

NORTHLIGHT THEATRE



SENSORY GUIDE

GUIDE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Northlight's production of *The First Lady of Television* by James Sherman.

This production will run at Northlight Theatre from September 4th through October 12th, 2025. The address is 9501 Skokie Blvd, Skokie, IL, 60077.

This guide holds many different accessibility tools to make your experience at the show as comfortable as possible. Please be aware that not every element of this guide will be useful to each individual. Therefore, please feel free to pick and choose which accessibility tools would be most beneficial to you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction (Pg 1)

Content & Sensory Notes (Pg 2)

Synopsis (Pgs 2-4)

Image Descriptions (Pgs 5-6)

Reference Photos (Pg 7)

Content Notes

- Smoking
- Mentions of WW2 and the Korean War
- Mentions of Fascism
- Discussion of communism
- Discussion of the Peekskill Riots
- Discussion of Nazis and white supremacy
- Discussion of anti-semitism
- Discussion of Jim Crow
- Brief mention of suicide

Sensory Notes

- Character sits up violently, loudly throwing the chair into a wall
- Some loud yelling and fighting

Synopsis

The play starts with lights up on a stage with the exterior of The Goldbergs family apartment window and on the windowsill, a can of Sanka Coffee. A woman, Molly, informs the audience that she is very busy, as tomorrow is a very exciting holiday, the fourth of July. She describes how the founding fathers were immigrants, just like most Americans today, which is why the holiday is so important. She then proceeds to advertise the can of Sanka Coffee, being instant, delicious, and very small amounts of caffeine. The lights then fade for a moment and Molly steps into her apartment. Her brother, David enters with fourth of July decorations. David helps Molly with the decorations and they engage in witty banter. Molly's son, Sammy, enters with a bag of groceries, Molly looks inside and realizes he is missing strawberries, so she sends him back to the store to get some so she can make blintzes. Then Rosalie, Molly's daughter, comes home and mentions a contest for writing an essay about the founding fathers, and the prize is \$50. Rosalie suggests

borrowing her brother's encyclopedia, and so Molly asks Sammy for Rosalie to help. Sammy wants to go to a dance with a girl he likes, so they make a deal, Rosalie helps him learn to dance, and Sammy helps her with her essay. Rosalie starts to show Sammy how to move his feet with the dance. Sammy is confused, and turns on a more upbeat song, and the whole family ends up joining in bouncing on their feet and having fun. Suddenly there's a knock at the door, and it's Jake, Molly's husband, carrying tons of dresses.

Suddenly Molly drops character, and is revealed as Gertrude, an actress who plays Molly on a TV show, the Goldbergs, which she produced. The lights change and everyone is revealed to be an actor on a family TV show. Gertrude demands the director get more dresses. Arlene, the actress of Rosalie, asks Gertrude to read a script she wrote, but Gertrude hasn't read it. Arlene keeps wanting to help with writing but gets turned down. Gertrude and Philip (the actor who plays Jake) argue about the amount of dresses. Suddenly everyone gets out of a break and Eli, who plays David, and Arlene, who plays Rosalie, break off. Gertrude starts to scold Arlene and Larry, who plays Sammy about the dancing, but Larry claims to know how to dance. Everyone comes back, Phil, Gertrude and Walter are talking about how Gertrude is under pressure from the sponsors because Phil is a "controversial personality" on the show. They start rehearsing again. Jake comes in with dresses, in distress. Jake says how he's behind at work because they're one man short, and how he had to fire a worker they liked very much for stealing. (which causes an upset on set because Phil is about to be fired). There is talk at the table and then the phone rings, and it's the man Jake fired, which he doesn't speak to. The lights go down and the actors move into position. They all drop characters and Gertrude calls everyone over to talk. She tells everyone that the sponsors don't want to have any controversial personalities. And how there are people protesting their show. They start talking about actors who are on the "Red channels" and communists and the blacklists. The cast brings up how all the awards that Phil has won have been overlooked. Also how everyone on the Red Channels list is Jewish.

The whole cast is annoyed with Arlene about her attitude toward communism. Walter suggests that Gertrude and Phillip go to Syracuse to clear their bad reputation there, but they refuse. They also refuse to sign the loyalty pledge because they think it's a sign of a guilty conscience. The group goes back to begin filming again. Larry worries about his acting skills and pulls over Gertrude to express concern that he'll lose his job if they don't fire Phillip. They begin filming the show. David tells Molly he didn't go to the parade because he gets nervous and worries he'll get lost. Sammy gets home from the parade but Arlene still isn't done changing backstage. They stop filming and decide to add more lines so Arlene has more time to change. They go through the dialogue again, this time with some ad-libbed lines. Sammy and Rosalie come back from the parade but their dad is lagging behind a bit because he's in a bad mood. Molly suggests that Rosalie read out her essay to him at the dinner table to make him feel better. They all gather at the dinner table and eat the red, white, and blue blintzes. Arlene starts reading her George Washington essay but she includes lines about President Truman fighting communism and suggests war is a good thing. Eli and Phillip get upset at her for changing the pre-written essay to support President Truman. She says she was attempting to show that the Goldbergs supported America. Gertrude makes her read the pre-written essay instead. After she reads, Mr. Mendel calls the family, and asks to talk to Jake.

Walter tells them to stop acting and take a break, per union rules. Arlene asks what time it is and then asks to use the backstage phone, Walter and Gertrude say no. Philip asks Walter if they can vote to skip the break. Eli finds that funny because Phillip was a founder of Actors Equity, he then asks to tell the ventilation story. He does and afterwards they discuss the American Federation of

Radio Artists. Phillip wants to combine the Radio Artists with the Television Authority. Eli says that's why people are after him, because they want to bust the union so they say communists are behind them. Larry asks when communism became a bad thing. The other actors tell him about the Great Depression and how Marxists wrote the best plays. Eli and Walter explain that the Russians used to be our allies but after Stalin and Churchill rose to power, the Cold War and Red Scare began. Arlene gets overwhelmed and tells Phillip and Eli to stop talking. Eli teases her. Arlene worries that if people think she works with communists, she'll lose her current career as well as a future career in acting. She suggests writing Jake out of the show for a while or he could prove he's a patriotic American like the men on the House UnAmerican Activities Committee. Phillip tries to tell Arlene about the horrible things those men did at the Peekskill Riots. Phillip and Eli feel very strongly about the injustice in the current political climate. Break is over and the actors begin filming again. Just a couple lines in, Walter interrupts to tell Gertrude they have a phone call. She picks it up and it's Cardinal Spellman. She tries to convince him to end the blacklisting against Phillip. The Cardinal doesn't take her seriously and makes her do an impression of her TV character. He then tries to convert her to Catholicism. She hangs up the phone and cries while Phillip tries to comfort her. He asks for reassurance that Gertrude won't fire him. She dismisses him and he gets agitated. She decides to start filming again.

Phil doesn't say his lines and instead stands up and walks out of the dining room. Phil is stressed about losing his job. Walter suggests they cancel the broadcast for tonight but Phil thinks that he'll be fired if they don't broadcast. Larry says he doesn't want Gertrude to fire Phil, Arlene gets mad at him and says they'll all get fired then, the whole cast starts arguing. Gertrude stops them and says there's no fighting in her family. She considers the cast to be more family to her than her own family. She tells Larry he is a good dancer. She tells Arlene that if she wants to make it on television, she has to be prepared to be called lots of things, even a communist. She tells Phillip that he is a great actor and he admires him. She decides to keep filming the show with Phil on it.

They start filming again from the phone call from Mr. Mendel. Jake learns that his worker didn't steal the dresses and it was just a misunderstanding. The show wraps up and the lights fade. Gertrude does her end-of-show speech wishing the viewers a happy holiday and advertises Sanka. She then drops character and starts to choke up. She says that Sanka has the freedom to cancel your TV show and you can take your show to another network where they tell you to fire one of your actors. Then your actor is out of work and takes his own life. Because this is America and in America you have freedom. The lights fade out.

Image Descriptions

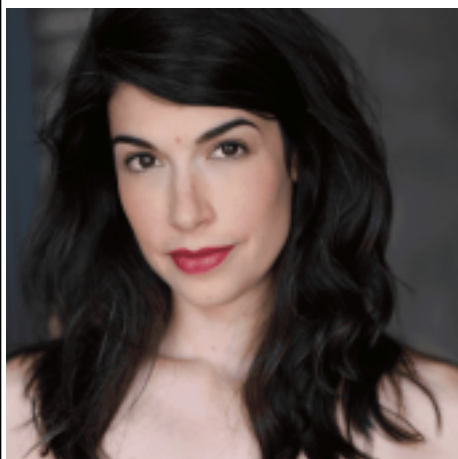


ID: A close-up headshot of a woman with curly, shoulder-length hair, wearing a teal satin blouse. She looks directly at the camera with a calm, confident expression against a dark background.



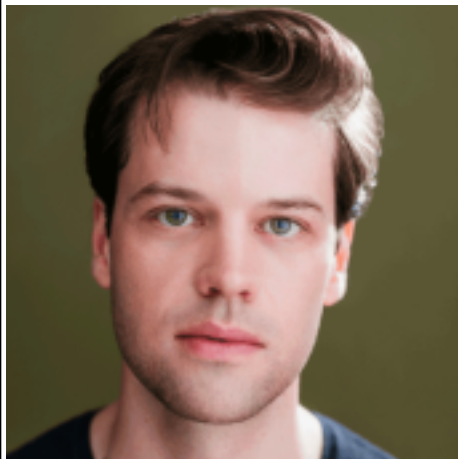
Mark David Kaplan
Eli Mintz “David”

ID: A male-identifying actor with salt and pepper curly hair and beard, in front of a blue gray background, wearing a dark blue blazer, looks contemplatively out at us. (Though he won't look quite like this in today's play, his happy and jovial demeanor will hopefully shine through!)



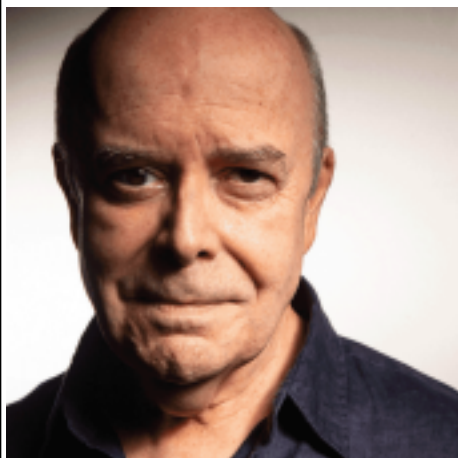
Sarah Coakley Price
Arlene McQuade “Rosalie”

ID: A white woman looks piercingly into the camera against a dark gray background. She wears red lipstick and her wavy dark brown hair falls past her collarbone and over the thin straps of her taupe-colored dress.



Ty Fanning
Larry Robinson “Sammy”

ID: A man with brown hair and green eyes. He is wearing a black sweater. His lips are slightly parted and his hair has a swoop in the front so some of it hangs over his forehead.



William Dick
Phillip Loeb “Jake”






ID: Late middle aged white male, bald on top with graying hair. He’s wearing a dark shirt and a pleasant smile.



Joe Dempsey
Walter Hart

ID: Joe Dempsey is an older, white guy wearing a plaid shirt and blue jacket against a brick wall background.

REFERENCE PHOTOS

	<p>North Shore Center for the Performing Arts Exterior</p> <p>ID: The front of North Shore Center on a sunny day. The building has white columns and its sides are primarily made of windows.</p>
	<p>North Shore Center for the Performing Arts Entrance</p> <p>ID: The doors to North Shore's building. The doors are paneled glass and there is a hand railing leading up. A man is entering the doors.</p>
	<p>North Shore Center for the Performing Arts Parking Lot</p> <p>ID: The parking lot at the theater. It is a sunny day with many clouds, there is a sign that says "Theatre Parking Only" and several cars parked.</p>
	<p>Northlight's Auditorium</p> <p>ID: The doors leading directly into the theater. There are three doors which are all light brown wood. Two doors are open. A sign above the doors reads North Theatre. A man is waving hello.</p>
	<p>The Set for <i>The First Lady of Television</i></p> <p>ID: The set depicts a mid-20th-century American living and dining room. The space features floral wallpaper, dark wood trim, and patriotic red, white, and blue bunting strung across the walls. At center stage, there is a green tufted sofa with a carved wooden coffee table on a patterned rug. A side table with a rotary phone and a lamp sit nearby. The dining area to the right includes a wooden table draped with a checkered cloth, matching chairs, and additional bunting. Warm wall sconces and framed portraits give the room a traditional, lived-in feel. The overall design conveys a domestic environment dressed for a celebratory occasion.</p>