

EARLY IN THE FILM *THE HOURS*—BASED ON MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM'S Pulitzer Prize–winning 1998 novel—Virginia Woolf characterizes the novel that she is writing as “a woman’s whole life in a single day. Just one day. And in that day, her whole life.” The book in question is *Mrs. Dalloway*, but this description applies equally to the stories of the heroines of *The Hours*: three women across time who are connected by Woolf’s masterpiece—one who is writing it, another who is reading it, and a third who is seemingly living out its plot. In the 2002 film, these roles were taken by Hollywood legends Nicole Kidman, Julianne Moore, and Meryl Streep. When Kevin Puts’s new adaptation of *The Hours* premieres this season, their operatic counterparts—mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato and sopranos Kelli O’Hara and Renée Fleming, who returns to the company for the first time since 2017—will carry them onto the Met stage.

As in the novel and film on which its based, Puts’s opera unfolds during a single day in the lives of three women: Virginia Woolf, who is beginning a new novel outside London in 1923; Laura Brown, a pregnant housewife in Los Angeles in 1949; and Clarissa Vaughan, a New York City editor throwing a party for her dearest friend who is dying of AIDS in 1999. Though separated by time and place, all three are connected by shared struggles with sexuality, mortality, and regret. In setting this complex story to music, Puts went beyond what was possible in either a book or a movie, in which the focus shifts from one heroine to another without really bringing them into contact. “In a way that is only possible through music, the lines between the stories gradually begin to blur,” he explains. “The worlds come together and apart, and we get these duets and trios which essentially transcend time.” The result is a powerful drama that is sure to resonate with contemporary audiences.

This guide approaches *The Hours* as an opportunity to explore the complexity of the human condition, especially regarding issues of mental illness and other afflictions. The materials on the following pages include an introduction to Cunningham’s novel and its subsequent adaptations for screen and stage, an analysis the opera’s three protagonists, and classroom activities that will bring the score and story to life. By delving into *The Hours* through music, literature, and history, this guide will forge interdisciplinary classroom connections, inspire critical thinking, and help students cultivate greater awareness of the experiences of those around them.

PRODUCTION

Phelim McDermott Production
Tom Pye Set and Costume Designer
Bruno Poet Lighting Designer
Finn Ross Projection Designer
Annie-B Parson Choreographer
Paul Cremo Dramaturg

PERFORMANCE

The Met: Live in HD
 December 10, 2022

Renée Fleming Clarissa Vaughan
Kelli O’Hara Laura Brown
Joyce DiDonato Virginia Woolf
Sean Panikkar Leonard Woolf
William Burden Louis
Kyle Ketelsen Richard
Brandon Cedel Dan Brown
Yannick Nézet-Séguin Conductor

Commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera and The Philadelphia Orchestra

In collaboration with Improbable

Production a gift of Robert L. Turner in memory of his mother, Suzanne Wilbert Turner

The Hours Educator Guide
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FLEMING



O'HARA



DIDONATO



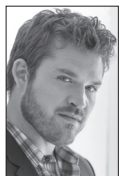
PANIKKAR



BURDEN



KETELSEN



CEDEL

The Metropolitan Opera Educator Guides offer a creative, interdisciplinary introduction to opera. Designed to complement existing classroom curricula in music, the humanities, STEM fields, and the arts, these guides will help young viewers confidently engage with opera regardless of their prior experience with the art form.

On the following pages, you'll find an array of materials designed to encourage critical thinking, deepen background knowledge, and empower students to engage with the opera. These materials can be used in classrooms and/or via remote-learning platforms, and they can be mixed and matched to suit your students' individual academic needs.

Above all, this guide is intended to help students explore *The Hours* through their own experiences and ideas. The diverse perspectives that your students bring to opera make the art form infinitely richer, and we hope that they will experience opera as a space where their confidence can grow and their curiosity can flourish.

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Deep Dives: Interdisciplinary essays providing additional insights

Fun Facts: Entertaining tidbits about *The Hours*

OPERA IN THE CLASSROOM

Active Exploration: Hands-on activities connecting the opera to topics in music, the humanities, STEM, and the arts

Critical Inquiries: Questions and thought experiments designed to foster careful thinking

Reproducibles: Classroom-ready worksheets that support the activities in this guide

CHARACTER	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
<p>Virginia Woolf A woman living in England in the 1920s</p>	mezzo-soprano	A real-life novelist known for her stream-of-consciousness prose, Virginia is hard at work on her novel <i>The Hours</i> (later renamed <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i>). Virginia has been battling a profound depression, and she has gone with her husband, Leonard, to the suburb of Richmond to help restore her mental health. But she misses London desperately, and her proximity to a deep river makes it easy for her to contemplate suicide.
<p>Leonard Woolf Virginia's husband</p>	tenor	Leonard loves Virginia, and he respects and champions her work. Aware that she is struggling with depression, he keeps a close eye on his wife, but his constant surveillance makes Virginia feel miserable and overwhelmed
<p>Clarissa Vaughan A woman living in New York in the 1990s</p>	soprano	In the second strand of the opera's narrative, Clarissa Vaughan lives at the time that Michael Cunningham's novel <i>The Hours</i> was written, and she is the linchpin of the narrative. She shares a first name with the titular hero of Virginia Woolf's novel, so in <i>The Hours</i> , her friend Richard often lovingly refers to her as "Mrs. Dalloway."
<p>Richard A poet</p>	bass-baritone	Clarissa's best friend and former lover, Richard is set to receive an award for his recently published novel, but he is struggling with advanced AIDS. At the end of the opera, we will learn that Richard is actually Laura Brown's son.
<p>Louis Richard's ex-boyfriend</p>	tenor	Louis was Richard's boyfriend for 12 years, including during the summer when Richard and Clarissa had a fling. When Clarissa bumps into Louis on the street in front of Richard's apartment, the chance meeting causes them both to reflect on their shared past.
<p>Laura Brown A woman living in California in the 1940s</p>	soprano	The third strand in the narrative braid of <i>The Hours</i> centers around Laura, a fictional housewife who appears to be living the post-World War II dream. She has a successful husband, a darling son (with another child on the way), and a nice house in the suburbs. But deep down, Laura is battling both depression and the realization that she is attracted to other women. She finds solace in reading <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> .
<p>Dan Brown Laura's husband</p>	bass-baritone	Like Leonard, Dan is deeply in love with his wife. Unlike Leonard, however, he seems unaware of Laura's struggles. The opera takes place on Dan's birthday, when Laura's efforts to bake him a birthday cake will reveal how she views herself and her place in the world.

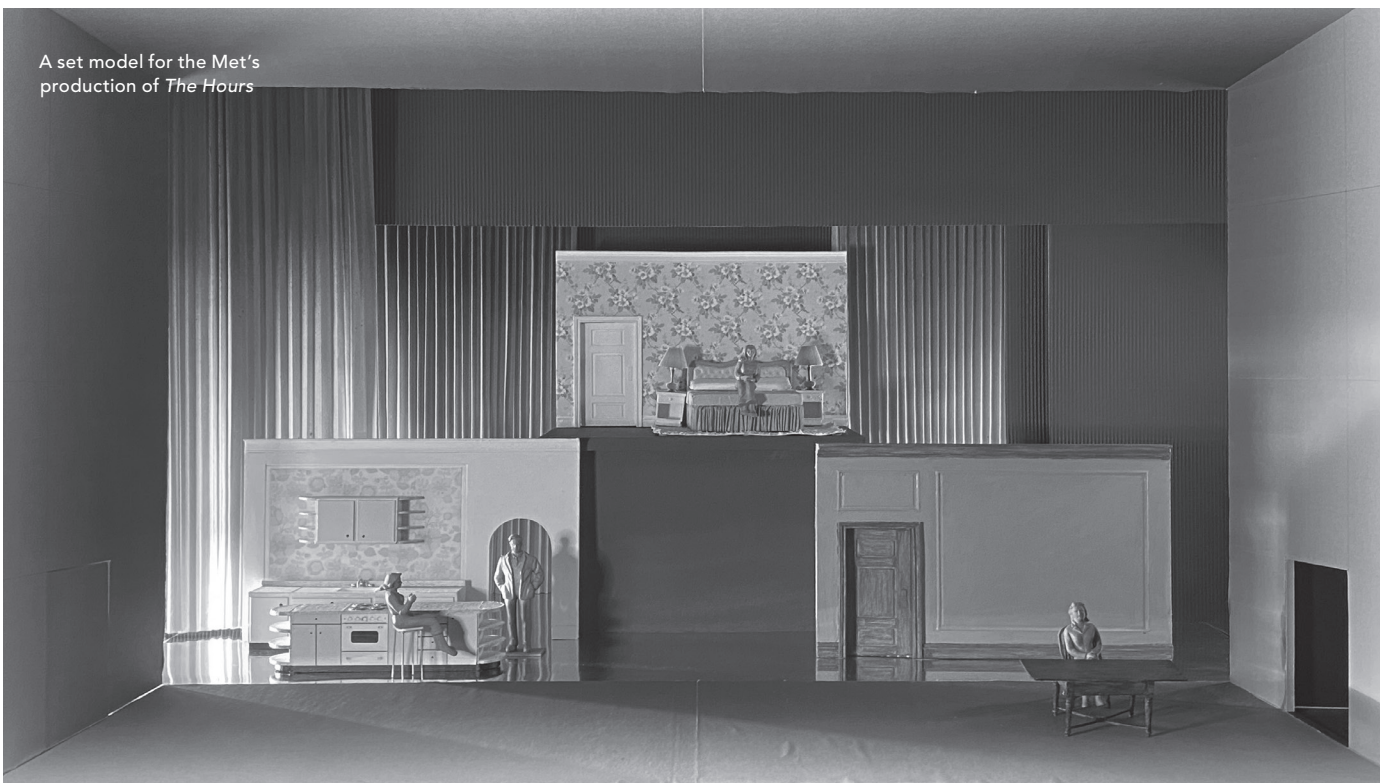
SYNOPSIS

The synopsis that follows presents the three different temporal realities of each act of *The Hours* as independent narratives. The opera braids these three stories together, and sometimes multiple realities appear side-by-side onstage. Students will likely find it easier to begin by studying each story separately. Thus prepared, they will be able to easily and creatively engage with the complex story structure as it is presented in the live opera performance.

ACT I: *A June day in New York City in the 1990s.* Clarissa busily prepares a party to be thrown that evening in honor of her friend Richard, who has won an award for his poetry. Her partner, Sally, suggests that Richard, who is suffering from advanced AIDS, may not be well enough to attend. Clarissa is adamant that his health is improving, and that the party will leave him in good spirits.

Clarissa goes to buy flowers for Richard's party. She stops to admire the beautiful June day in Washington Square, a large park in New York city with an iconic marble arch at its center. But try as she might, she cannot fully banish the thought of Richard's recent declaration: "I'm getting a prize 'cause I'm going to die." Clarissa runs into a novelist, Walter, and invites him to the party. Walter replies that he may well be able to attend as his partner, Evan, has a new "cocktail" of AIDS medication that has helped him feel better and more energized.

A set model for the Met's production of *The Hours*



Clarissa stops in the flower shop. Then, as she makes her way toward Richard's apartment, she remembers a summer from their youth: they had a love affair, even though he was already in a serious relationship with his boyfriend, Louis.

When Clarissa arrives at Richard's, he greets her with the nickname "Mrs. Dalloway," a reference to Virginia Woolf's novel, since its heroine is named Clarissa. It soon becomes clear that Richard is, indeed, profoundly sick. He cannot sleep at night, and during the day he constantly hears voices. He even suggests to Clarissa that he has won an award simply because the committee felt sorry for him. She is hurt and frustrated by his constant pessimism.

Clarissa returns home, but she feels a strange urge to go back and check on Richard again. Something, she tells Sally, is simply not right.

A June day in Richmond, a suburb of London, in 1923. Virginia Woolf has just awakened from a dream in which the first line of her new novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, came to her: "Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself." Her husband, Leonard, enters. He is concerned for Virginia's health and asks if she has eaten. Virginia feels sorry that her husband has to put up with her depression. She is desperate to return to central London from this sleepy suburb where Leonard has brought her to regain her strength. Virginia knows that this return is predicated upon her not losing weight, but as she works, the characters in her story—Clarissa Dalloway and the traumatized war veteran Septimus Warren Smith—are slowly taking shape in her mind, and she hates to interrupt her work with such mundane trifles as food. As she envisions it, the novel will take place over the course of a single day, and it will end with one of the characters dying by suicide.

As Virginia works on her novel, Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith appear onstage as dancers.

A June day in Los Angeles, in 1949. Laura is sitting in her bedroom. It is her husband Dan's birthday, and Laura feels that she should be downstairs, taking care of him and her son, Richie, whom she affectionately calls Bug. She has just started reading *Mrs. Dalloway*, and she steals a few minutes for herself and her novel before she emerges from her bedroom to start the day.

When Laura finally goes into the kitchen, she finds that Dan and Richie have placed a bouquet of roses on the table for her. Dan says they wanted to let her sleep because she is pregnant, but Laura worries that he sees how depressed she is. When Dan leaves for work, Laura suggests that she and Richie bake a cake. As she and Richie assemble the dessert, Laura feels desperate, confused, and alone.

Laura's neighbor Kitty arrives and reports that she must spend a few days in the hospital. Although Kitty puts on a brave face, it is clear that her diagnosis may be

something serious. Kitty's presence is the one thing that can pull Laura out of her gloom: on some level, Laura is already in love with Kitty.

After Kitty leaves, Laura feels desperate to get away. She drops Richie off with a babysitter, and then drives to a hotel in Pasadena.

ACT II: *Los Angeles, 1949.* Laura sits alone in a hotel room reading *Mrs. Dalloway*. As she reads, she hears Virginia's voice reciting the final lines of the book. She empties a bottle of pills onto the hotel bed but stops herself going any further. She suddenly feels selfish: there are people—Dan and Richie—who need her. Realizing this, she gathers her things and leaves the hotel.

When Laura picks up Richie, it is clear that he has been worried about her. She reassures him, and together they go home to celebrate Dan's birthday.



Kelli O'Hara, Joyce DiDonato,
and Renée Fleming

PAOLA KUDACKI/MET OPERA

A set model for the Met's production of *The Hours*



Richmond, 1923. Virginia finishes her novel. She feels strange to have already arrived at the end—not only of her book but also, she feels, at the end of her life. She wanders to a nearby river and fills her pockets with stones, but Leonard finds her in time to escort her home to safety.

When they arrive at their house, Virginia hears voices. She momentarily worries that it is a hallucination, but then she discovers that her sister, Vanessa, has arrived with her children. The children have found a dead bird and are preparing to give it a funeral. After the funeral, at dinner with Leonard, Vanessa, and her niece and nephews, Virginia asks when she might return to London. Leonard responds that she is not yet well enough. Virginia is crushed, but suddenly she brightens: she has thought of an ending for her novel.

The action jumps forward to 1941. Virginia has spent a lifetime oscillating between the joy of intellectual discovery and literary creation, and her bouts of intense depression. Now alone in Sussex, she fills her pockets with stones and walks into the river Ouse, choosing to die by suicide.

New York City, the end of the 20th century. Clarissa returns to Richard's apartment and finds his former lover, Louis, standing outside, wondering whether or not to let Richard know he is there. The two discuss Richard's new novel. Louis suggests that its main character is based on Clarissa, and then notes that the book ends with the narrator's mother dying by suicide. They reminisce about the summer many years ago when they were both in love with Richard.

When Clarissa opens the door to Richard's apartment, she is surprised by the sunlight that floods in: normally, Richard keeps the shades tightly drawn. Then, she sees Richard standing on a windowsill, leaning out over the street below. Terrified, Clarissa begs Richard to come down from the window. He is panicked and extremely anxious about what he will do with the infinite, empty hours that fill his days. As Clarissa looks on in horror, Richard steps off the window ledge to his death.

THE NOVEL *THE HOURS* BY MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM, INSPIRED BY VIRGINIA WOOLF'S NOVEL *MRS. DALLOWAY*

Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway* is a landmark of stream-of-consciousness prose, a hallmark of 20th-century avant-garde literature. Yet its well-earned status in the canon of Western literature can obscure just how (seemingly) simple the book's content really is. Originally titled *The Hours*, the novel follows a single woman on a single day in June. The society wife Clarissa Dalloway wakes up, buys flowers, passes through a park, and returns home to prepare for a party that evening. Yet for novelist Michael Cunningham, it is the very mundanity of Clarissa Dalloway's day that makes the novel so remarkable. "In *Mrs. Dalloway*," Cunningham wrote in his introduction to the 2021 Vintage Classics edition of the book, "Woolf insists that a single, outwardly ordinary day in the life of a woman named Clarissa Dalloway, an outwardly rather ordinary person, contains just about everything one needs to know about human life, in more or less the way nearly every cell contains the entirety of an organism's DNA." And indeed, Cunningham's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Hours* (1998) dives even further into the depiction of several "ordinary" days. Here, the lives and relationships of three women slowly start to unravel, revealing the rich, and often tortured, nature of human experience contained in the apparently mundane.

Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *The Hours* follows three women on a single day in June. Like Clarissa Dalloway, each woman prepares for a party to be held later in the day. And like Clarissa Dalloway, each woman could be said to be "outwardly ordinary." First is Woolf herself, writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in a suburb beyond London. Second is Laura Brown, a restless housewife in California in the 1940s. And finally, we have Clarissa Vaughan, a member of New York's intelligentsia around the turn of the 21st century. These three women will never meet one another. They live in three different decades, in three different cities, facing three very different sets of circumstances. On a deeper level, however, these women have everything in common. All three must respond to the major traumas of their generations: World War I, World War II, and the AIDS crisis. All three have been touched by depression and mental illness, and *Mrs. Dalloway* has been a driving force in every one of their lives. As Cunningham braids their stories together, we come to know each of these women deeply—and to discover just how extraordinary they really are.

*Other authors who wrote in this style include James Joyce, known for his novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916).

THE CREATION OF *THE HOURS*

- 1925** Virginia Woolf publishes *Mrs. Dalloway*. The earliest of Woolf's well-known novels, it is a landmark work of modernist, stream-of-consciousness fiction.
- 1941** Having struggled with mental illness for much of her life, Virginia Woolf dies by suicide on March 28, at the age of 59.
- 1952** Michael Cunningham is born on November 6 in Cincinnati, Ohio. He will study English literature at Stanford University, before going on to train at the Iowa Writers' Workshop. His first novel, *Golden States*, will be published in 1984.
- 1972** Kevin Puts is born on January 3 in St. Louis, Missouri. He studies at Yale University and the Eastman School of Music, where he receives his Doctor of Musical Arts degree. His early compositions include symphonies and concerti commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra and the California Symphony Orchestra.
- 1998** Cunningham publishes *The Hours*, his fourth novel, which imagines a single day in June as Virginia Woolf writes her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. This fictionalized account is interwoven with the stories of two other (fictional) women, separated in time and space but connected by *Mrs. Dalloway*. A critical triumph, the novel will win a Pulitzer Prize and a PEN/Faulkner Award the following year.
- 2002** Paramount Pictures releases *The Hours*, a cinematic adaptation of Cunningham's novel directed by Stephen Daldry. The movie is nominated for nine Academy Awards, including Best Adapted Screenplay, Best Music, and Best Picture. Nicole Kidman's portrayal of Virginia Woolf earns the Academy Award for Best Actress, and Meryl Streep (as Clarissa Vaughan) and Julianne Moore (as Laura Brown) receive Best Supporting Actress nominations.
- 2011** Composer Kevin Puts's first opera, *Silent Night*, premieres at Minnesota Opera to great critical acclaim. Based on the true story of a one-night ceasefire during World War I, when allied and German troops agreed to put down their weapons to celebrate Christmas Eve together, the work wins the Pulitzer Prize.

- 2013** Lyricist Greg Pierce’s first musical, *The Landing*, premieres at off-Broadway’s Vineyard Theater. The music is by John Kander, whose credits also include *Cabaret*, *Chicago*, and the song “New York, New York.”
- 2015** Puts’s second opera, *The Manchurian Candidate*, premieres at Minnesota Opera. Greg Pierce joins forces with John Kander once again, for the musical *Kid Victory*.
- 2016** In February, Pierce’s opera *Fellow Travelers*, written with composer Gregory Spears, premieres at Cincinnati Opera. Based on Thomas Mallon’s novel of the same name, it focuses on the “Lavender Scare” of the 1950s. The opera has been developed by Opera Fusion, a partnership between Cincinnati Opera and the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music that will later prove instrumental in the creation of *The Hours*.
Puts writes *Letters from Georgia*, a song cycle based on the letters of Georgia O’Keeffe, for soprano superstar Renée Fleming. It premieres in November at the Eastman School of Music, Puts and Fleming’s alma mater.
- 2017** Puts’s first chamber opera, *Elizabeth Cree*, premieres at Opera Philadelphia. Based on a novel by Peter Ackroyd and set in London in the 1880s, the plot mixes history and fiction, bounces back and forth in time, and weaves together several storylines—all narrative techniques that will later appear in *The Hours*.
- 2018** Buoyed by the success of their song cycle, Puts and Fleming have been brainstorming possible subjects for an opera. Fleming suggests *The Hours*, and both Puts and the Met’s artistic and managerial teams enthusiastically embrace the idea.
By April, librettist Greg Pierce, soprano Kelli O’Hara, and mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato are all on board, and by July, Pierce has started developing the libretto.
- 2019** Pierce completes the libretto for *The Hours* in September and Puts starts composing. In November, Phelim McDermott—whose previous productions at the Met include Philip Glass’s operas *Akhmaten* and *Satyagraha* and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*—is hired to direct.

An early workshop for *The Hours*
PHOTO JONATHAN TICHLER / MET OPERA



2020 Work on the opera has been going well, Seattle Opera and the Philadelphia Orchestra are on board to co-commission the work, and a workshop has been planned for November—until the Covid-19 pandemic forces the Met to close. The workshop is canceled, Seattle Opera has to pull out of hosting the work's premiere, and Phelim McDermott, who is based in the United Kingdom, is unable to travel to the United States for rehearsals.

2021 The Met reaches out to Opera Fusion about hosting a development workshop, and in March 2021, a small group of Met staff members travel to Cincinnati to take part. The singers must remain masked while performing behind individual plexiglass shields, and members of the creative team must sit at separate tables, but the workshop gives everyone their first chance to experience the opera live. A run-through is streamed to Met staff in New York and to Phelim McDermott in England.

2022 Back on schedule, *The Hours* is heard for the first time by a live audience in a concert version in March. Performed by the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, and featuring Renée Fleming, Kelli O'Hara, and a number of other singers from the Met, the performance enjoys excellent reviews and enthusiastic applause from the audience. It also allows the creative team to make a few minor adjustments to both the libretto and score before the staged premiere in the autumn.

On November 22, *The Hours* premieres at the Met.

INTERVIEW WITH KEVIN PUTS

Earlier this year, Met General Manager Peter Gelb sat down with composer Kevin Puts to discuss *The Hours*. They talk about the opera's conception, as well as how Puts developed the music around the narrative and the performers. Here is an excerpt from their conversation:

Composer Kevin Puts

PHOTO: DAVID WHITE



PETER GELB (PG): Kevin, why don't you tell us a little bit about how this opera came to be?

KEVIN PUTS (KP): Renée [Fleming] called me up to ask me if I was interested in composing an opera based on *The Hours*. Of course, I said yes immediately. I thought it would be great to do something that takes place in different time periods all at the same time because you can do things like this on the operatic stage, which is not always the case elsewhere, like in a film or book.

PG: It's hard to say "no" to Renée, especially because we wanted her back at the Met! How would you describe your score? I heard it when it was presented in its concert format in Philadelphia: it's very lush, harmonic, and beautiful.

KP: When I first started drafting the piece, I wasn't sure exactly how I wanted to approach it, especially how I wanted to establish the three different time periods. There is a music that we associate with Clarissa—the 1990s, New York, kind of an American urban vibe, I suppose.

Virginia Woolf has a much sparer, almost neo-Baroque, style of music. The harmony is always taking different turns and you're never quite sure where it's going. I was trying to figure out why that was, and I think maybe it's alluding to the complexity of her mind, and her stream-of-consciousness writing style. You're never sure where you're going to end up. It's circuitous.

And then I wrote the music of Laura Brown, who is living in the 1950s outside of Los Angeles after World War II—Kelli O'Hara's character. I didn't necessarily create her music, it was more about her environment, domestic bliss. It sounds orchestral like Henry Mancini, or *Leave it to Beaver*.

There's also a broader musical language, which I think has more to do with the magic of the novel and the inexplicable connections between these three stories. We're not exactly sure how they're connected: They're connected through Mrs.

Dalloway for sure, but is Virginia Woolf actually writing Clarissa's story as we see it unfold? That stimulated me to write something magical, with an atmosphere of mystery, throughout the piece.

PG: What is it like to work with singers in the process of developing new opera?

KP: One of the great advantages of new opera and the collaborations between composers and singers is the fact that they are always accessible to each other. I'm constantly texting with Renée, it's a wonderful thing. And the fact that we've worked on other projects together means that I know her quite well. It's also not just a matter of writing for Renée Fleming—I could imagine Strauss's *Der Rosenkavalier*, or several operas that she sings—but it's a matter of combining her talent with what I want to do, meeting in the middle. I've never worked so closely with a performer on a piece from the very beginning. We continued to work on it at her house after the Philadelphia performances, making it fit like a glove for her, so that she's happy with the shape of every phrase, every

rhythm. When someone of her caliber is happy with the lines she's singing, there's really no substitute. It's a magical thing for a composer to experience.

Kelli O'Hara's approach is a bit different from Renée's. She had a very straightforward approach to learning the opera. She was trained at first in operatic singing, but of course, she has enjoyed tremendous success on Broadway, and she's sung at the Met twice before. Utilizing the talent and skills she picked up from musical theater, she learned her part quickly, I think in just a week. It was amazing. She went after the part with full effort. There's really nothing she can't do. I asked her if she wanted feedback from me, and she said she was happy to incorporate all the changes. It was interesting to work with two very talented, but quite different performers.



Renée Fleming, left,
and Kelli O'Hara, right,
as Clarissa Vaughan and
Laura Brown

PAOLA KUDACKI / MET OPERA

VIRGINIA WOOLF AND THE CREATION OF MRS. DALLOWAY

- 1882** Adeline Virginia Stephen, who will later be known as Virginia Woolf, is born on January 25 in London. Her parents, Julia Duckworth and Leslie Stephen, both bring children from previous marriages into the blended family. Altogether, little Virginia has four half-siblings and three full siblings. Her older sister Vanessa, born in 1879, is Woolf's favorite; she will also appear in Michael Cunningham's novel *The Hours*.
A voracious reader, Woolf takes full advantage of her father's extensive library. She receives her early education at home, as she, like most other young women of this time, is denied the formal education her brothers receive.
- 1895** Woolf's mother dies on May 5, when Virginia is just 13. That spring, Woolf will have her first mental breakdown, precipitated by this tragic loss. Only a few years later her half-sister, Stella, also dies after a long illness.
- 1901** Woolf finishes her further education at King's College, London, one of the first universities to have a dedicated "Ladies' department." She studies classics and history, and she meets other women involved in the early womens' rights movement, known as "the suffragettes."
- 1904** After an excruciating two-year battle with cancer, Woolf's father dies. She suffers another breakdown, during which she believes that sparrows are singing to her in Greek, an idea that will appear in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.
- 1905** After their father's death, Woolf and her siblings leave their childhood home and move to the central-London neighborhood of Bloomsbury. Woolf's circle of friends—which will include the novelist E.M. Forster, the biographer Lytton Strachey, the painter Roger Fry, and the economist John Maynard Keynes—will be called "the Bloomsbury Group" after this locale. In these early years, the artistic and literary debates of the Bloomsbury Group intelligentsia will shape Virginia's outlook and writing style.
- 1909** Following the death of a brother and the wedding of her sister Vanessa, Woolf and her brother Adrian move to a new house in Fitzroy Square, where they take on three lodgers. In 1911, a young man named Leonard Woolf moves into the house. Back in London for a one-year hiatus from his civil-servant position in Ceylon (a former British colony, now known as Sri Lanka), Leonard immediately notices Virginia. The two are married on August 10, 1912.



1914 Woolf and Leonard move to Richmond, a suburb outside of London. Woolf's mental state has been shaky, and Leonard believes that the quiet of the countryside will help her recover. Although her hallucinations soon stop, Woolf, an ardent pacifist, remains tormented by news of the war.

1915 Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*, is published. Among the background characters in the story are an older couple named Clarissa and Richard Dalloway. Two years later, Virginia and Leonard jointly found Hogarth Press, a publishing house that will print and distribute most of Virginia's works.

1922 In May, Woolf writes to the poet T.S. Eliot that she is working on two short stories, including one called "Mrs. Dalloway in Bond Street." She finishes the story in September and soon sets about expanding it, sketching out a series of seven tangentially related short stories that will all come together in a final story to take place at Mrs. Dalloway's party that evening.

On October 14, Woolf writes: "Mrs. Dalloway has branched into a book; [...] a study of insanity & suicide: the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side—something like that." In November, Woolf writes that she is considering organizing the new novel by hour and calling it *The Hours*.

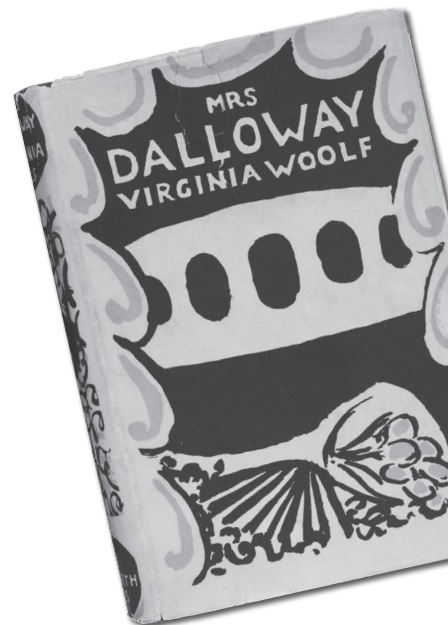
In the meantime, however, tragedy has struck Virginia's life once again: In October, her childhood friend Kitty Maxse dies after falling off the banister of her home, possibly inspiring the scene of Septimus's suicide.

1924 Virginia completes a first draft of the novel, now titled *Mrs. Dalloway*, on October 9 at 11:15AM, noting the time in the margin of her notebook. She spends the next three months revising the work, finishing in time to give Leonard a copy for Christmas.

1925 Woolf sends the completed manuscript to her publisher in January, and *Mrs. Dalloway* is published on May 25.

1927–41 Over the next decade and a half, Woolf will write a series of novels that now stand as exemplars modernist literature, including *To the Lighthouse* (1927), *Orlando: A Biography* (1928), *The Waves* (1931), *The Years* (1937), and *Between the Acts* (1941). She will also continue writing essays and criticism, including her book-length feminist essay *A Room of One's Own* (1929).

1941 On March 28, Woolf dies by suicide at the age of 59, filling her pockets with stones and wading into the River Ouse.



A British edition of *Mrs. Dalloway*, its cover design by the author's sister Vanessa Bell

MAKING THE MUNDANE EXCEPTIONAL: READING VIRGINIA WOOLF

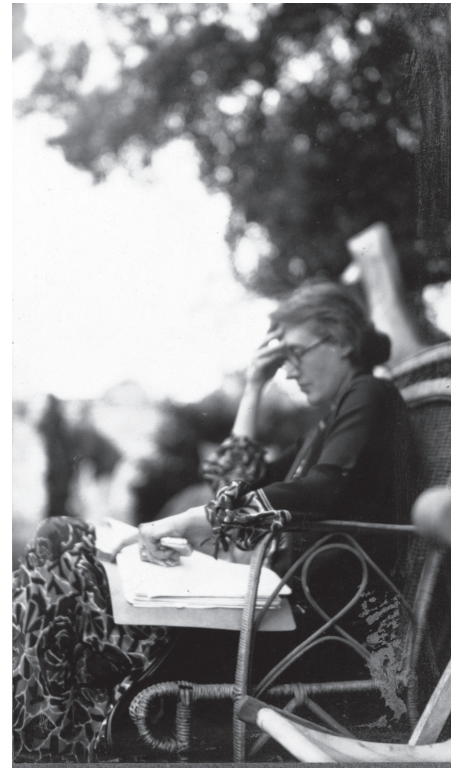
Michael Cunningham understands *Mrs. Dalloway* as one of the great novels of World War I. “Woolf always intended it to be set in London just after the war,” he wrote in a 2021 introduction to the novel, and “I’ve always found it illuminating to remember that on the streets on which Clarissa walked, on which she greeted acquaintances and considered gloves in a shop window, there would have been men missing limbs, men with melted faces, making their way among those who’d gone out to shop or to promenade.” The contrast between Mrs. Dalloway’s staid, upper-class life and the tortured existence of the veteran Septimus Warren Smith is one of the main generative tensions of the novel. Yet if we zoom out, we see that the impact of World War I on Woolf’s work (and on literature more broadly) goes far beyond Mrs. Dalloway and the shell-shocked Septimus.

World War I was a truly catastrophic event. By the time the war ended on November 11, 1918, some 20 million soldiers and volunteer civilians, largely male, were dead, another 20 million had been injured, and many more bore emotional and psychological scars from the conflict. For artists and intellectuals, World War I represented a profound betrayal by and of society at large. They responded by rejecting the conventions—social, artistic, and otherwise—of the pre-war age. The aesthetic style of the post-World-War-I era is known as modernism, and in literary terms, modernism meant renouncing the patterns of plot, chronology, and character to focus instead on experimental forms and genres.

For Woolf, a new approach to fiction required stepping beyond the mundane recitation of human activities, and instead entering the mind to explore the complex patterns of human thought. Using techniques such as stream of consciousness (where a character’s thoughts and feelings are depicted in a continuous flow) and interior monologue (narrative passages that show a character’s innermost thoughts), Woolf portrays her characters’ private thoughts and subjective experiences. Shifting perspective repeatedly, Woolf uses these mental portraits to explore shared circumstances, whether by representing six characters in one voice (as in *The Waves*), fragmenting one individual into disparate identities (as in *Orlando: A Biography*), or leaping from character to character (as in *Mrs. Dalloway*). These techniques mingle with authorial interjections that serve as narrative signposts and parenthetical digressions that describe actions and events (like stage directions in a drama).

Woolf was also fascinated by how humans experienced the passage of time. In *Orlando*, Woolf writes, “An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented on the timepiece of the mind by one second.” Indeed, this malleability of time is present throughout Woolf’s work: In *To the Lighthouse* (1927), she distills the passage of 10 years into roughly 20 pages; in “The Death of the Moth,” she composes an entire essay about a moth trapped behind a pane of glass as its life is slowly extinguished.

Virginia Woolf.



Both interests—the structure of human thought and the passage of time—figure prominently in *Mrs. Dalloway*. In the simplest terms, it is a novel about one woman spending one day preparing for a party. Yet as Clarissa Dalloway crosses the paths of other people in London, the narrative jumps between these different characters' perspectives. The result is like a psychological mosaic, with each fragmentary thought another tessera making up the narrative whole. As readers "collect" these fragments, a remarkable intimacy develops between the reader and the characters on the page. And as mundane experiences are filtered through different characters' perceptions, readers are challenged to recognize how an individual's sense of self may differ from the way they are perceived by others or how an individual's experience of an event may diverge from the way the event is understood by society.

Yet even as Woolf plays with the malleability of time in individual human perceptions (characters observe the present, think back on their pasts, imagine their futures), Woolf uses the clocks of London, which mark each hour on the hour, to move the story inexorably forward. Woolf's work thus reveals the importance of observation, using characters' memories, dreams, and impressions to shape the story. Her characters are dynamic and complex figures, changing (or changing their way of thinking) as they experience daily life and as the narrative progresses. By focusing on characters' inner lives, Woolf suggests that we must know ourselves in order to truly know others. "I am made and remade continually," Woolf wrote in *The Waves*. "Different people draw different words from me," and it is with these words that she can communicate the essence of human thought in her prose.

Left: Virginia Woolf between the society hostess Lady Ottoline Morrell and writer Lytton Strachey in 1910, photographer unknown.

Above: Woolf photographed by Lady Ottoline Morrell, 1926, a year after the publication of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

CRITICAL INQUIRY

In a BBC radio address in 1937, Woolf remarked, "Words do not live in dictionaries, they live in the mind." What do you think this means? How might it help us understand her work?

SCORING *THE HOURS*: PHILIP GLASS'S MINIMALIST SOUNDTRACK

Although Kevin Puts is the first composer to create an opera based on *The Hours*, he is not the first opera composer to offer a musical interpretation of Michael Cunningham's work. In 2002, Philip Glass, an American composer whose operas *Akhmaten* and *Satyagraha* have appeared at the Met, composed the soundtrack for Stephen Daldry's film *The Hours*. Glass won a BAFTA Award for Best Original Music for his score and was nominated for both an Academy Award for Best Original Score and a Grammy Award for Best Score Soundtrack Album. One of Glass's assistants in the composition of *The Hours* was composer Nico Muhly, whose operas *Two Boys* and *Marnie* have also recently been performed at the Met.

FUN FACT

The first version of Clarissa Dalloway—a minor character in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*—was based on Woolf's childhood friend Kitty Lushington, the inspiration for the name of Laura's neighbor in *The Hours*.

Glass is known as one of the foremost composers working in the 20th-century style of minimalism*. Minimalist music, also featured in Kevin Puts's opera, as well as in Nico Muhly's work, is characterized by repetition of short patterns consisting predominantly of diatonic arpeggios and/or scales. Harmonic shifts are often achieved by changing only one note at a time, resulting in a smooth musical surface. Because minimalist music is not concerned with foregrounding a memorable melody or creating harmonic or motivic development, it is often described as non-linear, circular, or static.

At a first glance, it might appear counterintuitive to use minimalist music—the ultimate non-narrative style—to accompany a film. Yet on closer examination, Glass's score turns out to be a refined narrative tool. The lives of the three protagonists unfold in three distinct timelines: Virginia Woolf's 1923 and 1941, Laura Brown's 1949, and Clarissa Vaughan's turn-of-the-20th-century New York. The three plot lines, though unique, are nonetheless connected by Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, and the common themes of solitude, depression, and lack of fulfillment. Glass's music offers another unifying force in this tripartite narrative, as the recognizable minimalist motifs wend their way through and across the three story lines.

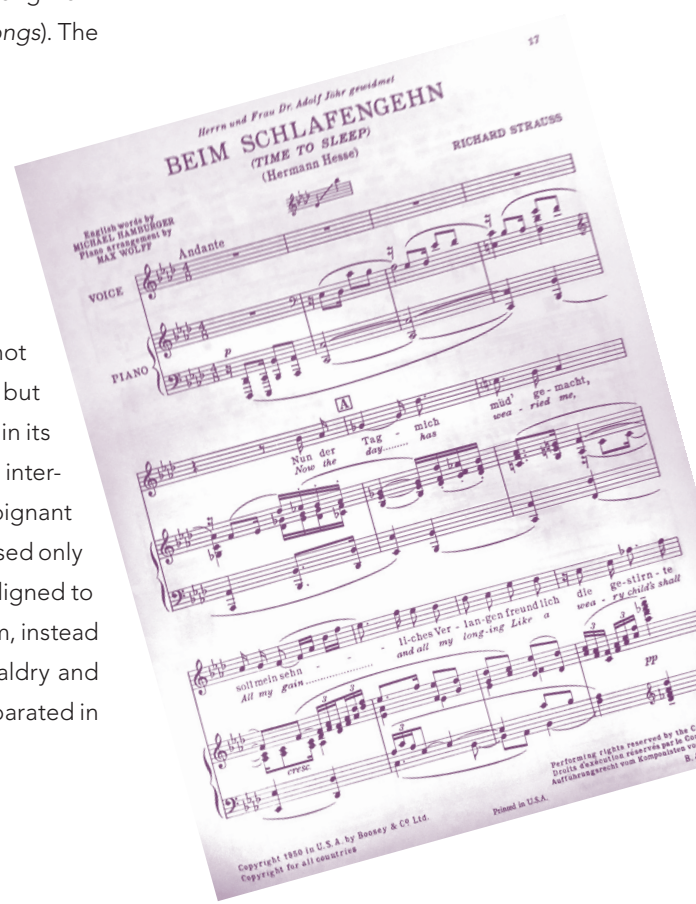
While the score is fully orchestrated, the piano is the most hauntingly present of all the instruments—this is because, as Glass explains, the piano is “a personal instrument, which can cross periods easily.” The piano is also an instrument that was historically associated with women and with potentially claustrophobic domestic settings, as it was one of the few instruments, alongside the harp, that 18th- and 19th-century genteel ladies were allowed to learn. The piano, then, becomes like an omniscient narrator, delving into the private thoughts of the three heroes while effortlessly crossing their temporal divides; director Daldry even describes Glass music as “another character.”

*Glass himself does not use this term to describe his music, but it is the accepted musical vocabulary to reference his techniques and the work of similar composers such as Steve Reich.

There is only one moment in the entire film when Glass’s music is replaced by the work of another composer. In the scene where Clarissa is cooking for Richard’s party, she is listening to “Beim Schlafengehen” (“When Falling Asleep”), an art song from the German composer Richard Strauss’s cycle *Vier letzte Lieder* (*Four Last Songs*). The song’s text, a poem by Hermann Hesse, begins:

Nun der Tag mich müd gemacht	<i>This day has left me weary,</i>
Soll mein sehnliches Verlangen	<i>And now my deepest yearning</i>
Freundlich die gestirnte Nacht	<i>Is to greet the starry night</i>
Wie ein müdes Kind empfangen.	<i>Joyfully, like a tired child</i>

On the most obvious level, Strauss’s song reflects Clarissa’s exhaustion: not merely the tiredness she feels after spending her day preparing for a party, but also the profound exhaustion caused by caring for her ailing best friend. Yet, in its juxtaposition with Glass’s minimalism, the song also offers a more complex interpretation. Strauss’s song, with its highly chromatic harmonic language and poignant melodies, is emblematic of late-Romantic individuality, and they were composed only seven years after Woolf’s death. Glass’s music, by contrast, is more closely aligned to the philosophical realm of Cunningham’s novel. Throughout the novel and film, instead of focusing on a single character’s life, Cunningham—and by extension Daldry and Glass—take a panoramic approach that captures the three protagonists, separated in time and space but sharing more than they will ever know.



CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS**Materials**

Philosophical Chairs
Reproducible Sheet

COMMON CORE:**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6–12.1**

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.7–12.1e

Seek to understand other perspectives and cultures and communicate effectively with audiences or individuals from varied backgrounds.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11–12.1d

Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives; synthesize comments, claims, and evidence made on all sides of an issue; resolve contradictions when possible; and determine what additional information or research is required to deepen the investigation or complete the task.

PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Philosophical Chairs is an activity designed to foster critical thinking, active inquiry, and respectful dialogue among students. To play, participants agree or disagree with a series of statements, but the game doesn't end there. The most crucial element is what happens next: Participants discuss their points of view and can switch sides if their opinions change during the discussion.

Each topic statement is deliberately open-ended yet ties into a number of the themes present in *The Hours*—including the day-to-day pressures of mental illness, the power of memories to both create and destroy, and the importance of honesty and authenticity in how we live our lives. Set the stage for this conversation mindfully. Offer students a brief overview of the opera's plot, setting, and context, and remind them how to build a safe space for productive conversation. Some of the topics might be confusing or hard—that's okay! As you and your students explore and learn about *The Hours*, you can return to these statements: What do they have to do with the opera's story? How might these questions help us explore the opera's story, history, and themes?

THE STATEMENTS

- You should always try to be who society wants you to be.
- Since you can't change the past, regrets are pointless.
- Regret helps us learn from past mistakes.
- Suffering is always a transformational experience.
- Everyone has demons.
- Everyone, at some point in their lives, will find themselves in psychological distress.
- Mental illness is a clinical condition (and not a personal weakness).
- It is normal to feel sad.
- It is important to prioritize your mental health.
- Being honest about who you are will make you happy.
- Everyone you meet in life, you meet for a reason.
- Coincidences are random and meaningless.
- Social norms will never change.

A NOTE TO FACILITATORS: Between statements, provide some clarity as to why that particular statement was chosen. Explain to students where and how each particular theme shows up in the opera, or invite students to offer their own explanations.

STEP 1. INQUIRE

Invite students to read one of the statements—out loud as a class, to themselves, or in small groups. As they read, they should ask themselves:

- Do I understand the statement?
 - If not, what questions might clarify it for me?
- What immediately comes to mind when I read the statement?
 - What is my initial reaction: Do I agree or disagree?
- What led me to that decision?
 - What opinions do I hold with regards to this statement?
 - What life experiences may have led me to believe this way?

STEP 2. RESPOND

Ask students to commit to one side. They can agree or disagree, but there is no middle ground. (Many will not be completely comfortable committing to one side over the other—that’s part of the game. It will help foster conversation and debate.)

STEP 3. DISCUSS

Share out! Use the following questions to guide discussion:

- Does anyone feel very strongly either way? Why or why not?
- Does anyone feel conflicted? Why or why not?
- Give voice to what you thought about in the first step:
 - What led me to make my decision?
 - What opinions do I hold with regards to this statement?
 - What life experience may have led me to believe this way?
- What might you have not considered that others are now bringing up in the discussion?
- Did any new questions arise during the discussion?

As the conversation continues, students are free to change their mind about whether or not they agree with the statement—or develop a more nuanced perspective.

Repeat steps 1 through 3 for each statement.

FUN FACT

Recently, the Pulitzer Prize has recognized a remarkable number of operas—and the incredibly diverse group of composers creating them. Since Kevin Puts’s *Silent Night* won the Pulitzer in 2012, the Prize has recognized Anthony Davis’s opera *The Central Park Five* (2020), Ellen Reid’s *prism* (2019), and Du Yun’s *Angel’s Bone* (2017). In the drama category, the Prize has also on occasion been awarded to notable musicals, including Lin-Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton* (2016).

A WHOLE LIFE IN A SINGLE DAY

No big plot. No thrilling actions. No heartbreaking romances. Just an entire novel based on one ordinary day in an ordinary woman’s life. This is the premise behind Virginia Woolf’s novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. Explore Woolf’s unique writing style and detailed exploration of the world inside the novel (London in the summer of 1923). Then, brainstorm your perfect “ordinary” day and create cover artwork to reflect its contents.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

Drama, Choral Music, Instrumental Music

NECESSARY MATERIALS

- paper and pencil
- markers, colored pencils, or access to a design platform, like Canva

STEP 1. EXPLORING DALLOWAY’S COVER ART

- Examine the cover artwork of the attached publications of *Mrs. Dalloway*.

Discuss as a class or small group:

- Prominent themes
- Similarities and differences between the covers
- Color pallets of individual covers
- Photographic images verses painted/drawn images

Now, discuss the following questions:

- How does the art on the cover of a book inform the reader of its contents?
- What have I learned about the characters of *Mrs. Dalloway* by looking at only the cover art of the books?
- What have I learned about Virginia Woolf by examining the cover art of the books?
- What do I suspect the plot of the book will be?

STEP 2. EXPLORING WOOLF’S WRITING

Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway*, published in 1925, heralded its author’s arrival into her own unique voice as a writer. The novel is regarded by many critics as the work in which Woolf refined her style of stream-of-consciousness narration, which then led her to explore this style further in later works. The shifting perspective of the narrative allows readers a deeper look at the world that surrounds Mrs. Dalloway: a singular June day in post-World War I London. The reader jumps from the inner monologue of one character to another with fluidity. This allows the reader to feel completely submerged in the atmosphere of the novel’s world and gives understanding to the motivations of individual characters in the way a more linear narrative would not.

From *The Washington Post*: “Woolf organizes the action around certain symbolic objects and events—an expensive automobile backfiring, a skywriting airplane, the crowded shopping streets of fashionable London, the Dalloway party—and effortlessly

segues from one character's consciousness to another in a series of subtly interconnected interior monologues."

STEP 3. EXPLORING MRS. DALLOWAY'S WORLD

Clarissa Dalloway wants nothing more than to throw a party, perhaps to distract herself from the weariness of the post-war world around her, or to avoid contemplating her own mental health. As she goes about the errands of her day, her experience of the world is shaped by who she encounters, and the sights, sounds, and smells of the city are viscerally described. Read some of the quotes below which give detailed insight into Mrs. Dalloway's mind as well as the world moving all around her:

"How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave; chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen."

"One might fancy that day, the London day, was just beginning. Like a woman who had slipped off her print dress and white apron to array herself in blue and pearls,



A photographic portrait of
Virginia Woolf by George
Charles Beresford, 1902
NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, LONDON

the day changed, put off stuff, took gauze, changed to evening, and with the same sigh of exhilaration that a woman breathes, tumbling petticoats on the floor, it too shed dust, heat, color; the traffic thinned; motor cars, tinkling, darting, succeeded the lumber of vans; and here and there among the thick foliage of the squares an intense light hung. I resign, the evening seemed to say, as it paled and faded above the battlements and prominences, molded, pointed, of hotel, flat, and block of shops, I fade, she was beginning. I disappear, but London would have none of it, and rushed her bayonets into the sky, pinioned her, constrained her to partnership in her revelry.”

“One feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air.”

STEP 4. DESIGNING YOUR PERFECT ORDINARY DAY

Now it's time to create a detailed outline of your perfect ordinary day. Read the instructions below and use the “A Perfectly Ordinary Day” sheet to document your answers.

Remember:

- Keep your day ordinary! Include meals, naps, technology, etc. Anything you do on an average day. Limited exciting action is ok!
- Select an evening event (party, date, concert etc.) to prep for. Include actions throughout your day that support your preparations.
- Make your total day's events last at least 14 hours, just as Mrs. Dalloway's does in the book.
- Don't forget to include other people! Share their parts in your day as well as your own.

STEP 5. COVER ART FOR THE ORDINARY

Now that you have written out the details of your ordinary day, it is time to design a book jacket to go along with your day. Reflect on the class's discussion about Woolf's cover art and its effects on the reader. Now, begin designing your cover. You may use paper and pen/markers/pencils or a design platform like Canva. When you have completed your design, share out with the class. Describe how your cover relates to the activities you included in your ordinary day.

FUN FACT

The first version of Clarissa Dalloway—a minor character in Woolf's first novel, *The Voyage Out*—was based on Woolf's childhood friend Kitty Lushington, the inspiration for the name of Laura's neighbor in *The Hours*.

THE PARTY PLANNER

Clarissa Vaughan is a wealthy and successful book editor in late 1990s New York who is preparing a party for her friend, a famous poet who has just received a prestigious award. Like the other characters in *The Hours*, her story is encapsulated by one single sunny day in June. Explore the party-planning antics as Clarissa gets ready for the big event, then plan a celebratory party for your best friend.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS:

Drama, Choral Music, Instrumental Music, AVID

NECESSARY MATERIALS:

- paper and pencil

STEP 1. REFLECT

The story of Clarissa Vaughan's day begins with a walk to a flower store. "What a thrill, what a shock, to be alive on a morning in June, prosperous, almost scandalously privileged, with a simple errand to run." Clarissa is planning a party for Richard, her best friend, who is in the late stages of AIDS. As she walks the streets of New York, she remembers the days of her early relationship with Richard, and the effects the virus has had on his physical and mental health. Clarissa is not ready to let Richard die, though she knows it will be soon. To distract herself from the encroaching sorrow of Richard's death, she decides to throw a fancy party complete with buckets of fresh flowers, a caterer, and Richard's favorite crab dish. Every detail has been thought of and planned out by Clarissa. Now, she must only convince Richard that attending it will be good for him.

What began as a brief romance, when Clarissa and Richard were in their early twenties, turned into a 40-year best friendship—a relationship that has been central to each of their lives. Now, as Richard's life is ending, Clarissa is clinging to anything that might keep him alive for longer. The party she plans to throw is therefore both a celebration and a diversion. Read the quotes below from both the book and the screenplay and reflect on the following questions:

- How does Richard feel about the party?
- What is most important to Clarissa about the party?
- Do Clarissa and Richard have the same expectations for the event?
- What does it mean to "cover the silence" with a party?
- What purpose does a party serve within a community of friends or family?

QUOTES:

“And Clarissa, Richard’s oldest friend, his first reader—Clarissa who sees him every day, when even some of his more recent friends have come to imagine he’s already died—is throwing him a party. Clarissa is filling her home with flowers and candles. Why shouldn’t she want him to come?”

Richard says, “I’m not really needed there, am I? The party can go on just with the idea of me. The party has already happened, really, with or without me.”

“Oh, Mrs. Dalloway. Always giving parties to cover the silence.”

SCREENPLAY DIALOGUE

RICHARD: Who is this party for?

CLARISSA: What are you asking, what are you trying to say?

RICHARD: I’m not trying to say anything. I think I’m staying alive just to satisfy you.

CLARISSA: That is what people do—they stay alive for each other.

STEP 2. PLAN YOUR OWN PARTY!

Now that you’ve read a bit about the event Clarissa is planning for Richard, it is time to plan your own festive event. Brainstorm a celebratory event that you might like to throw for a friend or loved one. Use the “Party Planning” template to fill in the details of your party. Share out the details of your party with members of your class.

EXPECTATION VS. REALITY

In Michael Cunningham’s Pulitzer Prize–winning novel, *The Hours*, the pressures placed on stay-at-home wives in the 1940s and 50s are explored with sincerity and a depth of reality known only to those who have lived the confines of that lifestyle. One-third of the novel is dedicated to a single day in the life of Laura Brown, a deeply lonely and sensitive young mother oppressed by the expectations of the “appropriate” behavior and skillset of a mid-century homemaker. The story follows her as she attempts, and ultimately fails, at what should be an easy task: baking a chocolate cake for her husband’s birthday. Explore one day in Laura’s life by reading some important quotes from the text, then creating a social-media post, “Expectation vs. Reality,” based on real 1950s homemaker ads.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS

American History, Home Science

NECESSARY MATERIALS:

- personal technology

STEP 1. DISCUSS

Laura Brown is a woman who loves to read. She struggles staying present in her everyday life as a mother and wife, and reading provides her the escape she longs for. Author Michael Cunningham explains that Laura, a “bookworm,” had always been “left alone to read,” never expecting that anyone, let alone a local World War II hero, would court and propose to her. In an opening description of her peppered with “shoulds” (she “should” be fixing breakfast, she “should” be out of bed by now), we learn of the constant turmoil she fights against. Laura’s husband, Dan, is kind and gentle, making her loathing of her life even more frustrating and shame-inducing. She decides to bake a cake for her husband’s birthday, and it comes to symbolize all her skill (or lack thereof) in homemaking. Laura is oppressed by the perfectionism spouted by 1950s wife culture and its strict post-war gender roles. An article from PBS’s website described the era as such: “For young mothers in the 1950s, domesticity was idealized in the media, and women were encouraged to stay at home if the family could afford it. Women who chose to work when they didn’t need the paycheck were often considered selfish, putting themselves before the needs of their family.”

In many American states, a “marriage bar” was in place all the way until the early 1970s which prevented women from working in certain fields (like civil service or teaching) once they were married. After World War II, the expectation for many white, middle-class homemakers, like Laura, was that they would stay home to cook, clean, and raise children, leaving home only to shop or attend church, ladies’ society functions, or charity meetings. And while some women surely enjoyed and reveled in these expectations, just as many felt stifled by them. Advertising agencies began to capitalize on

FUN FACT

In early drafts of *Mrs. Dalloway*, the first line of the novel was “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself,” and she later goes to a glove shop in Bond Street. For the final version, this line was updated to “Mrs. Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.”

the homemaker, designing ad campaigns targeted directly to the housewife who was encouraged to derive her sense of self and value from a clean and organized home.

Break into groups of two or three people. Have each group select one of the quotes below. Take five minutes to read the quote as a group and discuss what you learn about Laura from the quote. Have each group share out their findings.

“He [her husband, Dan] could (in the words of his own alarmed mother) have had anyone, any pageant winner, any vivacious and compliant girl, but through some obscure and possible perverse genius had kissed, courted, and proposed to his best friend’s older sister, the bookworm, the foreign-looking one with the dark, close-set eyes and the Roman nose, who had never been sought after or cherished; who had always been left alone to read. What could she say but yes?”

“She should not be permitting herself to read, not this morning of all mornings; not on Dan’s birthday. She should be out of bed, showered and dressed, fixing breakfast for Dan and Richie. She can hear them downstairs, her husband making his own breakfast, ministering to Richie. She should be there, shouldn’t she?”

“Here is the brilliant spirit, the woman of sorrows, the woman of transcendent joys, who would rather be elsewhere, who has consented to perform simple and essentially foolish tasks, to examine tomatoes, to sit under a hair dryer, because it is her art and her duty. Because the war is over, the world has survived, and we are here, all of us, making homes, having and raising children, creating not just books or paintings but a whole world—a world of order and harmony where children are safe (if not happy), where men who have seen horrors beyond imaging, who have acted bravely and well, come home to lighted windows, to perfume, to plates and napkins.”

“He [Laura’s son, Richie] wears blue pajamas. He is happy to see her, and more than happy; he is rescued, resurrected, transported by love. Laura reaches into the pocket of her robe for a cigarette, changes her mind, raises her hand instead to her hair. It is almost perfect, it is almost enough, to be a young mother in a yellow kitchen touching her thick, dark hair, pregnant with another child.”

“She is going to produce a birthday cake—only a cake—but in her mind at this moment, the cake is glossy and resplendent as any photograph in any magazine; it is better, even, than the photographs of cakes in magazines. She imagines making, out of the humblest materials, a cake with all the balance and authority of an urn or a house. The cake will speak of bounty and delight the way a good house speaks of comfort and safety. This, she thinks, is how artists or architects must feel (it’s an awfully grand comparison, she knows, maybe even a little foolish, but still), faced with canvas, with stone, with oil or wet cement. Wasn’t a book like *Mrs. Dalloway* once just empty paper and a pot of ink? It’s only a cake, she tells herself. But still. There are cakes and then there are cakes.”

“The cake is cute, Kitty tells her, the way a child’s painting might be cute. It is sweet and touching in its facility. Laura understands: there are two choices only. You can be capable or uncaring. You can produce a masterful cake by your own hand or, barring that, light a cigarette, declare yourself hopeless at such projects, pour yourself

another cup of coffee, and order a cake from the bakery. Laura is an artisan who has tried and failed, publicly. She has produced something cute, when she had hoped (it's embarrassing, but true) to produce something of beauty."

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

- How do I feel as I read this quote?
- What word(s) stick out to me?
- How is Laura feeling in the quote? What is going on around her?
- What do you suspect happened just before this quote in the story? After?

STEP 2. CREATE YOUR MEME

Expectation vs. Reality memes have grown increasingly popular on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. These memes show (usually through humor) the disparities found in modern culture. They can be both universally relatable and strangely specific. Expectation vs. Reality memes attempt to convey how a person desires something to make them feel (organized, clean, and relaxed!) versus how it really makes them feel (disappointed, tired, old). Let's examine some advertisements from the 1950s and see if we can create "Expectation vs. Reality" memes around them.

For this exercise, students will follow the steps below:

- Use your personal technology to find an image of a 1950s advertisement that speaks to you. Example search terms could be "1950s housewife ad," "advertisements 1950s," or something similar. The ad can be a photograph or a drawing and should include an image of a housewife working in her home. Examples could include: A woman baking, mopping the floor, or ironing clothes. Focus on images that show the subject clearly enjoying a task which is probably not enjoyable in reality.
- Your selected image will be used as the first of two images in a meme. It should represent the "Expectation" part of the "Expectation vs. Reality" meme.
- Now, create a photo to partner with the first which shows the reality of the task/emotional quality expressed in the first picture. Ask a partner to take the photo for you so that you can act out the "Reality" of the task.
- Edit your images so that they are side by side. Label the first "Expectation" and the second "Reality".

Share with your peers and discuss the following:

- Why did you select this advertisement?
- What is this ad trying to sell? Would you buy this product?
- What is the emotional state of the housewife in the ad?
- What are the similarities between your "Reality" photo and the original ad?
- What are the key differences between the two that make the second more realistic?
- How might you feel seeing this ad were you a housewife in the 1950s?

DIVING DEEPER: THE AIDS EPIDEMIC

Richard Brown is dying of AIDS. Like many gay men living in metropolitan areas during the AIDS epidemic of the 1990s, he has already lost many friends to the virus and has seen up close the ravages of the disease on a once healthy body.

WHAT IS AIDS?

AIDS begins as HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), a virus that attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases. It is spread by contact with certain bodily fluids of a person with HIV, most commonly during unprotected sex (sex without a condom or HIV medicine to prevent or treat HIV), or through sharing injection drug equipment. If left untreated, HIV can lead to the disease AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome). AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged because of the virus. For more information, please refer to hiv.gov.

Please read below for some important events in the timeline of the AIDS epidemic in NYC (all information taken from the timeline created by the NYC AIDS Memorial):

1980 In December 1980, a Brooklyn schoolteacher dies of AIDS in New York City. He is the 4th U.S. citizen known to die from the illness.

1982 Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), the first community-based AIDS service provider in the United States, is founded in New York City.

1985 15,527 cases of AIDS and 12,529 deaths reported in the U.S. to date. AIDS has now been reported in 51 countries and on every continent except Antarctica.

1987 AIDS activist Larry Kramer founds the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in New York City. Kramer's goal is to create a political direct-action group that will force governments, elected officials, public health agencies, the pharmaceutical and insurance industries, and religious institutions to act to protect those at risk of HIV, and those who are sick with AIDS. *TIME* magazine calls ACT UP "the most effective health activist [group] in history" for "pressuring drug companies, government agencies and other powers that stood in their way to find better treatments for people with AIDS—and, in the process, improving the way drugs are tested and approved in the U.S."

1990 160,969 cases of AIDS and 120,453 deaths reported in the U.S. To date, nearly twice as many Americans have died of AIDS as died in the Vietnam War.

1992 AIDS becomes the number-one cause of death for U.S. men ages 25 to 44.

1995 AIDS deaths in the U.S. reach an all-time high. AIDS becomes the leading cause of death for all Americans ages 25 to 44.

1997 President Bill Clinton calls for the development of an AIDS vaccine by 2007.

1999 The World Health Organization (WHO) announces that HIV/AIDS has become the fourth largest cause of death worldwide and the number one cause of death in Africa. The WHO estimates that 33 million people are living with HIV worldwide and 14 million people have died of AIDS.

PHILOSOPHICAL CHAIRS

Active listening, critical thinking, and respectful dialogue are learned skills: Everyone can acquire them, and no one can perfect them without practice. Philosophical Chairs is designed to help us develop these skills while also learning about opera.

You might find these statements challenging—and you might find it challenging to talk with someone whose views differ from your own. That’s the point! Take your time with each statement, embrace uncertainty, and know that changing your mind as you learn new information is a sign of strength. Before you begin your discussion, take some time to review the rules of engagement:

Be sure you understand the statement. If something is unclear, ask!

Face each other. Body language helps show that you’re listening.

Only one speaker at a time. Everyone will get their turn to speak.

Think before you speak. Be sure that what you’re going to say is what you really mean, and remember that we can disagree while still being kind.

Summarize the previous person’s comments before adding your own. This will show that you have heard their thoughts and are responding thoughtfully to what they said. It will also help avoid misunderstandings and faulty assumptions.

Address ideas, not the person. Challenging ideas or statements is great—but only if we respect the individuality and inherent value of the person who expressed them.

Three before me. After you’ve spoken, you may not make another comment until three others have shared their thoughts.

THE STATEMENTS

- You should always try to be who society wants you to be.
- Since you can’t change the past, regrets are pointless.
- Regret helps us learn from past mistakes.
- Suffering is always a transformational experience.
- Everyone has demons.
- Everyone, at some point in their lives, will find themselves in psychological distress.
- Mental illness is a clinical condition (and not a personal weakness).
- It is normal to feel sad.
- It is important to prioritize your mental health.
- Being honest about who you are will make you happy.
- Everyone you meet in life, you meet for a reason.
- Coincidences are random and meaningless.
- Social norms will never change.

Opera Review: *The Hours*

Have you ever wanted to be a music and theater critic? Now's your chance!

As you watch *The Hours*, use the space below to keep track of your thoughts and opinions. What did you like about the performance? What didn't you like? If you were in charge, what might you have done differently? Think carefully about the action, music, and stage design, and rate each of the star singers. Then, after the opera, share your opinions with your friends, classmates, and anyone else who wants to learn more about the opera and this performance at the Met!

THE PERFORMANCE, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Prologue: The chorus sings Virginia's thoughts. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Clarissa and Sally prepare for the party. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Clarissa buys the flowers herself. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Virginia admires Leonard's work. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Laura reads <i>Mrs. Dalloway</i> . MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Laura, Dan, and Richie at breakfast MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
More than friends: Richard and Clarissa look back MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Laura, Virginia, and Clarissa dream of escape. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Solitude in a hotel room MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

THE PERFORMANCE, SCENE BY SCENE	ACTION	MUSIC	SET DESIGN / STAGING
Virginia on the banks of the river MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Louis prompts a flashback. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A funeral for a bird MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
The ledge of Richard's window MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A chorus of drowning voices MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Richie becomes Richard. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
These three remain. MY OPINION OF THIS SCENE:	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆