

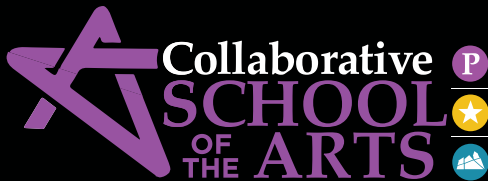
at theREP★

2023-2024 SEASON

# SWEAT

By Lynn Nottage

STUDY  
GUIDE



**FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT:**  
[COLLABORATIVESCHOOLOFTHEARTS.ORG](http://COLLABORATIVESCHOOLOFTHEARTS.ORG)

**Or Contact Group Sales at:**  
(518)382-3884 x 139 | [groupsales@proctors.org](mailto:groupsales@proctors.org)

theREP and Collaborative School of the Arts are a part of Proctors Collaborative

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## ATTENDING A PERFORMANCE

Being a member of an audience is an important job. Live theatre couldn’t exist without you! That job carries with it some responsibilities. Follow these simple suggestions in order to have the best theatre experience possible!

**BRING WITH YOU...**ideas, imagination, an open mind, observation skills and a sense of wonder.

**LEAVE BEHIND...**cell phones, pagers, pen lights, food and drink and anything else that might distract you, the performers or other members of the audience.

**THINGS TO DO BEFORE A PERFORMANCE...**learn about the show you are going to see, arrive on time, find your seat, visit the restroom.

## DURING A PERFORMANCE

**PLEASE DO...**applaud, laugh, pay attention to big and little details, think about questions that arise for you, stay seated until intermission/end of the show.

**PLEASE DON’T...**talk, sleep, eat or drink, distract others, use a cell phone, exit the theatre during the performance unless it’s an emergency.

## 2023-2024 | CAPITAL REPERTORY THEATRE STUDENT MATINEES

### “What the Constitution Means to Me”

by Heidi Schreck  
Student Matinee | Oct. 4, 2023

### “Million Dollar Quartet Christmas”

Book by Colin Escott  
Student Matinee | Dec. 13 and 20, 2023

### “Sweat” by Lynn Nottage

Student Matinee | Mar. 27, 2024

### WORLD PREMIERE

### “Three Mothers” by Ajene D. Washington

Student Matinee | May 2 and 9, 2024

### “Beautiful, The Carole King Musical”

Book by Douglas McGrath, Music and Lyrics by Carole King, Gerry Goffin, Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil  
July 12-Aug. 18, 2024

### ON-THE-GO! IN-SCHOOL TOURS

### “Shakespeare: The Remix”

by Aaron Jafferis & Gihieh Lee  
Oct. 23-Nov. 18, 2023

### “Henry Johnson: Ballad of a Forgotten Hero”

by Rachel Lynett  
Dramaturgy by Eunice Ferreria  
Feb. 5-March 8, 2024

### OTHER

**NEXT ACT! NEW PLAY SUMMIT 13 | SPRING 2024**  
**SUMMER STAGE YOUNG ACTING COMPANY**  
**PERFORMANCES | SUMMER 2024**

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[groupsales@proctors.org](mailto:groupsales@proctors.org).

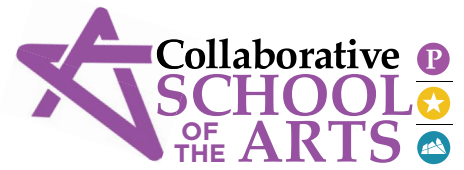
*\*This study guide was researched and written, in part, by theREP’s Administrative Intern, Megan Dellenbaugh.*

*\* Parts of this study guide originally appeared in the Guthrie Theater’s play guide for its 2022 production of “Sweat.” Reprinted with permission.*

*\*This study guide has been constructed for educational purposes only; theREP does not benefit financially from the guide.*

**FALL 2023**

**theREP** ★



## Dear Educator:

Welcome to Capital Repertory Theatre at 251 North Pearl St.!

We are thrilled that you are attending a student matinee performance of “Sweat”, one of theREP’s MainStage productions for the 2023-24 season, and hope that you will find this guide to be a useful tool in your classroom.

You have permission to reproduce materials within this guide for use in your classroom. It is designed to introduce the cultural and historical context of the play, as well as provide resources and ideas for incorporating the theatre experience into your curriculum. Productions by theREP are likely to generate questions, thoughts and opinions amongst your students.

The arts provide young imaginations with stimulation, points of reference and intellectual resources for the mind and spirit; it is theREP’s goal to make live theatre attendance possible for all students in the Capital Region. Tens of thousands of Capital Region students have attended student matinees and On-The-Go! performances throughout our history. We hope to continue to grow and serve the needs of the Capital Region education community for decades to come.

Your success stories help us to keep the program funded, so please let us know how you are using theatre in the classroom. We love to receive copies of lesson plans, student work related to our productions and your letters. These are important testimonials to the value of the arts in education.

We look forward to hearing from you!

**With deepest gratitude,**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret E. Hall".

**Margaret E. Hall**  
Associate Artistic Director  
mhall@attherep.org  
(518) 462-4531 x410

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shai Davenport".

**Shai Davenport**  
Education Programs Manager  
sdavenport@proctors.org  
(518) 382-3884 x197

# ABOUT US



Capital Repertory Theatre (theREP) is a non-profit professional-producing theatre. In its decades-long history, theREP has produced more than 8,000 performances for the people of the Capital Region.

A member of LORT (League of Resident Theatres), theREP strives to bring quality work that explores the essence of the human condition through the stories of people, events and phenomena that shape our contemporary lives. Theatre, at its best, entertains, cajoles and inspires by engaging the heart and mind through its most powerful ally—the imagination.

There are two basic types of theatre companies: producing and presenting. theREP is a producing theatre. The theatre hires a director and designers for the set, costumes, lights and sound. The theatre’s artistic director and the director select appropriate actors for all the roles in the play. Then they all come to Albany, where the play is built and rehearsed. The resident staff of the theatre works with visiting artists to put the production together.

In addition to the main theatre space, theREP has a studio theatre that acts as a rehearsal hall and secondary venue for performances (such as several of Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate NY’s recent productions), a costume shop where costumes are constructed and cared for, a prop shop where props are made, offices where the administrative staff works and housing facilities for out-of-town actors. theREP’s sets are constructed in a scene shop that is also a part of the Proctors Collaborative and located in Rotterdam, NY.

In contrast to a producing theatre, presenting theatres (sometimes called “roadhouses”)—like Proctors in Schenectady (also a part of the Proctors Collaborative)—host shows that have been designed, built and rehearsed elsewhere. Touring productions are booked into presenting theatres. Shows that are booked into presenting houses will tour regionally, nationally or even internationally over an extended period. What you will see at theREP or with our On-The-Go! tours are unique to theREP where it was built. No one from anywhere else will see this production just as you see it!

Capital Repertory Theatre is a part of Proctors Collaborative, which also includes Proctors, Universal Preservation Hall, the Collaborative School of the Arts and the Collaborative Scene Shop.



**STUDENT MATINEES** | Performance at theREP @ 10:30am

**PRICE** | \$12 per student

**CHAPERONES** | For every 15 students, one complimentary adult ticket is provided

**LOCATION** | 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12207

**RESERVATIONS** | Contact Group Sales at (518) 382-3884 x 139  
groupsales@proctors.org

**SCHOLARSHIPS** | Visit [www.attherep.org](http://www.attherep.org) for more information and applications

**ON-THE-GO!** | For more information and to book a tour contact  
onthego@proctors.org | [collaborativeschoolofthearts.org](http://collaborativeschoolofthearts.org)

*Capital Repertory Theatre is one of the organizations within the Proctors Collaborative, which also includes: Proctors, Universal Preservation Hall (UPH), the Collaborative School of the Arts and the Collaborative Scene Shop.*

# A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPT

BY MEGAN DELLENBAUGH

Mostly set in a fictional bar in Reading, Pennsylvania in 2000 and 2008, one of the United States' poorest cities, "Sweat" follows a group of friends as they navigate the devastating consequences of poverty and power before and during the Great Recession. Most of the characters work at Olmstead's, a steel-tubing factory that is one of the most sought-after jobs in the city. When Cynthia, a Black woman, is promoted, tensions rise as the union, which includes many of her friends, doles out pay cuts and or fires the workers and locks them out. The play culminates in a startling display of violence. "Sweat" explores the themes of power, race, class and blame.

## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION POINTS

- "What Nottage captures brilliantly is the way work, however hard or demanding, gives people an identity and purpose... I can't think of any recent play that tells us so much, and so vividly, about the state of the union."
- "Lynn Nottage's 'Sweat' ... on Broadway after a run last fall at The Public Theater, is a lot of great things: a deeply researched case history of the collapse of labor in America, a useful guide to understanding our own chaotic political moment, and a worthy attempt to put serious material before a wider public in a commercial environment."



## CHARACTER LIST

- Evan - 40s, Black American. Jason and Chris' parole officer in 2008
- Jason - 21/29, White American of German descent. Tracey's son.
- Chris - 21/29, Black American. Cynthia's son. Wants to go to college.
- Stan - 50s, White American of German descent. Uniting force between the characters, a neutral ground.
- Oscar - 22/30, Colombian American. Busboy at the bar in 2000.
- Tracey - 45/53, White American of German descent. Jason's mother. Very pro-union.
- Cynthia - 45/53, Black American. Brucie's wife, Chris's mother. Wants to keep her job.
- Jessie - 40s, Italian American.
- Brucie - 40s, Black American. Cynthia's estranged ex-husband, Chris' father. Addicted to drugs.

# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

## LYNN NOTTAGE

Lynn Nottage is a two-time Pulitzer Prize™-winning playwright and screenwriter. Her plays have been produced across the United States and internationally. Nottage's play "Sweat" won the Pulitzer Prize, an Obie Award, the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize, a Tony™ Nomination and a Drama Desk Nomination. The play was commissioned and premiered by Oregon Shakespeare Festival American Revolutions History Cycle/Arena Stage, and moved to a sold-out run at The Public Theatre, and then onto Broadway.

Nottage is the first and only woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice ("Sweat" in 2017 and "Ruined" in 2009). She graduated from Brown University and the Yale School of Drama and is an Associate Professor at the Columbia School of the Arts. In addition to theater, she has worked on filmed projects with Amazon, HBO, Netflix, and Apple TV+ and has written several books.

- Nottage spent two-and-a-half years interviewing people in Reading after one of her close friends suddenly struggled to survive economically after having done well. She met a group of steelworkers who had been locked out from their work for 93 weeks. She serendipitously received a grant from Oregon Shakespeare to write a play based on American revolutions, so she started working on "Sweat."
- "What surprised me was my ability to empathize with people who I always thought were on the other side of the divide. When you interview Black Americans and Latino folks, there is a narrative that has existed for the last 50 years of being sort of disaffected from the culture. But I sat in rooms with middle-aged White men and heard them speaking like young Black men in America—they feel disenfranchised, disaffected."
- "My motto when I was writing this was 'replace judgment with curiosity.' I wanted it very much to be an ensemble piece and to be a collective narrative. The way that the play is structured is that each of the characters has their own aria ... There are certainly characters that I judged a little heavier and harsher, but I tried to have empathy for all of them."



## LYNN NOTTAGE

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# HISTORICAL CONTEXT BY MEGAN DELLENBAUGH

DRAMATURGICAL INTERN AT theREP

## SETTING CONTEXT

In 2000, **Reading, Pennsylvania**, placed 32nd on the United States' ranking of its poorest cities. By 2007, it had entered the top 10, and in 2011, it was officially the number one poorest city in the country. Residents have a far lower education level than the national average, with only 8% having a bachelor's degree and 65% having a high school diploma. The dominant employers in Reading were in manufacturing, however, because of "globalization, automation and recession," almost six million manufacturing jobs were erased across the United States between 2000 and 2009.



## THE GAP BETWEEN LOWER AND UPPER CLASS

While middle-class jobs in manufacturing were disappearing, "Pennsylvania added jobs at the lower end of the wage spectrum—in health care and social services—and at the highest end, in sectors like management and finance...The difference between the income earned by the wealthiest 5% in Berks County and by a median-income household rose 13.2% in 20 years, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nationally, the wealth gap became even more pronounced, increasing 15.8%."

## POLITICAL CLIMATE

In the 2000 election between Al Gore (D) and George W. Bush (R), Bush won with 52.73% of the votes. In the 2008 election between Barack Obama (D) and John McCain (R), however, Obama won with 53.92% of the votes. Pennsylvania is a swing state, meaning either a Republican or Democratic candidate could reasonably win the election. While White voter registration leans toward the Republican party (51%), Hispanic and Black registration is overwhelmingly Democratic (about 64% and 87%, respectively). Despite the high concentration of Hispanic voters in Reading, Berks County tends to vote conservatively.



In 2000, Bush (R), won with **52.73%** of the votes.



In 2008, Obama (D) won with **53.92%** of the votes.

*Pictured Top Down: Reading, PA, George W. Bush and Al Gore, Barack Obama and John McCain.*

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

## BY MEGAN DELLENBAUGH

DRAMATURGICAL INTERN AT theREP

### LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRATION IN THE EARLY 2000S

Many Hispanic people migrated to Reading in the early 2000s from large cities like New York, “drawn by cheaper rent and the promise of a better life.” Nationally, the 2000 census revealed that 52% of the foreign-born population in the United States was Latin American. Unfortunately, despite being such a high population in the U.S., in 2000 and 2008, the national median annual earnings of Hispanic men were over \$20,000 less than the total men’s income.



Read original article here:  
[www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/realestate/29reading.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/29/realestate/29reading.html)

### THE GREAT RECESSION

Beginning in December 2007 and ending in June 2009, the Great Recession was America’s worst economic decline since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Historically, banks would only grant mortgages to people who had good credit, but during the early 2000s, the housing market was thriving, so banks began doling out subprime mortgages, expensive loans given to people who were less likely to pay them back. While not ideal for the lender or the borrower, subprime mortgages allowed people to buy houses that they assumed would continue to increase in value, allowing them to pay off their loans easily in the future. In 2007, however, demand for houses decreased, causing the value to decrease as well. Homeowners were now unable to pay their mortgages or sell their houses, and the banks foreclosed their homes. Because the foreclosed houses were worth less money, the banks and the previous homeowners lost money. This sparked an economic downturn that laid off 8 million Americans, foreclosed 4 million homes per year and shut down 2.5 million businesses.



### SIMPLE EXPLANATION OF THE GREAT RECESSION



[www.youtube.com/watch?v=yM0uonkloXY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yM0uonkloXY)



## People, Places and Things

### PEOPLE

#### Aryan Brotherhood

The nation's oldest major white supremacist prison gang, founded in 1964 at San Quentin State Prison by Irish bikers to provide protection for White prisoners in newly desegregated prisons. It currently has approximately 20,000 members. Its motto is "blood in, blood out," meaning it takes a violent attack on a rival gang member or a corrections officer to get into the gang, and death is the only way out.

#### Bradley

Senator Bill Bradley of New Jersey ran for the Democratic nomination for president in 2000 but lost to Al Gore. Bradley was a former basketball player: He won an Olympic gold medal in 1964, was named NCAA Player of the Year in 1965 and played 10 years in the NBA on the New York Knicks. He's also a Rhodes Scholar.

#### James Garner

American actor known for his TV roles in "The Rockford Files" and "Maverick," plus several movie roles.

#### Joni Mitchell

Canadian-American singer, songwriter and producer. She released her debut album in 1968 and went on to become a leading figure in her generation of musicians. Among her hits are "Both Sides Now," "Chelsea Morning," "Big Yellow Taxi," "Woodstock" and "The Circle Game."

#### Larry Holmes

American boxer and former heavyweight champion who actively competed professionally from 1973 to 2002. His professional record was 69 wins (including 44 knockouts) and six losses. Though a native Georgian, Holmes has lived in Easton, Pennsylvania, since 1957.

### white hats

Many manufacturing and construction sites have color-coded hard hats to help quickly identify who's who and what skills are onsite. There may be some variation in the color assignments, but generally managers, supervisors, engineers and forepersons wear white hard hats.

### PLACES

#### Albright

Private liberal arts college located in Reading, Pennsylvania, founded in 1856, making it the oldest institution of higher learning in Berks County. Named for German evangelical preacher Jacob Albright, the school offers certification programs in Early Childhood Education and Secondary Education.

#### ashram

A spiritual and yoga retreat, often led by a guru.

#### Atlantic City

A gambling resort city on the New Jersey coast, approximately two hours southeast from Reading via the expressway through Philadelphia, known for its casinos, boardwalk and beaches.

#### Berks

Berks County in southeastern Pennsylvania. Reading is the county seat of Berks, a mostly urban county of 411,000 people that includes 71 townships/boroughs and one city, though it also has farms and rural areas and is considered part of Pennsylvania's Dutch Country.

#### botanica

A shop chiefly within a Hispanic community that sells herbs and traditional charms, amulets, oils and candles for religious and spiritual practice.

# CULTURAL CONTEXT

## **Centro Hispano**

Also known as Hispanic Center, this social services organization serves greater Reading and Berks County and is dedicated to improving the quality of life for the Latinx population.

## **Colombia**

A country in northwestern South America on the Pacific Ocean and Caribbean Sea that includes the only land border (shared with Panama) with Central America.

## **hippie trail**

A journey popular among hippies during the 1960s and 1970s from Europe through central Asia into south Asia, often ending (or starting) in India. The route could be done cheaply, sometimes by hitchhiking or taking buses. The exact path may vary, but in the play, Jessie names many of the typical hot spots: Istanbul (Turkey), Tehran (Iran), Kandahar and Kabul (Afghanistan), Peshawar and Lahore (Pakistan), and Kathmandu (Nepal).

## **Kodiak**

The main community on Kodiak Island in the Gulf of Alaska, 250 miles southwest of Anchorage.

## **Myrtle Beach**

Vacation resort city in South Carolina on the Atlantic Ocean featuring long, white, sandy beaches, approximately 600 miles south of Reading.

## **'Nam**

Short for Vietnam. The Vietnam War (1955–1975) was a military conflict between the communist government of North Vietnam (aka the Viet Cong) and the government of South Vietnam and its ally, the U.S.

## **parole office**

An inmate begins a relationship with the parole board and its agents several months before release. Within 24 hours of release, a parolee meets with a parole agent and subsequently meets with the parole agent as often as parole conditions require.

## **rectory**

Church-owned housing provided for a minister or priest.

## **Penn**

A major east-west street in central Reading.

## **Pomeroy's**

Major department store in Reading, which had a landmark store at 6th and Penn Street built between 1892 and 1957, with 10 branches in other Pennsylvania cities and malls, plus one in New Jersey.

## **Puerto Ricans**

Puerto Ricans make up the largest subgroup of the Hispanic population in Reading and Berks County.

## **Sneaker Villa**

Local business based in Reading that eventually grew into a regional chain called Villa with 125 locations in 10 states until it merged with NTLR in 2017.

## **Tijuana**

The second-largest city in Mexico (one of the participating countries in the North American Free Trade Agreement) located directly across the border from San Diego, California. Tijuana is one of the maquiladora export processing zones, where parts enter duty-free, get assembled in Mexico and then get exported back to the U.S. with only value-added duties paid. A company can move its business to one of these zones, pay local wages and abide by local safety laws, bring in their parts tax-free and export them with minimal extra cost. The percentage of exports from the U.S. to Mexico's maquiladora zones in the first 10 years of NAFTA went from 39% to 61%.

## **Wharton**

The Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, with its main campus in Philadelphia, is a top-ranked prestigious business school offering undergraduate and graduate degrees, including a Master of Business Administration.

## **Whitner's**

Department store that originated as a dry goods store founded by C.K. Whitner in 1877 and established on Penn Street in 1883. A fire destroyed the first structure; a new building opened in 1911.

## **THINGS**

### **arepas**

A staple of Colombian food. There are nearly as many varieties of arepas and ways to serve them as there are bread, but these grilled or griddled cakes are typically made of white corn flour and served with butter and cheese or stuffed.

# CULTURAL CONTEXT

## **Carhartt**

A workwear clothing company founded in 1889 by Hamilton Carhartt to create bib overalls for railroad workers.

## **Green Stamps**

S&H Green Stamps, a loyalty rewards program of Sperry and Hutchinson Company from the 1890s to 1980s with peak use during the 1960s and 1970s. Participating retailers would issue stamps upon checkout, customers would collect them in little booklets and redeem them for items in the enormous S&H catalog.

## **lockout**

An employer-initiated work stoppage. When a contract has expired, a business may prohibit workers from returning to work until a new contract is negotiated. (For example, the 2022 MLB season was delayed because of a lockout of players as a new contract was worked out.) It's the parallel move that employers can make as opposed to an employee-initiated strike.

## **NAFTA**

The North American Free Trade Agreement was negotiated by the George H.W. Bush administration and established in 1994 under the Bill Clinton administration to promote trade between Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, creating a free-trade zone among the three countries. Gradually, between January 1, 1994, and January 1, 2008, most tariffs and quotas were eliminated on products exported and imported among the three countries. Side provisions were intended to prevent businesses from relocating in search of lower wages and looser health, safety and environmental regulations.

## **pretzels**

Reading is the self-declared Pretzel Capital of the World, with the local industry dating to the 1860s. By 1948, Reading was producing a third of all pretzels baked in the U.S. These are most commonly "snack pretzels" (hard pretzels), but there are plenty of soft pretzel bakeries in Reading as well.

## **rhythmic gymnastics**

A sport within the larger umbrella of gymnastics that includes group and individual competition on the floor with a ribbon, hoop or ball.

## **seven, eight dollars an hour**

In 2008, minimum wage in Pennsylvania had just been increased a dime to \$7.25 per hour, which remains the minimum wage in Pennsylvania today.

## **strike**

An employee-initiated work stoppage used as a negotiating tactic to pressure an employer into terms favorable to employees during contract negotiations.

## **steel tubing**

Tubes that may be round, square or rectangular and vary in dimensions, thickness and length. Steel tubes are usually used for structures like scaffolding (as opposed to pipes, which are used for transporting liquids and gases).

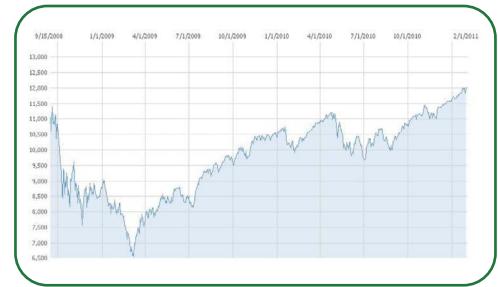
## **union**

A trade or labor union represents workers, often by specific industry or trade, and collectively bargains with an employer for wages, working conditions and other benefits on behalf of the workers. **G**

# ECONOMIC CONTEXT

## BY MEGAN DELLENBAUGH

DRAMATURGICAL INTERN AT theREP



**DOW JONES INDUSTRIAL AVERAGE** – Also known as **the Dow or the DJIA**, a stock market index that tracks the 30 largest public companies in the United States. It can be used to track the overall stock market.

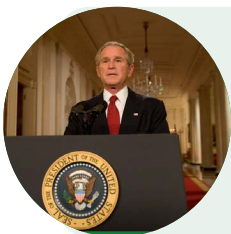
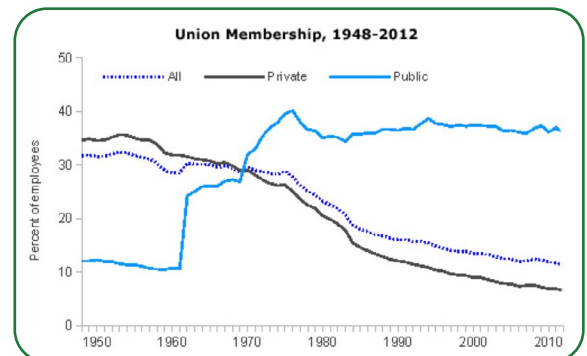
### **NAFTA – North American Free Trade Agreement.**

An agreement between the U.S., Canada and Mexico to reduce tariffs on trade between the three countries. NAFTA “implemented universal, higher health, safety and environmental standards” and increased economic competitiveness in the United States, allowing for the creation of more small businesses. On the other hand, it increased inflation and decreased employment in the manufacturing industry.

**TECH BUBBLE** – Also known as the dot com or internet bubble, investors gave money to Internet-based startups, hoping that the companies would be successful, paying no mind to traditional red flags in investing. When the companies weren’t profitable, the investors stopped investing and the value of Internet-based companies sharply declined, bringing the U.S. economy down with them.

### **UNION STRUCTURE AND OPERATION IN THE EARLY 2000s – There are two types of unions – the public and private sectors.**

Public sector unions are unions for workers hired by the government to perform a public service, such as teachers or police officers, that mostly focus on improving work conditions. Private sector unions are unions for workers in non-governmental industries, such as the Writers Guild of America or Actors Equity, that focus on improving wages and job security. The characters in “Sweat” would be in a private-sector union. In 2000, 13.5% of all workers in the United States were in a union. By 2008, that number declined to 12.4%. While public sector unions have been rising in popularity, membership in private sector unions is decreasing along with national membership in all unions. Using the concept of strength in numbers, the purpose of all unions is to have collective bargaining power so the workers can talk to their bosses, asking for better working conditions and being more likely to get them.



**“A VERY DIRE WARNING” SPEECH** – A speech made in 2008 by President Bush suggesting a government bailout for Wall Street. “A very dire warning” refers to Larry King’s comments before the speech on CNN. The transcript is linked in the source.

**PENNSYLVANIA MINIMUM WAGE** – In 2007, the Pennsylvania government raised the minimum wage from \$5.15 per hour to \$7.15 per hour. The federal minimum wage was raised to \$7.25 in 2009.

## Reading's Cyclical Economy

By Carla Steen  
Resident Dramaturg

Reading, the county seat of Berks County in southeastern Pennsylvania, took its name from the city in Berkshire, England, and gave its name to the railroad made famous in the board game Monopoly. That railroad helped establish Reading's textile and steel industries and make it the fourth-largest city in Pennsylvania. The city later became known for its outlet shopping and as the self-declared Pretzel Capital of the World. As these news excerpts indicate, Reading's fortunes have risen and fallen as local, national and global factors buffeted its economy.

### The Philadelphia Inquirer

#### A Garment Factory's Slow Death

At 1:10 p.m. last Tuesday, the knitting machines inside the Talbott Mill fell silent. ... Friday was the final day for [Supervisor Stanley] Boyer and 40 other workers in the knitting shop, the first section of the mill to be phased out. By the end of the year, the entire Talbott Knitting Mill will close, leaving 450 garment workers out of work. Talbott, a division of U.S. Industries Inc. of New York, has reigned for 30 years as one of the largest garment-making factories in both Reading and Pennsylvania. ...

In the last decade, the textile and garment industries have suffered steady attrition as production moved to factories with lower costs. Before, most of the work was finding its way to non-union companies in the South. But now, foreign competitors are seizing an increasingly larger share of the market.

Jennifer Lin, June 26, 1984

### The New York Times

#### Day by Day Economics as Seen in Reading, Pa.

Throughout the nation, from automobile factories to dairy farms, businesses and workers are hearing talk of recession and fearing its consequences on their lives. No one place is a perfect microcosm of the U.S. But the Reading area reflects both the weaknesses and the partly offsetting strengths of the economically floundering mid-Atlantic region. While its large manufacturing base tends to reflect contraction quickly, Reading's economy as a whole is diverse, and occasional visits here may provide a look at how one city deals with difficult economic times.

Some analysts think recession has already put its clammy grip on Reading and the rest of Berks County. One important gauge is a drop in the amount of electricity used by industry. This proxy for industrial output has trailed 1989 levels in three of the last four months. And the unemployment rate, though below the national average, has climbed one and a half percentage points since September 1989.

Robert D. Hershey, Jr., December 5, 1990

# ECONOMIC CONTEXT

## JUST AUTO

### USA: Dana Corporation Announces Plans to Close Reading, Pa., Facility

Dana Corporation announced today that it plans to close its structural products manufacturing facility in Reading, Pa. The specific date of the closure will be determined following discussions with officials of the United Steelworkers of America, Local 3733, which represents many of the workers in the facility. ...

Mike Greene, president of Dana's Structural Products Group, said the closure of the 75-year-old plant reflects the continuing evolution taking place in the automotive industry. "The closing of the Reading manufacturing plant is a direct result of changes in automotive supplier logistics requirements. Manufacturing efficiency now requires that our facilities be located closer to our customers' operations," he said. "Global competitiveness, coupled with the requirement to serve our customers' evolving needs, led to the decision to close the facility."

bcusack, August 23, 2000

## Economic Policy Institute

### Pennsylvania Stagnation: Is NAFTA the Culprit?

There is no doubt that American manufacturing has been hard hit by globalization. Between 1967 and 2000, manufacturing employment went up or down with the business cycle, but never dipped below 16.5 million workers. Since 2001, the U.S. has lost 3.4 million manufacturing jobs and employment dipped below 14 million.

Pennsylvania manufacturing has been even harder hit, with 208,000 jobs lost — a 24 percent decline — in the same period. Overall employment growth in the state continues to lag that of the rest of the country; jobs in the nation as a whole have grown three times as fast as jobs in Pennsylvania.

Furthermore, real median wages in Pennsylvania fell 2 percent between 2001 and 2007.

Robert E. Scott, April 17, 2008


## The New York Times

### Reading, Pa., Knew It Was Poor. Now It Knows Just How Poor.

Reading, a struggling city of 88,000 ... has earned the unwelcome distinction of having the largest share of its residents living in poverty, barely edging out Flint, Mich., according to new Census Bureau data. The count includes only cities with populations of 65,000 or more and has a margin of error that makes it difficult to declare a winner — or, perhaps more to the point, a loser.

Reading began the last decade at No. 32. But it broke into the top 10 in 2007, joining other places known for their high rates of poverty like Flint, Camden, N.J. and Brownsville, Tex. ...

Now it is No. 1, a ranking that the mothers at the day care center here say does not surprise them, given their firsthand knowledge of poverty-line wages, which for a parent and two children is now \$18,530.

The city had been limping for most of the past decade, since the plants that sustained it — including Lucent Technologies and the Dana Corporation, a car parts manufacturer — withered. But the past few years delivered more closings and layoffs, sending the city's poverty rate up to 41.3 percent. 

Sabrina Tavernise, September 26, 2011

# IDEAS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

## ENGLISH/LITERARY

### WRITE!

**WRITE! A Review:** Ask students to write a review of the REP's production of "Sweat." Things to consider when writing the review:

- Did any of the characters resonate with you and why?
- What was the most compelling or intriguing aspect of the production?
- How did the set, costumes and props add (or take away) from the production?
- What did you think of the sound/music and stage movement?
- What did you think of the direction of the piece?
- What questions arose for you about the production? Was anything unclear or confusing?
- What did you think of the actors—did you feel their characters were vibrant, three-dimensional, real people?
- Can you make any connections between this play and other plays that you have seen?
- Can you make any connections from the play to your own life?

**WRITE! What is Lynn Nottage's message about the nature of the middle class in modern America? Do you agree with her point of view?**

### THEMES!

#### Discussion:

1. Working Class Disillusionment;
2. Relationships, status and resentment;
3. Economic Strain and Race Relations;
4. Shame, Regret and Forgiveness

#### • **Prior to seeing the production:**

- How do the following themes show up in "Sweat?"

#### • **After seeing the production:**

- Has your perspective on these same themes changed after seeing the play?
- How do shame and pride influence the attitudes and or decisions of each character?

### READ!

**Read additional works by Lynn Nottage.**

- "Clyde's," acting edition, Dramatists Play Service, 2022.
- "Crumbs From the Table of Joy and Other Plays," Theatre Communications Group, 2003.
- "Intimate Apparel and Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine," Theatre Communications Group, 2006.
- "Ruined," Theatre Communications Group, 2009.
- "By the Way, Meet Vera Stark," Theatre Communications Group, 2013.
- "One More River to Cross: A Verbatim Fugue," Dramatists Play Service, 2015.
- "Mima's Tale," acting edition, Dramatists Play Service, 2019.

# IDEAS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

## SOCIAL STUDIES/HISTORY

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION POINTS (or Research Paper Ideas)

1. Us vs. Them
  - Boss vs. workers
  - Educated vs. not educated
  - Politicians vs. citizens
  - Race
  - Nativism
  - Union vs. non-union
  - Scarcity vs. abundance
2. Identity and Humanity
  - Race
  - Gender
3. Talk about the effects of stress on the play's characters. What coping methods do each of the characters use to deal with their emotional turmoil? Which of the characters' methods are effective and which are not?
  - Privilege
  - Nativism
4. Connections between "Sweat" and the current political climate

## THEATRE/ART

### CLASSROOM DISCUSSION ON ART! VISIBILITY/REPRESENTATION

Why is it important for everyone, in every walk of life, to have a voice and be represented in the world of art? How does the world of art, be it performative or visual, help everyone in every walk of life be represented?

### DESIGN!

Design a show poster for a production of "Sweat." (Students are encouraged to look up past show posters for the play as inspiration; as well as images of Reading, PA during 2000 and or 2008.)

- **Art to evoke the play.**
- **Production title and playwright name.**
- **Performance venue and dates.**
- **Consider:**
  - quote about it being a Pulitzer Prize-winning play
  - box office information

### COSTUME DESIGN!

After reading the play, students are asked to research clothing in 2000 and 2008 as well as the location of Reading, PA; and then to create a collage of found/research images for each of the characters. Students' work could then be presented to the class at large.

### RESPONSES TO THE PLAY

Hold a classroom discussion about the play after seeing the REP's production. Have students read these responses and add that to the discussion.



# IDEAS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

## Chicago Tribune

Can a play be sympathetic to the plight of the displaced white, working-class workers of America while also holding that same group fully accountable for its defensiveness, myopia and well-documented racial prejudices?

It's hard. Most writers pick a side. ...

But playwright Lynn Nottage's potent and powerful *Sweat*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2017 ... comes closer than any recent play to attempt to voice the feelings of (in this case) union workers in a Pennsylvania steel town in [2000], long-serving folk whose decent contract is slowly whittled away by a company salivating over the savings promised by the North American Free Trade Agreement. ...

*Sweat* is a piece about how these cruel bosses and their inhuman system of capitalist competition forces the various racial groupings of the working-class to feed upon themselves. And that the America we all now share is filled with the walking wounded from that bloody battle.

**Chris Jones**

"*Sweat* at Goodman Theatre," *Chicago Tribune*, March 19, 2019

## The Guardian

What Nottage captures brilliantly is the way work, however hard or demanding, gives people an identity and purpose. Tracey, who comes from a family of German craftsmen, is a militant unionist but bereft without employment. "Do you know what it's like," she asks, "to get up and have no place to go?" For the equally tough Cynthia, work is a means of advancement and her union card is a symbol of racial acceptance. Behind the play's portrayal of the damage done to individual lives by what Nottage calls "the American deindustrial revolution" lies a wider picture of collapsing hopes and corporate ruthlessness. ...

I can't think of any recent play that tells us so much, and so vividly, about the state of the union.

**Michael Billington**

"Breathtaking Drama About Life in the American Rustbelt," *The Guardian*, December 20, 2018


Originally appeared in the Guthrie Theater's play guide for its 2022 production of "*Sweat*." Reprinted with permission.

# IDEAS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

## VULTURE

Lynn Nottage's *Sweat*, which opens tonight on Broadway after a run last fall at The Public Theater, is a lot of great things: a deeply researched case history of the collapse of labor in America, a useful guide to understanding our own chaotic political moment, and a worthy attempt to put serious material before a wider public in a commercial environment. ...

Critics frequently complain about the lack of serious theater on contemporary political themes in our diet, let alone theater that brings more than just one racial or socioeconomic perspective to bear. Nottage provides these things as generously as anyone has; indeed, even the black-white conflict of the play is complicated by the presence of a Colombian-American character who is mistreated by everyone. The playwright's generosity may be part of the problem, though. As I wrote last year, there's a checklist quality to the dramaturgy that begins to feel obligatory: white privilege, white nationalism, Rust Belt deindustrialization, the Whartonizing of management, the opiate epidemic — all, and many more, get their due.

But great drama takes place in the space between people. The interplay of ideas can of course be a part of that, but only a part. Characters aren't pundits, and plots aren't treatises. Nottage knows this; her 2003 play *Intimate Apparel* was profoundly human while still scoring its important points. In writing *Sweat*, she must have believed that the politics were too important to be bossed around by the personalities. But we shouldn't be surprised, then, if the personalities sometimes refuse to work. 

**Jesse Green**

"Lynn Nottage's *Sweat* Tells But Doesn't Show," *Vulture*, March 26, 2017



# IDEAS FOR CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

## The New York Times

As bars often are in old-fashioned and socially conscious dramas like *Sweat*, this one is a microcosm for a larger world. That includes not only Reading, Pa., the steel town where the play is set, but also a beleaguered part of the United States in which jobs are under siege and identity is fraying.

It is foolish to underestimate the anger in places like these, as the most recent presidential election confirmed. Though it takes place in 2000 and 2008, and one of its characters swears he will never vote again, *Sweat* is the first work from a major American playwright to summon, with empathy and without judgment, the nationwide anxiety that helped put Donald J. Trump in the White House.

For that reason alone, the arrival on Broadway of *Sweat*, which originated at the fertile Oregon Shakespeare Festival and was previously staged in New York at The Public Theater, warrants serious applause. So does the fact that it marks the belated Broadway debut of Ms. Nottage, a justly acclaimed dramatist of ambitious scope and fierce focus.

**Ben Brantley**

"*Sweat* Imagines the Local Bar as Caldron," *The New York Times*, March 26, 2017

### CITATIONS/ADDITIONAL READING

- <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-review-labor-breakingviews-idUKKBN17D2KT>
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- <https://www.adl.org/resources/hate-symbol/aryan-brotherhood>
- "Sweat" Study Guide Guthrie Theater
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- <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/03/20/1-trends-in-party-affiliation-among-demographic-groups/>

### RESOURCES CONSULTED

Originally appeared in the Guthrie Theater's play guide for its 2022 production of "Sweat." Reprinted with permission.

**EDUCATION AND OUTREACH** are key components of theREP’s mission, “to create an authentic link to the community we serve.” Through a wide range of programs, theREP strives “to provide the Capital Region with theatre programming which inspires a greater understanding of the human condition” and helps “to develop future audiences by instilling the notion that theatre is a vital part of the cultural life of all vibrant cities.”

## PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

**Student Matinees (Classics on Stage):** Performances of most of the theatre’s professional productions are scheduled during the school day with dramatically discounted prices for area students to allow for greater accessibility.

**On-The-Go! In-School Tour:** Specially adapted professional productions designed to play to students on-site in schools. theREP’s On-The-Go! program reaches close to 10,000+ students every year.

**Young Playwright Contest:** Providing students ages 13-19 with the opportunity to submit their work to be produced on theREP’s stage. In addition, the winning playwrights are given a mentorship—prior to the production of the play—with a theatre professional playwright (and/or director).

**Summer Stage Young Acting Company:** Providing young actors the opportunity to work together, with leading professionals in the field, on a production that will take place at theREP. Company members hone their acting skills while rehearsing and then performing the Young Playwright Contest-winning plays.

**CAST (Cultivating Arts & Students Together):** Providing students with the opportunity to volunteer at the theatre and earn community service credits at the same time. Teens get an in-depth learning experience that satisfies their passion to be a part of the arts while fulfilling their community service needs.

**Artists-in-Residency Programs:** theREP works in conjunction with school educators to bring highly trained teaching artists to work in extended residency within the classroom. Opportunities to embed the theatrical experience into the curriculum are available.

**Career Development:** theREP is dedicated to helping build the next generation of theatre professionals with programs like the Professional Apprenticeship Program which provides year-long or summer-long paid apprenticeships (as an assistant stage manager and or crew member) and Internship Program that provides college students internships in many disciplines of theatre. These programs are specifically for young people beginning a career in the performing arts.



DOUG LIEBIG

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