conversations with John, he feels that seizing life and embracing responsibility is a powerful choice, it has rich and lasting rewards. He has two adopted boys himself and wonderful relationships with them as adults. His sister had cancer as well and these incidents are reflected in the play.

Beyond the entertainment value, what kind of conversations or discussions do you hope *Brooklyn Laundry* sparks not only among the audience, but your collaborators during the rehearsal process?

I think the play focuses on difficult choices. How do we get outside of ourselves and take a path that seemingly is challenging but ultimately rewarding. It's about responsibility to each other and to our community. Theatrically it reminds us of the value of ensemble and its rewards as well.



SETTING: DROP-OFF LAUNDRY

Brooklyn Laundry takes place at a drop-off laundry in Brooklyn, New York, where you can bring a bag of clothes to have them washed and folded. Drop-off laundry has a long history, dating back to Ancient Rome, when workers called *fullos* would clean the clothes of the city. Even with the invention of the electric washer and dryer in the 20th century, many could not afford to own their own washer and dryer, leading to the development of self-service laundromats. Today, laundromats, cleaners, and drop-off laundries offer a variety of services, including tailoring, wash-fold-dry, and dry cleaning.

Laundry Fun Fact!

In the play, Owen's laundry uses Arm and Hammer soap, but laundries haven't always smelled so fresh. In the Middle Ages, lye was the most common cleaning agent, and in Ancient Rome they cleaned their clothes with something even smellier - urine!



John Patrick Shanley on the inspiration behind *Brooklyn Laundry*

"At a certain point, they lost my whole bag of laundry. Somebody took the wrong bag. We wait weeks and weeks and they never came back. Someone got a whole bag — my sheets, my clothes — and said, "I'm keeping this. I'm sleeping on these sheets. Maybe I'll wear one of his sweatshirts."

And I had to negotiate how much the credit would be with the guy at the laundry. I just took him in: He had this look in his eye of a slight weariness. **He turned into a character in my mind that became part of the play.** I started to just admire the heroism of all the people who we don't see in the newspaper and who run this city, who make New York City the great city that it is."

SETTING: BROOKLYN

The iconic Brooklyn Bridge crosses over the East River, connecting Manhattan and Brooklyn. It was designed by John A. Roebling. The bridge finished construction in 1883 and at that time was the longest suspension bridge in the world.

Brooklyn Bridge by the Numbers!

- 116,000 vehicles, 30,000 pedestrians and 3,000 cyclists travel over the Brooklyn Bridge each day.
- Total length of bridge and approaches: 6,016 feet
- Main span: 1,595.5 feet



Brooklyn is one of the five boroughs of New York City. The boroughs refer to different geographic areas of the city and are Manhattan, Staten Island, Queens, The Bronx, and Brooklyn - where our play takes place. Brooklyn is across the East River from Manhattan - hence the need for its famous Brooklyn Bridge. Brooklyn is made up of many different neighborhoods and is known for its culture and art.

Brooklyn Fun Facts!

- Brooklyn is home to the 2nd largest Black population of any city in North America
- Brooklyn is home to Nearly 730,000 Black people live in Brooklyn—second only to Chicago —and larger than Atlanta and Detroit's Black population combined.
- Brooklyn is the most diverse community on the planet.
- Brooklyn is the 3rd Largest "City" in America — Larger than Boston, Atlanta, Washington DC & Minneapolis Combined

CAREGIVING AND FAMILIES

WHAT IS KINSHIP CARE?

In *Brooklyn Laundry*, the playwright depicts several different types of caregiving – for example, we see care depicted between two siblings, between a parent and a child, and between romantic partners. One type of caregiving highlighted in the play is kinship care, which is when children and youth live with relatives or extended family when their parents are unable to care for them. The most common type of kinship care is grandchildren living with their grandparents, and there are approximately 2.7 million children being raised by their kin in the United States today. According to the Annie E. Casey Foundation, “most child welfare professionals agree that placing children with appropriate kin is the best living situation for children whose parents aren’t able to care for them safely at home.”

NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES

We often see families in books, movies, and TV that consist of a father, a mother, and two children. However, in the past fifty years, our idea of what family means has evolved to become more inclusive. Some families may have single or divorced parents, or include queer couples or relationships. Some families choose to adopt or foster children. The term “chosen family” has become more well-known in recent years; it refers to the people you feel so connected to that you would consider them family, and is used widely in the LGBTQ+ community. By depicting families with complex ties in a relatable way, popular shows like *Modern Family* have expanded our ideas of what a family can be.



INVISIBLE WORK AND EMOTIONAL LABOR

Washing the dishes, planning groceries for the next week, caring for children – would you consider these things work? The term “invisible work” refers to domestic work that is done in private, without pay. These tasks can be exhausting and mentally difficult, but they are still not widely considered to be ‘work’ when compared to, say, going to the office. Emotional labor is one type of invisible work, defined as the work required “to put your feelings to one side in order to manage other people’s emotions.” Historically, invisible work has been done mostly by women, a pattern that persists today, even as many women take jobs outside of the home.

Want to learn more about these topics? Check out Family Focus, a Chicago-based organization that invests in strengthening families through social justice and advocacy.

Discussion Questions



- Who are the people in your family? Does your idea of family include people who are not related to you? How is your family similar to or different from “traditional” depictions of family?
- Where do you see “invisible work” being done in *Brooklyn Laundry*? Where do you see “invisible work” being done in your own life?

ROMANTIC COMEDIES

A rom-com is any movie in which the film's primary comedic tension derives from a central romantic relationship.



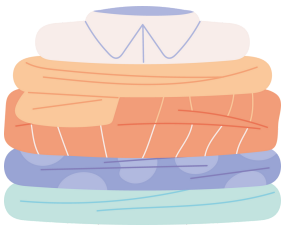
Laundry Collection

To put together laundry or a great rom-com, your characters first need to meet. To put all their baggage on the scale and say hello. Otherwise known as the meet cute (or in some case, not so cute).



Wash What Happens

Next, everything combines into a soapy, dramatic mixture. Bring on the unique, troublesome situation that keeps the audiences guessing, such as a business shutting down, an accidental proposal, or being stuck in an elevator together. Something that mixes everything up and brings problems to light.



A Dry and Warm Ending

Finally, whether the couple finally admits their feelings for each other, starts dating, gets hitched, says "I do," or finds a different kind of happy ending, a happily ever after is a staple of all romantic comedies. The clothes are freshly washed and ready to wear for the rest of their lives.



Discussion Questions



- What's your favorite rom-com? Can you think of any more romantic comedy tropes that your movie follows that isn't listed here?
- Following the three steps, how would you write your own romantic comedy?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

SUSPENSION BRIDGE

The Brooklyn Bridge is a suspension bridge. Suspension bridges use cables and tension in order to carry their load. To see how they work, break into groups and build your own suspension bridges between two desks. After all groups have finished, test and see who's bridge is the strongest by hanging a paper cup from the center of the bridge and seeing how many pennies it can hold.

To build your own suspension bridge each group will need the following:

- 7 drinking straws
- masking tape
- dental floss or thread
- scissors
- 2 large paper clips
- ruler

How to Build Your Own Suspension Bridge

1. Cut two short pieces of straw, each 3 centimeters (about 1.25 in.) long. For each tower, tape two straws on either side of a short piece of straw, as shown. Tape the long straws together at the top, too.
2. Tape one tower to the edge of a desk. Tape the second tower to a second desk of the same height. Position the towers 17 cm (about 7 in.) apart.
3. Place another straw between the towers so its ends rest on the short pieces. This straw is the bridge deck. Now you have a simple beam bridge.
4. Now change the beam bridge into a suspension bridge. Tie the center of a 100-cm (about 4 ft.) cable around the middle of a new straw. Place the straw between the towers. Pass each end of the cable over a tower and down the other side.
5. To anchor the bridge, wrap each end of the cable around a paper clip. Slide the paper clips away from the tower until the cable pulls tight. Then tape the paper clips firmly to the desks. Test it again.

To test the strength of the bridges the class will need

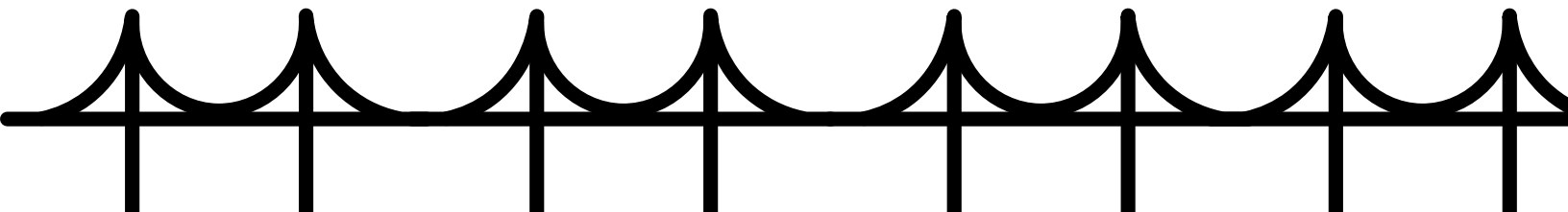
- 2 large paper clips
- paper cup
- pennies

Make a load tester by unbending a large paper clip into a V-shape. Poke the ends of the paper clip into opposite sides of a paper cup, near the rim. Use a second paper clip to hang the load tester over the bridge deck. Record how many pennies the paper cup can hold before the bridge fails.

VIDEO



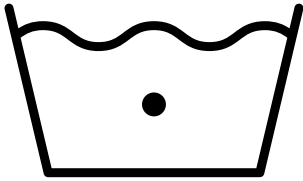
How do suspension bridges work?



CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

INSPIRATION STRIKES (EVEN FROM LAUNDRY)

This play was inspired by an ordinary place, a laundry in Brooklyn. From this seemingly ordinary place, the playwright created intricate characters and stories, full of the joy and sadness of real life.



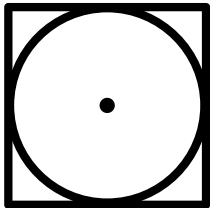
Wash: Think of an everyday place you visit as part of your routine (grocery store, gym, gas station, school, library, etc)

Now imagine a character who works there and write a character description. Consider the following:

- How long have they worked there?
- What is their job?
- What is their family like?
- How old are they?
- What do they like to do?
- What are their dreams?

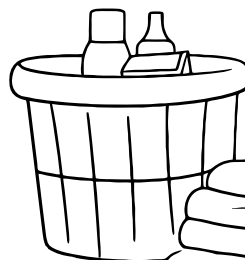
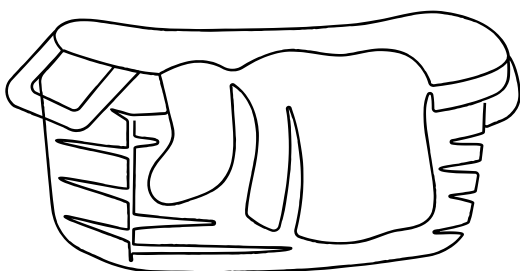


Rinse: Keep your character in mind. Pass your character description to another classmate. Get a character description from someone else.



Spin: Write a short scene between the character you imagined and the character you received from someone else. Try to include a conflict between the characters.

Bonus! Dry & Fold: Have volunteer actors read out the scenes! Discuss the different interpretations of characters and if any of these pieces could be combined to create a play.



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