

UTSC Drama Society's Summer Reading Series

Episode 5: Our Town by Thornton Wilder

Colette

Welcome to the UTSC Drama Society Summer Reading Series. On this episode we're going to be hearing an excerpt from Thornton Wilder's 'Our Town.' We begin our excerpt at the beginning of the play. This is 'Our Town.'

ACT 1

No curtain.

No scenery.

The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light. Presently the Stage Manager, hat on and pipe in mouth enters and begins placing a table and three chairs down-stage left, and a table and three chairs downstage right. He also places a low bench at the corner of what will be the Webb house, left.

"Left" and "right" are from the point of view of the actor facing the audience. "Up" is toward the back wall. As the house lights go down he has finished setting the stage and leaning against the right proscenium pillar watches the late arrivals in the audience. When the auditorium is in complete darkness he speaks:

Stage Manager

This play is called "Our Town." It was written by Thornton Wilder; produced by UTSC Drama Society. In it you will see Ms. Kang, Ms. Kaneko, Ms. Cesari, Ms. Lagoda, Ms. Akinlade, Ms. Ratnaweera, Mr. Palermo, Ms. Heng. The name of the town is Grover's Corners, New Hampshire just across the Massachusetts line: latitude 42 degrees 40 minutes; longitude 70 degrees 37 minutes. The First Act shows a day in our town. The day is May 7, 1901. The time is just before dawn.

A rooster crows.

The sky is beginning to show some streaks of light over in the East there, behind our mount'in.
The morning star always gets wonderful bright the minute before it has to go, - doesn't it?

He stares at it for a moment, then goes upstage.

Well, I'd better show you how our town lies. Up here -

That is: parallel with the back wall.

is Main Street. Way back there is the railway station; tracks go that way. Polish Town's across the tracks, and some Canuck families.

Toward the left.

Over there is the Congregational Church; across the street's the Presbyterian.

Methodist and Unitarian are over there.

Baptist is down in the holla' by the river.

Catholic Church is over beyond the tracks.

Here's the Town Hall and Post Office combined; jail's in the basement.

Bryan once made a speech from these very steps here.

Along here's a row of stores. Hitching posts and horse blocks in front of them. First automobile's going to come along in about five years belonged to Banker Cartwright, our richest citizen . . . lives in the big white house up on the hill.

Here's the grocery store and here's Mr. Morgan's drugstore. Most everybody in town manages to look into those two stores once a day.

Public School's over yonder. High School's still farther over. Quarter of nine mornings, noontimes, and three o'clock afternoons, the hull town can hear the yelling and screaming from those schoolyards.

He approaches the table and chairs downstage right.

This is our doctor's house, Doc Gibbs'. This is the back door.

Two arched trellises, covered with vines and flowers, are pushed out, one by each proscenium pillar.

There's some scenery for those who think they have to have scenery.

This is Mrs. Gibbs' garden. Corn . . . peas. . . beans . . . hollyhocks . . . heliotrope . . . and a lot of burdock.

Crosses the stage.

In those days our newspaper come out twice a week - the Grover's *Corners Sentinel* - and this is Editor Webb's house. And this is Mrs. Webb's garden. Just like Mrs. Gibbs', only it's got a lot of sunflowers, too.

He looks upward, center stage.

Right here . . .'s a big butternut tree.

He returns to his place by the right proscenium pillar and looks at the audience for a minute.

Nice town, y'know what I mean?

Nobody very remarkable ever come out of it, s'far as we know. The earliest tombstones in the cemetery up there on the mountain say 1670-1680 they're Grovers and Cartwrights and Gibbses and

Herseys same names as are around here now.

Well, as I said: it's about dawn.

The only lights on in town are in a cottage over by the tracks where a Polish mother's just had twins. And in the Joe Crowell house, where Joe Junior's getting up so as to deliver the paper. And in the depot, where Shorty Hawkins is gettin' ready to flag the 5:45 for Boston.

A train whistle is heard. The Stage Manager takes out his watch and nods.

Naturally, out in the country - all around - there've been lights on for some time, what with milkin's and so on. But town people sleep late.

So - another day's begun.

Mrs. Gibbs

Good morning, Howie.

Howie Newsome

Morning, Mrs. Gibbs. Doc's just comin' down the street.

Mrs. Gibbs

Is he? Seems like you're late today.

Howie Newsome

Yes. Somep'n went wrong with the separator. Don't know what 'twas.

He passes Dr. Gibbs up center.

Doc!

Dr. Gibbs

Howie!

Mrs. Gibbs

Children! Children! Time to get up.

Howie Newsome

Come on, Bessie!

He goes off right.

Mrs. Gibbs

George! Rebecca!

Dr. Gibbs arrives at his back door and passes through the trellis into his house.

Mrs. Gibbs

Everything all right, Frank?

Dr. Gibbs

Yes. I declare - easy as kittens.

Mrs. Gibbs

Bacon'll be ready in a minute. Sit down and drink your coffee. You can catch a couple hours' sleep this morning, can't you?

Dr. Gibbs

Hm...Guess I know what it's about, too. Her stummick ain't what it ought to be.

Mrs. Gibbs

All told, you won't get more'n three hours' sleep. Frank Gibbs, I don't know what's goin' to become of you. I do wish I could get you to go away someplace and take a rest. I think it would do you good.

Mrs. Webb

Emileeee! Time to get up! Wally! Seven o'clock!

Mrs. Gibbs

I declare, you got to speak to George. Seems like something's come over him lately. He's no help to me at all. Can't even get him to cut me some wood.

Washing and drying his hands at the sink. Mrs. Gibbs is busy at the stove.

Dr. Gibbs

Is he sassy to you?

Mrs. Gibbs

No. He just whines! All he thinks about is that baseball George! Rebecca! You'll be late for school.

Dr. Gibbs

Mmm...

Mrs. Gibbs

George!

Dr. Gibbs

George, look sharp!

George

Yes, Pa!

As he goes off stage.

Dr. Gibbs

Don't you hear your mother calling you? I guess I'll go upstairs and get forty winks.

Mrs. Webb

Walleee! Emileeee! You'll be late for school! Walleee! You wash yourself good or I'll come up and do it myself.

Rebecca Gibbs

Ma! What dress shall I wear?

Mrs. Gibbs

Don't make a noise. Your father's been out all night and needs his sleep. I washed and ironed the blue gingham for you special.

Rebecca

Ma, I hate that dress.

Mrs. Gibbs

Oh, hush-up-with-you.

Rebecca

Every day I go to school dressed like a sick turkey.

Mrs. Gibbs

Now, Rebecca, you always look very nice.

Rebecca

I come and slap the both of you - that's what I'll do.

A factory whistle sounds.

The children dash in and take their places at the tables.

Right, George, about sixteen, and Rebecca, eleven. Left, Emily and Wally, same ages. They carry strapped school-books.

Stage Manager

We've got a factory in our town too - hear it? Makes blankets. Cartwrights own it and it brung'em a fortune.

Mrs. Webb

Children! Now I won't have it. Breakfast is just as good as any other meal and I won't have you gobbling like wolves. It'll stunt your growth, - that's a fact. Put away your book, Wally.

Wally

Aw, Ma! By ten o'clock I got to know all about Canada.

Mrs. Webb

You know the rule's well as I do - no book at table. As for me, I'd rather have my children healthy than bright.

Emily

I'm both, Mama: you know I am. I'm the brightest girl in school for my age. I have a wonderful memory.

Mrs. Webb

Eat your breakfast.

Wally

I'm bright, too, when I'm looking at my stamp collection.

Mrs. Gibbs

I'll speak to your father about it when he's rested. Seems to me twenty-five cents a week's enough for a boy your age. I declare I don't know how you spend it all.

George

Aw, Ma, - I gotta lotta things to buy.

Mrs. Gibbs

Strawberry phosphates - that's what you spend it on.

George

I don't see how Rebecca comes to have so much money. She has more'n a dollar.

Spoon in mouth, dreamily.

Rebecca

I've been saving it up gradual.

Mrs. Gibbs

Well, dear, I think it's a good thing to spend some every now and then.

Rebecca

Mama, do you know what I love most in the world - do you? - Money.

Mrs. Gibbs

Eat your breakfast.

The Children

Mama's, there's first bell. - I gotta hurry - I don't want anymore - I gotta hurry.

The children rise, seize their books and dash out through the trellises. They meet, down center, and chattering, walk to Main Street, then turn left.

The STAGE MANAGER goes off, unobtrusively right.

Mrs. Webb

Walk fast, but you don't have to run. Wally, pull up your pants at the knee. Stand up straight, Emily.

Mrs. Gibbs

Tell Miss Foster I send her my best congratulations - can you remember that?

Rebecca

Yes, Ma.

Mrs. Gibbs

You look real nice, Rebecca. Pick up your feet.

All

Good-by.

Mrs Gibbs fills her apron with food for the chickens and comes down to the footlights.

Mrs. Gibbs

Here, chick, chick, chick, chick.

No, go away, you. Go away.

Here, chick, chick, chick, chick.

What's the matter with you? Fight, fight, fight, that's all you do.

Hm . . . you don't belong to me. Where'd you come from?

She shakes her apron.

Oh, don't be so scared. Nobody's going to hurt you.

Mrs Webb is sitting on the bench by her trellis, stringing beans.

Good morning, Myrtle. How's your cold?

Mrs. Webb

Well, I still get that tickling feeling in my throat. I told Charles I didn't know as I'd go to choir practice tonight. Wouldn't be any

use.

Mrs. Gibbs

Have you tried singing over your voice?

Mrs. Webb

Yes, but somehow I can't do that and stay on the key. While I'm resting myself I thought I'd string some of these beans.

Rolling up her sleeves as she crosses the stage for a chat.

Mrs. Gibbs

Let me help you. Beans have been good this year.

Mrs. Webb

I've decided to put up forty quarts if it kills me. The children say they hate 'em, but I notice they're able to get 'em down all winter.

Pause. Brief sound of chickens cackling.

Mrs. Gibbs

Now, Myrtle. I've got to tell you something, because if I don't tell somebody I'll burst.

Mrs. Webb

Why, Julia Gibbs!

Mrs. Gibbs

Here, give me some more of those beans. Myrtle, did one of those secondhand-furniture men from Boston come to see you last Friday?

Mrs. Webb

No-o.

Mrs. Gibbs

Well, he called on me. First I thought he was a patient wantin' to see Dr. Gibbs. 'N he wormed his way into my parlor, and, Myrtle Webb, he offered me three hundred and fifty dollars for Grandmother Wentworth's highboy, as I'm sitting here!

Mrs. Webb

Why, Julia Gibbs!

Mrs. Gibbs

He did! That old thing! Why, it was so big I didn't know where to put it and I almost give it to Cousin Hester Wilcox.

Mrs. Webb

Well, you're going to take it, aren't you?

Mrs. Gibbs

I don't know.

Mrs. Webb

You don't know - three hundred and fifty dollars! What's come over you?

Mrs. Gibbs

Well, if I could get the Doctor to take the money and go away someplace on a real trip, I'd sell it like that. Y'know, Myrtle, it's been the dream of my life to see Paris, France. Oh, I don't know. It sounds crazy, I suppose, but for years I've been promising myself that if we ever had the chance -

Mrs. Webb

How does the Doctor feel about it?

Mrs. Gibbs

Well, I did beat about the bush a little and said that if I got a legacy - that's the way I put it - I'd make him take me somewhere.

Mrs. Webb

M-m-m . . . What did he say?

Mrs. Gibbs

You know how he is. I haven't heard a serious word out of him since I've known him. No, he said, it might make him discontented with Grover's Corners to go traipsin' about Europe; better let well enough alone, he says. Every two years he makes a trip to the battlefields of the Civil War and that's enough treat for anybody, he says.

Mrs. Webb

Well, Mr. Webb just admires the way Dr. Gibbs knows everything about the Civil War. Mr. Webb's a good mind to give up Napoleon and move over to the Civil War, only Dr. Gibbs being one of the greatest experts in the country just makes him despair.

Mrs. Gibbs

It's a fact! Dr. Gibbs is never so happy as when he's at Antietam or Gettysburg. The times I've walked over those hills, Myrtle, stopping at every bush and pacing it all out, like we were going to buy it.

Mrs. Webb

Well, if that secondhand man's really serious about buyin' it, Julia, you better sell it. And then you'll get to go to Paris, all right Just keep droppin' hints from time to time that's how I got to see the Atlantic Ocean, y'know.

Mrs. Gibbs

Oh, I'm sorry I mentioned it. Only it seems to me that once in

your life before you die you ought to see a country where they don't talk in English and don't even want to.

The Stage Manager enters briskly from the right. He tips his hat to the ladies, who nod their heads.

Stage Manager

Thank you, ladies. Thank you very much.

Mrs. Gibbs and Mrs. Webb gather up their things, return into their homes and disappear.

Now we're going to skip a few hours.

Emily

I can't, Lois. I've got to go home and help my mother. I promised.

Mr. Webb

Emily, walk simply. Who do you think you are today?

Emily

Papa, you're terrible. One minute you tell me to stand up straight and the next minute you call me names. I just don't listen to you.

She gives him an abrupt kiss.

Mr. Webb

Golly, I never got a kiss from such a great lady before.

He goes out of sight. Emily leans over and picks some flowers by the gate of her house. George Gibbs comes careening down Main Street. He is throttling a ball up to dizzying heights, and waiting to catch it again. This sometimes requires his taking six steps backward. He bumps into an Old Lady invisible to us.

George

Excuse me, Mrs. Forrest.

Stage Manager

As Mrs. Forrest

Go out and play in the fields, young man. You got no business playing baseball on Main Street.

George

Awfully sorry, Mrs. Forrest. - Hello, Emily.

Emily

H'lo.

George

You made a fine speech in class.

Emily

Well ... I was really ready to make a speech about the Monroe Doctrine, but at the last minute Miss Corcoran made me talk about the Louisiana Purchase instead. I worked an awful long time on both of them.

George

Gee, it's funny, Emily. From my window up there I can just see your head nights when you're doing your homework over in your room.

Emily

Why, can you?

George

You certainly do stick to it, Emily. I don't see how you can sit

still that long. I guess you like school.

Emily

Well, I always feel it's something you have to go through.

George

Yeah.

Emily

I don't mind it really. It passes the time.

George

Yeah. - Emily, what do you think? We might work out a kinda telegraph from your window to mine; and once in a while you could give me a kinda hint or two about one of those algebra problems. I don't mean the answers, Emily, of course not . . . just some little hint ...

Emily

Oh, I think hints are allowed. So ah if you get stuck, George, you whistle to me; and I'll give you some hints.

George

Emily, you're just naturally bright, I guess.

Emily

I figure that it's just the way a person's born.

George

Yeah. But, you see, I want to be a farmer, and my Uncle Luke says whenever I'm ready I can come over and work on his farm and if I'm any good I can just gradually have it.

Emily

You mean the house and everything?

*Enter Mrs. Webb with a large bowl and sits on the bench
by her trellis.*

George

Yeah. Well, thanks ... I better be getting out to the baseball field. Thanks for the talk, Emily. Good afternoon, Mrs. Webb.

Mrs. Webb

Good afternoon, George.

George

So long, Emily.

Emily

So long, George.

Mrs. Webb

Emily, come and help me string these beans for the winter. George Gibbs let himself have a real conversation, didn't he? Why, he's growing up. How old would George be?

Emily

I don't know.

Mrs. Webb

Let's see. He must be almost sixteen.

Emily

Mama, I made a speech in class today and I was very good.

Mrs. Webb

You must recite it to your father at supper. What was it about?

Emily

The Louisiana Purchase. It was like silk off a spool. I'm going to make speeches all my life. - Mama, are these big enough?

Mrs. Webb

Try and get them a little bigger if you can.

Emily

Mama, will you answer me a question, serious?

Mrs. Webb

Seriously, dear - not serious.

Emily

Seriously, - will you?

Mrs. Webb

Of course, I will.

Emily

Mama, am I good looking?

Mrs. Webb

Yes, of course you are. All my children have got good features; I'd be ashamed if they hadn't.

Emily

Oh, Mama, that's not what I mean, What I mean is: am I pretty?

Mrs. Webb

I've already told you, yes. Now that's enough of that. You have a nice young pretty face. I never heard of such foolishness.

Emily

Oh, Mama, you never tell us the truth about anything.

Mrs. Webb

I am telling you the truth.

Emily

Mama, were you pretty?

Mrs. Webb

Yes, I was, if I do say it. I was the prettiest girl in town next to Mamie Cartwright.

Emily

But, Mama, you've got to say something about me. Am I pretty enough ... to get anybody... to get people interested in me?

Mrs. Webb

Emily, you make me tired. Now stop it. You're pretty enough for all normal purposes. Come along now and bring that bowl with you.

Emily

Oh, Mama, you're no help at all.

Stage Manager

Thank you. Thank you! That'll do. We'll have to interrupt again here. Thank you, Mrs. Webb; thank you, Emily.

Mrs. Webb and Emily withdraw.

