



**CAROLINE, OR
CHANGE
ENRICHMENT GUIDE
ACTORS' PLAYHOUSE**

**FOR STUDENTS &
TEACHERS**

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Actors' Playhouse at the Miracle Theatre, 280 Miracle Mile, Coral Gables, FL 33134
March 27 – April 14, 2024 Student Matinee April 11, 2024 10:00 AM

CHARACTER LIST & PLOT SUMMARY

CHARACTER LIST

Caroline Thibodeaux - 39 years old, the Gellman's maid

Emmie Thibodeaux - 16 years old, Caroline's daughter, supportive of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement

Jackie Thibodeaux - Caroline's younger son

Joe Thibodeaux - Caroline's younger son

Dotty Moffett - An old friend of Caroline, also works as a maid

Noah Gellman - 8-years old, the Gellman's son

Stuart Gellman - A professional clarinetist and teacher/Noah's father

Grandpa and Grandma Gellman - Stuart's parents

Rose Stopnick Gellman - Noah's stepmother, a friend of the family who marries Stuart after his first wife's death

Mr. Stopnick - Rose's father, liberal New York Jew

The Domestic Appliances - Caroline has given personalities and voices to the washer, dryer and radio that keep her company in the basement as she works.

- The Radio is portrayed by three women that look and sing like a Motown girl group.
- The Washing Machine, portrayed by an actor, is brand-new and a good force that pushes Caroline to move forward in life.
- The Electric Clothes Dryer, portrayed by an actor, torments Caroline throughout the play.

The Moon - Also portrayed by an actor, the Moon is a calming and healing presence throughout the play.

The Bus - Also portrayed by an actor, is the primary source of transportation for the African American characters in the play.

PLOT SUMMARY

Caroline or Change is set in 1963 in Lake Charles, Louisiana during the America Civil Rights Movement. It takes place just before, after and during the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

Caroline Thibodeaux is a 39-year-old African American maid for a middle class, Southern Jewish family, the Gellmans. Caroline, a divorced mother of four, has been working as a maid for 22 years. That means she began working as a domestic servant at the age of only 17. During her work, she spends most of her time in the humid basement, where she passes her time with the radio, washer, and dryer. As mentioned in the character list, these appliances are characters in the play.

The Gellmans' young son, Noah, whose mother recently died of cancer, shares a special relationship with Caroline, a woman resistant to the sweep of change she sees around her. Noah's new stepmother Rose, struggling to bond with Noah and unable to give Caroline a raise, enlists Caroline's help in a plan to teach Noah a lesson about leaving change in his pants pocket.

Rose tells Noah and Caroline that when Caroline does the laundry, she should keep the money she finds in Noah's pockets. Although Caroline does not want to take money from a child, she eventually concedes due to her own children's desperate need for food, clothing, and shoes that she cannot afford with her regular salary. This puts Caroline in an ethical predicament. The arrangement goes wrong when a \$20 bill goes missing and leads to an upsetting fight between Caroline and Noah. This causes a rift between Caroline's family and the Gellmans.

With the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the strength of the Civil Rights Movement accompanied by the inspirational speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sweeping change begins to affect Caroline's life. She must come to terms with the personal and national transformation. Although serious and based on historical settings and situations, the script has offbeat humor, moving relationships, and an upbeat ending.



COMPOSER-JEANINE TESORI

Jeanine Tesori has written four Tony-nominated scores for Broadway; *Twelfth Night*, *Thoroughly Modern Millie*, *Shrek the Musical*, and *Caroline, or Change*. The production of *Caroline or Change* at the National Theater in London received the Olivier Award for Best New Musical.

Her first off-Broadway musical, *Violet*, received the New York Drama Critics Circle Award in 1997. She has received many other honors including Drama Desk and Obie awards. Her film scores include *Winds of Change* for ABC, *Show Business*, and *Wrestling With Angels*. She has composed songs for Disney DVD releases *Mulan II*, *Lilo and Stitch II*, and *Little Mermaid III*.

**PLAYWRIGHT-TONY KUSHNER**

Tony Kushner was born in New York City in 1956, and raised in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Kushner is best known for his two-part epic, *Angels in America*. Kushner has translated and adapted Pierre Corneille's *The Illusion*, S.Y. Ansky's *The Dybbuk*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Good Person of Szechwan* and *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and the English-language libretto for the children's opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krasa. He attended Columbia and New York University.



He wrote the screenplays for Mike Nichols' film of *Angels in America*, and Steven Spielberg's *Munich*. His books include *But the Giraffe*, *A Curtain Raising*, and *Brundibar: the Libretto*, with illustrations by Maurice Sendak; *The Art of Maurice Sendak: 1980 to the Present*, and *Wrestling with Zion: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Palestinian/Israeli Conflict*, co-edited with Alisa Solomon.

Kushner is the recipient of a Pulitzer Prize for Drama, an Emmy Award, two Tony Awards, three Obie Awards, an Oscar nomination, an Arts Award from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, among many others. He is the subject of a documentary film, *Wrestling with Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner*, made by the Oscar-winning filmmaker Freida Lee Mock. He is working on a screenplay about Abraham Lincoln.

HISTORICAL INFORMATION

THE UNITED STATES: 1963

Cost Of Living

- Average Cost of new house: \$12,650.00
- Average Income per year: \$5,807.00 Gas per Gallon: 29 cents
- Average Cost of a new car: \$3,233.00 Loaf of bread: 22 cents
- Bedroom Air Conditioner: \$149.95

Financial Perspective between 1963 and 2023:

In 1963, a woman with less than 9 years of education, like Caroline, would only make about \$953 a year. That was \$4854 less than the average person. Money back then was equal to much more money now due to inflation. In fact, money today is about ten times more than it was 60 years ago. For example: \$20 in 1963 would be valued at about \$200 today. That means that Caroline would only make about \$9400 in 2023. **Caroline makes about \$5000 below the Federal Poverty Line in today's money.** Her income is 1/3 lower than the lowest income level for a family.

The Environment of 1963:

- World Religions status: 890 million Christians, 200 million Buddhists, 365 Hindus, 13 million Jews and over 100,000 Black Muslims.
- Lee Harvey Oswald assassinates President John F. Kennedy, often referred to by his initials JFK, the 35th President of the US, on November 22, 1963.
- Jack Ruby murders John F. Kennedy's suspected assassin Lee Harvey Oswald live on television.
- The Vietnam War, called a "Conflict" as it was never officially declared a war, had been raging on for 9 years and would not end for another 11, claiming the lives of 58,220 American soldiers.

Politics

President Kennedy answers questions about Vietnam on CBS television September 2 and 9: "I don't think that unless a greater effort is made by the government to win popular support that the war can be won out there," he says. "In the final analysis, it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it. We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they have to win it—the people of Vietnam—against the communists." 1963 saw the 4th and 5th American anti-war demonstrations on September 21st and October 9th, as young Americans agreed with JFK and felt this was not their fight.

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Human Rights and Social Justice

- "I have a dream," says Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. during the *March on Washington* ceremony held at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on August 28, 1963.
- NAACP leader Medgar Evers, 37, is shot to death June 12 in the doorway of his home at Jackson, Miss.
- On August 1, The United States Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit rules that New Orleans must desegregate all of its public parks, playgrounds, community centers, and cultural facilities.
- On September 25 in Alabama, four African American girls are killed and 19 people injured when a bomb explodes at Birmingham's 16th Street Baptist Church.

Prominent Figures to Research

- Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Malcolm X
- John F. Kennedy
- Robert Kennedy

Prominent Organizations:

- SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee)
- CORE (Congress of Racial Equality)
- NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People)



CAROLINE, OR CHANGE: THE MUSIC By Jack Tamburri

Jeanine Tesori's brooding, complex score for *CAROLINE OR CHANGE* is packed with recurring themes and motifs. Unlike the traditional Broadway song structure (play a pleasing melody, then play it six more times), Tesori's music is interested in communicating a constant stream of precise emotional events.

The score to *CAROLINE* is always building tension--achingly beautiful melodies surface and submerge, then return transformed, with new orchestrations and new associations to characters and feelings. Here is a quick guide to some of the play's common musical gestures.

In the play's opening, listen for Caroline's line "there is only under water." The "underground/under water" antithesis occurs in the lyrics throughout the play, and you'll notice that every time it comes up, there is a musical callback to this first moment.

The score uses rhythms, structures, and melodies from a wide variety of musical sources, including early 60s Motown pop, Delta blues, Klezmer, slave spirituals, and even Broadway musicals (in the Radio's first number, a major-key modulation that wouldn't be out of place in a Broadway finale is abruptly cut off by Caroline repeating "Nothing ever happens").

A roiling, driving bass groove, introduced by the moaning Dryer in the play's first scene, comes back in the transcendent "Lot's Wife." In the opening, Caroline is lamenting "Thirty dollars ain't enough." This rhythm is going to underscore moments of similar crisis throughout the show.

Dottie, Caroline's neighbor, regales Caroline with some choice lyrics about her caustic attitude. A sly 3-note bass figure accompanies Dottie's initial attempts at pleasant conversation, and this chord structure returns in the low woodwinds when she begs Caroline to change herself and acknowledges the pain that comes with change in a complimentary scene late in the play.

Stuart's clarinet is a feature not only of his own passages of song, but those of his son, Noah, as well. Noah's personal ensemble also often includes his mother, the bassoon, and occasionally his own abandoned cello. The seesaw arpeggios we come to associate with the clarinet actually occur first under Noah's entrance and return again and again under the Gellman family's domestic scenes. Finally, the squeaky woodwind exercise turns into a wave-like motif in the piano when Stuart, the Moon, and Emmie have their trio in the show's second half.

The two major musical worlds that of the Gellmans' chamber music and Klezmer- inflected woodwinds and that of Caroline's bluesy, pop-song basement come together at the Hannukah party, where Mr. Stopnick's didactic recitative eventually gives way to Emmie's spirited rhythm and blues.

From The Court Theatre Dramaturg 2008, Chicago, Illinois

JEWISH AMERICANS

SOUTHERN JEWS & THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The civil rights movement rocked the nation for more than a decade. The core years, 1954-1964, witnessed the greatest cooperation between blacks and whites. No white ethnic group in the United States contributed as much to support the movement, both in terms of money given to the cause and individuals expending human energy, as did northern Jews. The conventional wisdom is that southern Jews, fearful for their own safety and for the safety of the Jewish community, did little or nothing.

Northern Jews made personal decisions about how involved they wished to get in the civil rights movement; how the world felt about their decisions played only a small role in the action that they took. To behave similarly in the South, one would have to have been almost totally oblivious to public opinion and walk cautiously, if at all.

Unfortunately, it seems that this lack of activity was present in the female Jewish community of the South as well. It seems that while northern Jewish women took risks, the southern Jewish women did not. Women raised in southern Jewish communities, knew that they had to be more careful because their behavior reflected on all Jews in the region and in an area like the Deep South where taking a stand could hurt your family and business, many people knew their limits.

It is important to recognize the pressure under which southern Jews lived and to show how southern values affected the behavior of southern Jews. Southern Jewish merchants, on the other hand, were caught between their righteous ideals and the consequences of acting upon them. Author Charles Webb says, "the one characteristic which best defines the response of Jewish merchants to desegregation was fear: fear of personal, political, and commercial repercussions."

Who could blame them? It was merely 20 years after the Holocaust, and the South was just 100 years past slavery. These were fragile times for everyone. Southerners were a product of their environment. Change was dangerous. Becoming an agent of change could be fatal.



JEWISH AMERICAN LIFE

Jewish Americans are Jews who are American citizens or resident aliens. The United States is home to the largest, or second largest Jewish community in the world.

The Jewish community in the United States is composed predominantly of:

- Ashkenazi Jews from Central and Eastern Europe
- Sephardic Jews from Western Europe and North Africa
- Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia
- Ethiopian Jews
- Indian Jews

Politics and Civil Rights

- While the first group of Jewish immigrants from Germany tended to be politically conservative, the second wave that started in the early 1880s was generally more liberal or left wing.
- In the 1960 election, over 80% of Jewish Americans voted for Catholic Democrat John F. Kennedy.

Jewish Americans have been very active in:

- The Civil Rights Movement
- Women's Rights Movement
- Gay Rights Movement

Religious Practice

- Jewry is generally considered an ethnic and religious identity.
- Among the 4.3 million American Jews described as "strongly connected" to Judaism, over 80% report some sort of active engagement with Judaism.

Language

- Although almost all American Jews are today native English-speakers, some American Jews are bilingual with Modern Hebrew.
- Many of America's Hasidic Jews are raised speaking Yiddish, a language that has had a major influence on American English.
- Some examples of English words that derive from Yiddish words include chutzpah, glitch, klutz, bagel, futza, shlemiel, shlump, shnuk, shmuck, schmutz, schlep, shmo, nebish, tuches, klots, yold, bubbe, oy vey, mensch, nosh, putz, mazel tov, and many more (Steinmetz, 1986).

HANUKKAH

Hanukkah from the Hebrew word for "dedication" or "consecration", marks the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem after its desecration by the forces of Antiochus IV and commemorates the "miracle of the container of oil." According to the *Talmud*, at the re-dedication following the victory of the Maccabees over the Seleucid Empire, there was only enough consecrated olive oil to fuel the eternal flame in the Temple for one day. Miraculously, the oil burned for eight days, which was the length of time it took to press, prepare and consecrate fresh olive oil.



Name: Some say the word was derived from the Hebrew verb "כָּנַח" meaning "to dedicate" or to "educate." Hanukkah is also the Hebrew acronym for "ח' לילה תיבב הכלהו תורנ' ח'" meaning "eight candles as determined by House of Hillel" Hillel, a rabbinical school of thought, argued in favor of starting with one candle and lighting an additional one every night. Jewish law adopted the rule.

Kindling the Hanukkah Lights: Hanukkah is celebrated by a series of rituals that are performed every day throughout the 8-day holiday. There are special additions to the daily prayer service, and a section is added to the blessing after meals. The primary ritual is to light a single light each night for eight nights. An extra light called a Shamash, meaning guard or servant, is also lit each night, and is given a distinct location, usually higher or lower than the others. The reason for the Hanukkah lights is not for the "lighting of the house within", but rather for the "illumination of the house without," so that passers-by should see it and be reminded of the holiday's miracle.

Hanukkah Music, Foods & Gelt

There are several songs associated with the festival of Hanukkah. The most well known in English-speaking countries include "Dreidel, Dreidel, Dreidel" and "Chanukah, Oh Chanukah."

Potato pancakes, known as latkes in Yiddish, are traditionally associated with Hanukkah, especially among Ashkenazi families. There is a custom of eating foods fried or baked in oil as the original miracle of the Hanukkah menorah and the consecration oil that lasted for 8 days.

Hanukkah gelt (Yiddish for "money") is often distributed to children to enhance their enjoyment of the holiday. The amount is usually in small coins, although grandparents or other relatives may give larger sums as an official Hanukkah gift.

CAROLINE, OR CHANGE

POST-SHOW DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are the various types of music, heard in *CAROLINE, OR CHANGE*, important to the show?
2. How was the music in the show reflective of the change going on in the world in 1963?
3. Why does Noah idolize Caroline? Why is he drawn to her?
4. Why doesn't Caroline return Noah's affections?
5. Was Rose trying to break up Caroline and Noah's relationship with the "change in the pocket" rule?
6. What does Caroline mean when she says, "Nothing ever happens underground in Louisiana. Cause there ain't no underground in Louisiana. There is only underwater,"
7. "Consequences unforeseen" is repeated multiple times in the play. What consequences are unforeseen?
8. Would Caroline's problems change if she had more money?
9. Dotty tells Caroline not to "...drown in that basement. Change or sink. Let go, forget, move on." How does Caroline's unwillingness to change affect her interactions with others like Dotty and Emmie?
10. How is Emmie embracing the change happening in the world around her?
11. What is Caroline asking for in the song *Lot's Wife*? Why does she want to be turned into a "...pillar of salt"?
12. Caroline says that change is a danger for a woman "...caught between the devil and the muddy brown sea", a woman like her. What does she mean? What is the devil in her life? What is she caught between?
13. What does the word "change" in the title mean?
14. What does the bus represent in the play?
15. Why does Caroline give human like characteristics to the appliances? What roles do they play in her daily life?
16. If JFK is the President of the United States, why does Noah refer to Caroline as the President? What does he mean when he says that she "...runs everything"?

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