



— *The* —
GRADUATE
 — *Study Guide* —

A PLAY ADAPTED BY / UNE PIÈCE ADAPTÉE PAR **TERRY JOHNSON**, BASED ON THE NOVEL BY / D'APRÈS LE ROMAN DE **CHARLES WEBB**, AND THE MOTION PICTURE SCREENPLAY BY / ET LE SCÉNARIO DE **CALDER WILLINGHAM & BUCK HENRY**, BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH / GRÂCE À UNE ENTENTE AVEC **STUDIO CANAL**.

DIRECTED BY / MISE EN SCÈNE **ANDREW SHAVER**

A SEGAL CENTRE PRODUCTION / UNE PRODUCTION DU CENTRE SEGAL

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About this

STUDY GUIDE

This Study Guide was compiled by Lucie Lederhendler, Educational Programs Manager, for the Segal Centre production of *The Graduate*, directed by Andrew Shaver, running from August 31 - September 21, 2014. Additional content was provided by Caitlin Murphy and Jess Fildes. It may be used solely for educational purposes. Please be advised that this production contains a small amount of nudity.

It is recommended that you view this guide online at: www.segalcentre.org/whatson/the-graduate/

You are encouraged to watch the seminal 1967 film version of this story and make critical comparisons. Be advised, however, that certain plot and character points are decidedly different from the stage play. Please see pages 4, 13, and 14 to support your comparison.

Educators are provided with comprehension questions for ESL courses on page 5, and in-depth discussion questions on page 11, as well as a list of vocabulary used in the play. A bibliography is provided on page 15. For additional source information, or additional information about this and other study guides, or for information on what we have to offer student groups, please contact Lucie at llederhendler@segalcentre.org or 514-739-2301 #8360.

We would love to hear from you and your students! See page 18 for information on how to engage with us.

“ You are grotesque, and I’m grotesque...”

CAST & CREW

...we’re all grotesque.

LUKE HUMPHREY **BENJAMIN BRADDOCK**
BRIGITTE ROBINSON **MRS. ROBINSON**
GEORGIANA BEATY **ELAINE ROBINSON**
AL GOULEM **MR. ROBINSON**
MARCEL JEANNIN **MR. BRADDOCK**
JANE WHEELER **MRS. BRADDOCK**
SESKA LEE **VARIOUS ROLES INCLUDING STRIPPER**
GRAHAM CUTHBERTSON **VARIOUS ROLES INCLUDING HOTEL CLERK**
JUSTIN RUTLEDGE **MUSICIANS**
& MATTHEW BARBER

ANDREW SHAVER **DIRECTOR**

JAMES LAVOIE **SET DESIGNER**
SUSANA VERA **COSTUME DESIGNER**
MARTIN SIROIS **LIGHTING DESIGNER**
JESSE ASH **SOUND DESIGNER**
ORIGINAL MUSIC COMPOSED & PERFORMED BY JUSTIN RUTLEDGE & MATTHEW BARBER
GEORGE ALLISTER **VIDEO DESIGNERS**
& PATRICK ANDREW BOIVIN
SARAH-MARIE LANGLOIS **STAGE MANAGER**
RACHEL DAWN WOODS **ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER**
ISABEL FAIA **APPRENTICE STAGE MANAGER**



Marc Laliberté, 2014

Photo: The Segal Theatre Production team has a design meeting on *The Graduate* in June 2014. Roles, from left: General Manager, Sound Designer, Set Designer, Video Designers, Director, Head Carpenter, Costume Designer, Lighting Designer, Assistant Technical Director.

The SYNOPSIS

Benjamin Braddock, a recent college graduate, sits alone in his bedroom avoiding his own party, and wearing the diving suit that his father bought him as a graduation gift. His parents pressure him to join the party downstairs, but Ben insists on being left alone.

Mrs. Robinson, a tipsy party-guest and neighbour, enters Ben's room, saying she was told to have a nap. Despite Benjamin's repeated requests that she leave, Mrs. Robinson stays and strips down to her slip, then eventually nothing. Ben rejects her advances.

When her husband knocks on the door, and his wife runs to the bathroom, Mr. Robinson assumes she is sick. While he waits for her to emerge, Mr. Robinson advises Ben to sow his wild oats and encourages him to meet his daughter Elaine when she comes home from college.

The Robinsons leave, and Ben decides that rather than face the party downstairs, he will leave home altogether with nothing more than what he has in his pockets. His father accepts the plan, and gives him some money.

Ben goes hitchhiking for eight days, which is all that he can stand, but the experience gives him the confidence to arrange a meeting with Mrs. Robinson. They meet in the lobby of the Taft Hotel. Benjamin is so nervous he can barely speak, so Mrs. Robinson takes control.

They meet regularly for the rest of the summer, and Benjamin does little else: he sleeps late, watches television, floats in his pool, and goes to the hotel. Eventually, he seeks to deepen the relationship with Mrs. Robinson, and she reluctantly talks about her marriage. Ben learns that she and her husband have not had sex in over four years, and have

never loved each other beyond their adolescent infatuation that resulted in getting pregnant with Elaine. Ben is fascinated, more so because Mr. Braddock and Mr. Robinson have set Ben up with Elaine in hopes of shaking him out of his depression. When he reveals this plan to Mrs. Robinson, she categorically forbids it, and they trade nasty insults.

*“Before you know it
you’ll find a nice little
girl and settle down....
but until then...”*

Ben tries to sabotage his date with Elaine, showing up late, taking her to a strip club, and refusing conversation. When Elaine gets upset, his guilt takes over and they begin to enjoy themselves. Elaine's earnest, positive outlook seems to be the panacea to Ben's nihilism, and he becomes smitten with her.

For their second date, Ben arrives at the Robinsons' house to pick Elaine up for a drive, but is blocked by Mrs. Robinson. To assuage Elaine's confusion, Ben confesses part of the affair, and she infers the rest. Elaine and Mrs. Robinson drink the day away, trashing Benjamin. Ben, meanwhile, has decided that he's going to marry Elaine.

Elaine returns to university in Berkeley, and Benjamin secretly follows her there. Upon discovering him, she asks him to leave, but he is insistent in his love for her. He learns that in order to gain her daughter's forgiveness, Mrs. Robinson accused him of raping her. Ben clarifies the actual details of the seduction, which

only disgusts Elaine more, but does introduce a kernel of doubt that tempers her anger. Elaine mentions that another man has proposed to her, which makes Benjamin so jealous that Elaine feels compelled to leave, but she turns back to give him a kiss.

Later, Mr. Braddock and Mr. Robinson arrive at Benjamin's door. They have a measured, rational conversation, which ends in calmly-delivered threats and insults. Mr. Braddock has made an appointment with a psychiatrist for Benjamin back in Los Angeles. Ben refuses to go, but a strong backhand slap convinces him.

Benjamin's parents have him checked into a mental institution, where they have a family therapy session. Upon learning that Elaine is going to get married, Benjamin jumps through the window and runs away.

Ben crashes Elaine's wedding, punching her fiancée before dragging her to the vestry, where Mrs. Robinson follows in before he can barricade the door. Ben insists that Elaine loves him and should marry him. Mrs. Robinson coolly insults Ben's prowess as a lover, which enrages him as he tries to forcibly remove Elaine's wedding dress. At this point, Mr. Robinson breaks through the door with an ax.

Elaine eventually calms everyone down, urging them to return to the wedding. Mrs. Robinson and Ben are left alone, and she tells Ben how boring and obedient Elaine is, unaware that Elaine has re-entered and overheard. Elaine leaves with Ben.

At a seedy motel somewhere in Nevada, Elaine shyly removes her wedding dress. When Ben doesn't react, she realizes that they have no idea what they're doing. Ben pulls out a box of her favourite cereal and they eat it, dry, on the bed.

Pop-out quote: Mr. Robinson, I, 1.

QUESTIONS



- Why is Benjamin wearing a diving suit in the first scene?
- How do the Braddocks know the Robinsons?
- What is Mr. Robinson's business?
- What is Mrs. Robinson looking for when she comes into Ben's room?
- Why does Benjamin leave home? What is he looking for?
- Do his parents support the decision to leave?
- Who does Benjamin meet while he travels? How does he earn money?
- Is it Benjamin or Mrs. Robinson who initiates the first tryst?
- How long have Mr. and Mrs. Robinson been married? Why did they get married?
- Why does Mr. Braddock set Ben up on a date with Elaine?
- What are some things Elaine references as proof that the world is beautiful?
- What does Elaine say to the stripper?
- Why does Benjamin go to Elaine's house?
- Why does Benjamin get kicked out of Elaine's house?
- When does Benjamin ask Elaine to marry him?
- Where does Elaine go to school?
- Where does Benjamin see Elaine with another man?
- Why does Mr. Braddock drive up?
- Why does Mr. Braddock take Benjamin back? How does he convince him to come?
- Who does Mrs. Braddock blame for Ben's depression?
- Where do the Robinsons send Elaine?
- How does Benjamin escape the hospital?
- How does Benjamin block the door of the vestry?
- What insults does Mrs. Robinson have for Benjamin? For Elaine?
- Why does Elaine decide to leave with Benjamin?
- What reassures Elaine that Benjamin could be a good match for her?

Image: Vintage Postcard, c. 1967. detail.

“ Let’s show that bunch of...

GROTESQUES ”

down there just what Benjamin Braddock is made of.

Benjamin’s inability to cope with society begins immediately after graduating from university. Faced with the “real world,” he finds its inhabitants disgusting and frightening, not in small part because he sees himself reflected in them. After this shift in the way he sees humanity, he uses the word “grotesque” to describe them, and the human condition in general.

“Grotesque” originally described Ancient Roman paintings and drawings during the Italian Renaissance, which were characterized by ornate interwoven flourishes, as well as human and animal figures throughout. As renaissance artists appropriated this style, a strong emphasis was placed on animal and human hybrids. A centaur or sphinx, for example, could be described as literally grotesque. Grotesque portraits, as those pictured to the right, distort the human head to impossible proportions, dehumanizing them while at the same time inspiring pity. These drawings imply that an absurd outside appearance represents an internal reality.

As a noun, “grotesque” can be synonymous with “gargoyle,” the ornamental rain spout that can be found on precious buildings. On Catholic churches, gargoyles are seen at once as representations of evil, and as guardians against it.

Fundamentally, what the word “grotesque” conveys is the unnatural combination of two things in one. The figures are disconcerting because they inspire empathy and disgust simultaneously. A centaur, for example, is the physical manifestation of the

soul of a man and the soul of a horse coexisting internally. It is impossible for a grotesque hybrid to be at peace.

The figures are disconcerting because they inspire empathy and disgust simultaneously.

The characters of *The Graduate* are beautiful, rich, and sociable. Mr. Braddock buys Ben a diving suit on the event of his graduation, concealing him and his malaise from the smiling masses of his parents’ friends downstairs. Ben refuses to join the party because he understands that his function is the same as the suit: to demonstrate his parents’ worthiness to their peers by being a perfect son. In the end, we see that the Braddocks are narcissists, and filled with self-doubt.

Mrs. Robinson, likewise, is the hybrid of a housewife and a seductress. When she asks Ben to unzip her dress, she is revealing her hidden side, much like a snake shedding its skin.

Mr. Robinson hides his emotional character under mannered professionalism, and Elaine is a rebel at heart, living in the disguise of an obedient daughter.



Image: Detail of *Five Grotesque heads* by Francesco Melzi, 1515.
Title quote: Mr. Braddock, Act 1, scene 1.

“ I’ve got just one thing to say, Ben. ”

PLASTICS,

Ben. Plastics.

One of the most memorable lines of 1960s America is one word: “Plastics.” Why is Mr. Robinson so excited about plastics? Because, plastics...

...ARE POP!

The resins used in plastics after the 1930s allowed designers to customize the colour and shape of plastic. As quickly as new trends can appear, plastic goods can match them!

...ARE FAKE.

Plastics were originally created to replace ivory, and today the word “faux” is nearly synonymous with plastic, particularly in textiles.

...ARE ACCESSIBLE.

Plastic versions of luxury items such as silk, ebony, and ivory are made affordable to the middle class. Mass-production of plastics through the depression and World War One enabled prices to stay very low for consumers.

...ARE ADAPTABLE.

World War Two was the impetus for new applications of plastics, including raincoats, helmet liners, and dome-shaped cockpit covers. After the war, these new technologies became the stuff of future visions in design.

...ARE DURABLE.

Plastic features a durable, non-porous surface that can be cleaned simply with a cloth or with harsh chemicals. The rise in popularity of women’s magazines through the 1960s created a competitive pressure to keep the cleanest home among housewives.

...ARE DISPOSABLE.

Because of their affordability, plastic items could be given away and thrown out with more abandon than their non-synthetic counterparts. Mid-century home makers, obsessed with cleanliness, began to get rid of old items when they showed signs of wear. With items like disposable razors and plastic dinnerware, tossing became the alternative to cleaning.

This word is important in Benjamin Braddock’s story because plastics, though a wise investment choice, stand for the opposite values of the youth at this time. Ben’s generation...

...ARE INDIVIDUALS

Backgrounded by the civil rights movement, the American youth of the 60s prioritized non-conformity. A new code of conduct emphasized the following of impulses and cravings, as evidenced by the free love movement.

...ARE SINCERE.

The ease and comfort of fitting in was insurmountably appealing to the generations that had survived World War Two, but those people who grew up in the affluence of the 50s tended towards adventure rather than laying down roots.

...ARE CEREBRAL.

In the tense context of the civil rights movement, the student movement in the US took on greater meaning, and being a college student was associated with being a social activist, linking education, intellectualism, and freedom.

...ARE REBELLIOUS.

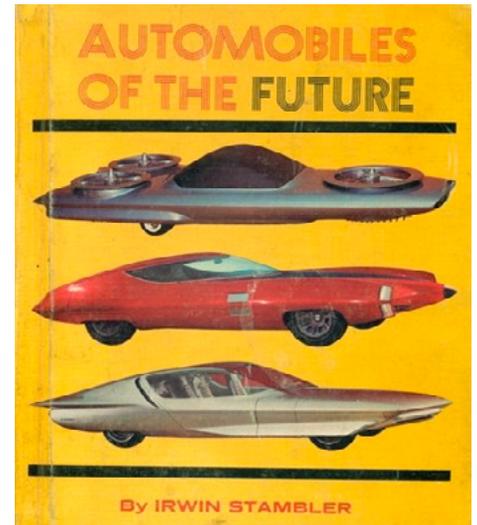
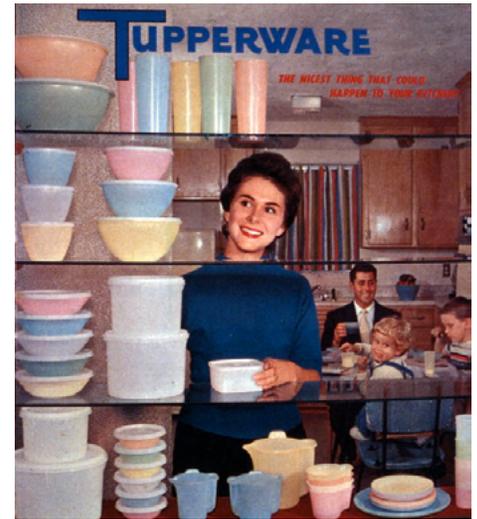
Young people in the 60s were largely distrustful of authority, resulting in a large pacifist movement, in which citizens no longer supported conflicts simply by virtue of the US government supporting them. The Cold War, evidence of lying, and the suppression of uprisings in Eastern Europe made American youth question authority regularly.

...ARE SPONTANEOUS.

The popular catchphrase “Don’t trust anyone over 30” illustrates how self-aware the counter-culture was of its own youth, and how removed they felt from the aging process.

...ARE ENVIRONMENTALISTS.

Although environmental conservation efforts existed before the 1960s, new groups focused on regulating human behaviour, such as culture of excess and waste that came about after wartime austerity measures.



“ I want

SIMPLE PEOPLE,

...simple, honest people that can't even read or write their own name.

Several things become apparent when Benjamin describes what he will look for on his vagrant journey.

- The first is that he has very little experience with working-class people, calling them “simple,” and equating that with “real.”

- He equates education and complexity, and a lack of education with simpleness.

- In the funny exchange in which he says to his father, “Ordinary people who don't have big houses. Who don't have swimming pools.” Mr. Braddock responds, “Don't get carried away now, son,” we realize the level of privilege that the Braddocks live in.

- Benjamin uses his grandfather as an example of these people, because he had rough workman's hands, which his father says built half of Toledo. Likely, that would have been a part of The New Deal, a government assistance program, in which the government created work for citizens, largely based in infrastructure.

- Based on that knowledge, it can be inferred that Mr. Braddock was raised with limited means. Although it is never articulated what industry he works in, he is in sales, and has wealthy clients such as Mr. Robinson to impress.

Elaine comes to embody Benjamin's ideal, despite coming from a wealthier context than he does. She is in college, but is not particularly smart. Nor, for that matter is Benjamin.

When Elaine tries to convince Benjamin that life is filled with more beauty than ugliness, she

says “Heaven's in the details,” and attributes it, incorrectly, to Robert Frost (the common belief is that Mies Van der Rohe said “The Devil is in the details.”)

*“I have looked down the
saddest city lane.
I have passed by the
watchman on his beat
And dropped my eyes,
unwilling to explain.”*

She supports her defense of optimism with more innocuous examples, such as Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead*, which is about a young man in as much crisis as Benjamin, to the point that it could be seen as a parallel story, but filled with more violence and nihilism. This implies that Elaine hasn't read the book, or at least hasn't understood it, nor knows little more than the point-form of what “people like her” are expected to know.

Benjamin, likewise, is fueled by impulse and immediacy, and so frightened of the future that he stubbornly refuses to acknowledge his past, place, or privilege. When Elaine asks him if he finds her mother attractive, he cannot answer, because he doesn't know the answer nor does he know what is expected of him.

Despite the rebellion that drives the plot of *The Graduate*, these major characters display an astounding lack of self-motivation. So then, who is simple?



The iconic painting shown above was criticized by rural Iowans, who were irate about the depiction of them as “pinch-faced and grim.” The artist, Grant Wood, is a native of Iowa, and claims the painting is an appreciation rather than a mockery, saying he “had to go to Paris to appreciate Iowa.”

Consider that the truth here may be that there is no such thing as “simple people” - only people who simplify people.

Title quote: Benjamin in Act I, scene 1.
Pop out quote: Robert Frost, from “Acquainted with the Night,” 1927.
Image: Grant Wood, “American Gothic.” Detail. 1929.

“Mrs. Robinson, you are trying to _____
SEDUCE _____
me, aren't you. Aren't you?”

GOING STEADY

Benjamin's parents' generation, being largely comprised of veterans, changed the American system of courtship to a binary one, where the expectation was for the man to be strong and possessive, and the woman vulnerable and supportive. A profusion of articles, columns, and even marriage classes defined the new dating etiquette: Boys “protected” girls, exercising control by opening car doors, ordering in restaurants, and taking responsibility for asking girls for dates. They married younger and had more children.

THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the sexual revolution - more a revolution in mores than in actual sexual behavior - turned this whole system on its head. Few of the carefully elaborated rules of the 1940s and 1950s still held. Couples still dated, but women began to ask men on dates, men reached for the check with less frequency, and living together became, within certain communities, an acceptable step in courtship.

Singles clubs and bars proliferated, and people of all ages sought congenial partners through dating services, and the personal ads in magazines and newspapers. Couples conducted courting on their own terms, as both men and women assumed more individual responsibility and initiative in finding a mate than at any previous time, while also exercising greater freedom in the process.

This was not, however, universal, and there was a large schism between the two doctrines.

DIVORCE

California was the first state to adopt “no fault” divorce in 1969/70. This was an incredible coup for the women's

*“...the story is an unintentional retelling of the Hippolytus and Phaedra myth. The whole younger man-older woman thing—that's where it comes from. It took me decades to realize this, but it's true. The f**king thing shows up in everything ... and then it gets filed away in our collective brains, because the corrupting aspects make that myth dangerous.*

Yet there's something so primal and compelling about it that keeps it coming back. There are a number of basic stories like that, but that younger man-older woman one always seems to get to people. You want to make money, remake Cinderella. You want to move people, remake the Hippolytus and Phaedra myth.”

movement. Before this, wrongdoing had to be proven by one spouse, obliging the other to accept culpability, limiting equal distribution of assets.

In the case of the Robinsons, the number of witnesses of the adultery likely means that Mr. Robinson would be granted the divorce, with Mrs. Robinson accepting fault, thereby denying her alimony. The year that the Robinsons divorce (likely 1965), saw a more than 200% increase in divorces nationwide.

The social climate in which *The Graduate* takes place is one in which the sanctity of marriage was being called into question, replaced by a burgeoning interest in individual freedoms and the right to personal happiness.



LOVE STORIES

It is within this atmosphere of rapid transition and shifting expectations that the story of Benjamin and Mrs. Robinson unfolds. In the eyes of her peers, Mrs. Robinson is guilty of breaking social rules that she does not subscribe to. In retrospect, she regrets the appropriate decisions she made as a young woman, so in her maturity she is acting on pure impulse.

Benjamin consistently acts on impulse once he is removed from the prescriptive atmosphere of university, but chooses Elaine for his partner, who starts out with a personality that is more aligned with 1950s courtship ideals than with 1960s sexuality.

Title quote: Benjamin in Act I, scene 1.
Pop out quote: Fear, David. “Mike Nichols on the Graduate.”
Image: LIFE magazine, 1964

The place is

CALIFORNIA

the year is 1964.

CIVIL RIGHTS

The Graduate is set in California in 1964, and as Elaine points out to Benjamin on their first awkward date, his apathy and boredom are pretty out of step with the times. 1960s America was politically charged and rife with protest.

Annoyed with Benjamin's self-indulgence, Elaine tells him:

“There are people fighting for an education in Alabama. Fighting state troopers for a good education. Do you think they think life is bullshit?”

She also mentions that she went to the Civil Rights march in Washington.

The Civil Rights movement was a mass protest initiative calling for the end of racial segregation and discrimination. It led to the Civil Rights Act, signed in 1964 by President Lyndon B. Johnson (though it had originally been introduced by John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated in November of the previous year).

Interwoven with the rising demands for racial equality came the second wave of feminism, which advocated for broader opportunities for women, a complete reframing of women's perceived place in society. This new wave was hugely inspired by the publication of Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963, which examined



what she called “the problem that has no name” — an overpowering sense of boredom, dissatisfaction and claustrophobia that housewives, told they should delight in their roles as wife and mother, were actually feeling.

In *The Graduate* we see how much of Mrs. Robinson's deep unhappiness comes from the limited opportunities afforded her by her times: getting pregnant meant getting married. The second wave of feminism came along a little too late for her, but would very likely have an unseen hand in shaping the future of her daughter, Elaine.

OTHER REFERENCES

The big fire, Act I, Scene 2, is reference to an especially active fire year in Shasta County, in the northeast of California (See map, below). In 1964, 49 forest fires alone caused \$112,930 in damage, necessitating the massive recruitment of backup firefighters¹.

Benjamin says he made \$5 an hour doing this dangerous work, compared to the federal minimum wage of \$1.25².

The monk who set himself on fire, referenced in Act II, Scene 6, is Thích Quảng Đức, a Vietnamese Buddhist Monk who, on June 11, 1963, lit himself on fire in a busy intersection in protest of the South Vietnamese persecution of Buddhists. It was well-documented in powerful photographs that he sat calmly, in flames, until he expired.



Photo: Scherman, Rowland for USIA. Detail of *March On Washington, 1963*.

1. Source: State of California Department of Forestry.

2. Source: U.S. Department of Labor.

“ He seems a little

DISILLUSIONED.”

... Today's young people...

Although Benjamin is technically the youngest of what is called “The Lost Generation,” (born between 1925 and 1945) his character functions as the avant-garde of the Baby Boom generation (born between 1946 and 1966). Indeed, it was with its 1967 film adaptation that *The Graduate* entered the canon of American pop culture, and situates Benjamin as a solid first-line Boomer (If he is 21 in 1968, he would have been born in 1947).

The Baby Boom is the dramatic increase in birthrate that occurred immediately after the end of World War II as families were reunited and the strict rationing that had been enforced through the war was lifted. A mass exodus from city cores to suburbs changed the image of the American family. Relative national prosperity, in conjunction with relief that the war was over, created an atmosphere of optimism in the typical American family. Adults of the Silent Generation were ambitious in the direction of comfort and ritual, as opposed to adventure and competition.

When their children, the Baby Boomers, became adults, they behaved contrary to that ethos. In the relative peacetime of their youth, focus shifted to the domestic issues facing the United States. Rather than cultivating comfort, they tended towards protest. Without the soldier-like discipline and faith in authority that comes from a life monopolized by military conflict, Boomers grew up questioning authority.

Warren F. Kimball writes, in his preface to the book *Decade of Disillusionment: The Kennedy-Johnson Years* :

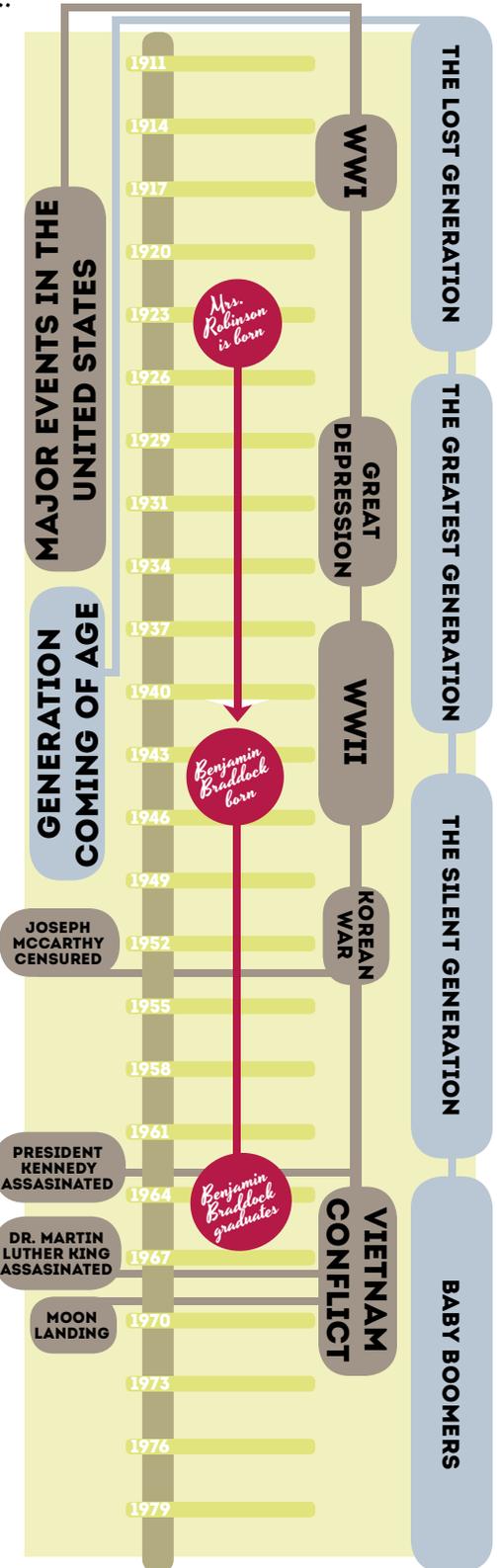
“It was a decade made remarkable by the precipitous rise and fall of an optimistic belief in the ability of the American government to solve our national problems; a rise and fall illustrated by the economy, the attitude of young people, and by the Vietnam [conflict].”

(page xii)

The conceit of the story of *The Graduate* occurs after Benjamin, having bought in to The System for his whole young life, questions that system in an existential way. About to embark on his adult life, he feels unequipped to make the decisions that he anticipates needing to make, and so he does nothing.

When he meets external characters during his hitchhiking adventure, the stories Benjamin returns with are a testament to this disillusionment being epidemic--prostitutes are thieves, homosexual men are unconcerned with consent; even firefighters are underpaid and unmotivated.

When he takes Elaine to a strip club on their first date, she reacts in horror at the evidence of this epidemic, until the stripper proves herself to be an intelligent human.



Title quote: Mrs. Braddock, Act 1, scene 2.

Sources: Heath, Jim F. *Decade of Disillusionment: The Kennedy-Johnson Years*. Indiana University Press. Indiana: 1976.

IN CLASS

Discussion Questions & Glossary

FOR ESL:

Advanced vocabulary from The Graduate

Try to define the word based on its context, below.

prophylactic

I, 1. Mrs. Robinson says the diving suit “looks like a prophylactic.”

squiffy

I, 1. Mr. Robinson: “Have you seen my squiffy little wife?”

queers

I, 2. Mr. Braddock: “What kind of people gave you rides?”
Ben: “Queers.”

disillusioned

I, 2. Mrs. Braddock, about Benjamin: “He seems a little disillusioned.”

porter

I, 3. Desk clerk at hotel: “I’ll have the porter bring [your luggage] in.”

seconol

I, 5. Mrs. Robinson: “[Mr. Robinson]’s out all day. He comes home. He takes two seconol, then it’s tomorrow.”

lascivious

I, 5. Benjamin: “I am not proud of spending my time in hotel rooms with a lascivious alcoholic.”

nihilist

I, 6. Elaine: “I don’t believe I’m sitting here with a nihilist. I’m always being attached onto by nihilists. I hate nihilists. I try to avoid them.”

melodramatic

I, 7. Benjamin: “Mrs. Robinson, I hope you won’t be offended if I ask you not to be too melodramatic about this.”

acrimony

I, 7. Benjamin: “I don’t think there’s any great crisis that necessitates any degree of acrimony here.”

audacity

I, 7. Mrs. Robinson: “Are you in love Benjamin? Do you have the audacity?”

degenerate

I, 8. Mrs. Robinson: “Degenerate son of a bitch.”

abdicate

II, 2. Mr. Robinson: “Ben, you’re a little old to abdicate responsibility.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Happily ever after?

At the end of the play, Benjamin and Elaine have successfully rebelled, escaped the clutches of their parents wishes, and found themselves a private little hideaway. Often in life we can fight so hard for something we want, we don’t think of what might happen after we get it. What do you imagine happens for Elaine and Benjamin the next day after the play ends? And the day after that? Is there such thing as ‘happily ever after’? Why do romantic comedies often end right after the couple finally gets together?

Boredom

We usually think of boredom, especially the kind that Benjamin’s experiencing, as a bad thing. It can produce feelings of irritability and restlessness, and can sometimes lead to impulsive, self-destructive or otherwise just plain weird decisions. Think of a time in your life when you felt bored for an especially long time. What did you do about it? How could boredom possibly be positive? productive? useful? How could it be a good thing to be bored sometimes? Why was this period in American history at once a decade of protest and of disillusionment?

Youth

George Bernard Shaw, a famous Irish playwright, once said that “Youth is wasted on the young.” What do you think he meant by this? Why do older people, like Benjamin and Elaine’s parents, feel compelled to give younger people advice and interfere with their lives? It is obvious why young people would find this annoying, but what might they also be unable to appreciate about where their elders are coming from?

Sexuality

“Cougar” is an epithet used to describe mature women who seek sexual relations with younger men, and Mrs. Robinson is often used as its archetype. What does that language say about female sexuality? How is a mature woman’s pursuit of a lover treated differently from a young woman’s? Describe the depiction of Elaine’s desires as compared to Mrs. Robinson, and as compared to Benjamin’s. How do the different characters cope with their sexuality? Why does Mr. Robinson react with jealousy when his marriage to Mrs. Robinson is so unhappy? In the film, 42-year-old Mrs. Robinson is played by a 32-year-old. In this production, What does that say about the perception of female age? Has that perception changed in the last 50 years?

Under the skin

When Mrs. Robinson’s dress unzips, it is symbolic of a snake shedding its skin, and contains all the serpentine connotations of manipulation and deception. What other symbols in the play can you identify of the characters’ dual nature? Does the conflict in the play derive from this duality or insincerity, or from Benjamin’s obsession with authenticity?

“...One morning it hit me: *Schmuck!* this is your

SOUNDTRACK! „

One of the ways that *The Graduate* is iconic of young America in the 1960s is its celebrated soundtrack. Though today we're very used to watching movies featuring popular songs that we recognize, at the time of *The Graduate's* release in 1967, using previously existing songs in a soundtrack was hardly ever done. And it happened a bit by accident! Mike Nichols, the film's director, actually wanted to get new music from folk-duo Simon and Garfunkel, and was only using their existing songs — “The Sound of Silence,” for instance — as place-holders while he edited the film and waited. But as the musical duo took longer and longer to come up with new material, and Nichols grew fonder and fonder of the old songs, they stuck.

The smash-hit “Mrs. Robinson” was a song that Simon and Garfunkel were already working on as a separate single (not intended for the movie) with the place-holder title “Mrs. Roosevelt.” When Nichols heard it, he loved it. They changed the title to “Mrs. Robinson” and re-worked the lyrics to be her ode.

“In some ways, the ironic use of Simon and Garfunkel’s music — “April Come She Will” while Ben sits in bed in the Taft Hotel, drinking a can of soda, catatonically watching television while Mrs. Robinson flits back and forth in various stages of undress, or Paul Simon’s acoustic guitar slowing down and sputtering as Ben’s Alfa Romeo runs out of gas during his desperate race to the church—prefigured the music video. You might say MTV was born out of The Graduate.”



SIMON AND GARFUNKEL

An American music duo, consisting of Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, originally formed under the name “Tom and Jerry” in 1957

Simon was the actual songwriter of the two, and Garfunkel was most praised for his angelic voice; well-known for their beautiful harmonies

The film *The Graduate* (1967) contributed immensely to their success.

They were known to have a very rocky relationship and broke up in 1970; but they have come together a few times since in hugely popular reunion concerts.

In 2004, they were listed as #40 in Rolling Stone's **100 Greatest Artists of All Time**.

The song “Mrs. Robinson” is ranked #6 in the **American Film Institute's Top 100 Movie Songs of all time** (2004).

“The Sound of Silence” was written by Paul Simon in 1964, in response to John F. Kennedy's assassination the previous November.

MATTHEW BARBER & JUSTIN RUTLEDGE

For the Segal Centre's production of *The Graduate* this season, director Andrew Shaver (page 14) invited Canadian singer / songwriters Matthew Barber and Justin Rutledge on stage to play original music inspired by that seminal soundtrack.

Barber has produced seven albums in the style of 20TH-Century Folk-Rock tradition, and has previously composed for the theatre in the MECCA Award-winning musical *Haunted Hillbilly* (produced by Sidemart Theatrical Grocery, created and developed at the Segal Centre). Rutledge is equally prolific in the North American Folk scene, having won a Juno and composed for *The Arsenists* (Canadian Stage), and *Divisadero* (Necessary Angel).

MATTHEWBARBER.COM

JUSTINRUTLEDGE.COM



Title quote: Mike Nichols (as quoted in *Time Out, New York* interview, 2012)
Popout quote: From *Here's to you, Mr. Nichols*, *Vanity Fair* 2008

WRITING THE SCRIPT

It takes a village.

THE NOVELIST

The Graduate began as an overlooked novel by **Charles Webb** (Right, top), a working-class writer from the middle United States. Four years later, he sold the rights to *The Graduate* and all its characters to the movie studio, allegedly for \$20,000. When the film came out, Webb and his wife decided to sell all of their possessions and live basically. Although *The Graduate* grossed \$100 million at the American box office, and despite the several novels he has written since then, Webb has lived in penury for his whole adult life, working at Kmart, dishwashing, managing a nudist camp, and living off government assistance.

In the different but equally ambiguous endings to the novel, film, and play, Benjamin and Elaine run off together in a fit of hyperactivity and adventure. Once the impulse fades, they are taken over by stillness and an awareness that the uncertain future still exists as much as it did following Ben's graduation.

In 2007, Webb wrote a sequel to *The Graduate*, called *Home Schooled*. If we accept him as the omniscient authority on the future of the characters in this play, then what happens to them is this: they settle into a comfortable suburban marriage and have two children. Benjamin holds on to the skepticism of the educational system that instigated the events of the first book. He has nonetheless become a teacher, in a way, as was expected of him in the first book, because he home schools his children.

Mrs. Robinson has stopped drinking and is allowed back into the lives of her children and grandchildren in order to persuade the principal of their local school that the children do not have to go to public school.

THE SCREENWRITERS

There is little dispute that the unexceptional novel *The Graduate* would have faded from the collective memory if **Mike Nichols** (right, bottom), **Buck Henry**, and **Calder Willingham** (right, centre) had not collaborated to create the iconic film that defined a generation in America. The contrary decision to cast the small, semitic Dustin Hoffman in the All-American role of Benjamin changes much of the subtext of the attraction between characters. The soundtrack underscored a very particular, quiet, spirit of protest, in opposition to the narcissism of The Beatles or the abrasion of Bob Dylan. Of course, we must not forget Buck Henry's last-minute addition of the one-word that would come to represent the enemy for Benjamin and all his contemporaries: Plastics.

Both Nichols and Henry have a strong and celebrated background in comedy. Nichols, along with his partner Elaine May, popularized improvisation with their decidedly intelligent, hugely successful comedy routines through the 1950s, and Henry had been writing and acting in television and movies for as long. He would go on to host Saturday Night Live a total of ten times.

THE PLAY

Terry Johnson's stage adaptation premiered at the Gielgud Theatre in London's West End in April, 2000, and was directed by Johnson himself. Of this rebirth in a new medium 36 years later, *Guardian* reviewer Maddy Costa summed up the tendency of this play to age with its audience this way:

"Men of a certain age get Art; women get The Graduate."

Popout quote: From Maddy Costa, *Another Day, Another Naked Actress*. Images, from Top: Charles Webb, Calder Willingham / Buck Henry, Mike Nichols.



Joss McKinley for The Telegraph



Bob Willoughby



Bob Willoughby

The Film

THE GRADUATE

1967

Mike Nichols' 1967 film changed the face of American cinema, with its unprecedented realism and symbolic atmosphere. It was, and remains, a huge success, both at the box office and among critics and connoisseurs.

In a 1968 *New Yorker* feature, Jacob Brackman said, "*The Graduate* has the look of today. The Berkeley students look like Berkeley students - not like the Berkeley students of a dozen years ago, or like a middle-aged conservative's nightmare of Berkeley students... Similarly, his camera has captured the exact appearance of a contingent of senior citizens, a *nouveau-riche* poolside lawn party... The care that Nichols has devoted to surface reality infuses into familiar personalities ... There's something thrilling in that accomplishment - something like the strange excitement of overhearing one's name mentioned."

For a contemporary audience, the film is iconic for Nichols' use of pacing, soundtrack, and symbolism that he achieves simply with the use of lenses and camera angles (see stills, right), that reinforce a feeling of going nowhere, being controlled, and being trapped. It, along with Nichols' other work, has been listed as an inspiration for such filmmakers as Wes Anderson (*Rushmore*, *Grand Budapest Hotel*) and Marc Webb (*500 Days of Summer*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*) for these devices.

The film grossed \$104,642,650 (1967 USD) domestically, won the 1968 Best Director Academy Award, five Golden Globes, five BAFTA's, a Grammy, and many more. It is #17 on the American Film Institute's list, *100 years... 100 Movies*, and has two lines in the AFI's list *100 Years... 100 Movie Quotes* ("Plastics," is #42, and "Mrs. Robinson, you're trying to seduce me, aren't you?" is #63.)



The DIRECTOR

Andrew Shaver

Andrew Shaver is a performer, producer and the founding Artistic Director of SideMart Theatrical Grocery (2007). Before relocating to Toronto, SideMart was the Segal Studio Resident Company from 2008-2011, during which time they produced the Canadian premiere of Mark Doherty's *Trad*, the world premiere of Morris Panych's *Gordon* and the original musical *Haunted Hillbilly*, with a book by Graham Cuthbertson and songs by Matthew Barber.

This past November, Andrew opened SideMart's very own Theatrical Grocery in Toronto's East End, launching it with *Out of the Woods*, a songplay he co-wrote and performed with Amy Rutherford and Justin Rutledge. In May, he directed Kyle Gatehouse in Patrick Costello's *Ballad of the Young Offender* in the Grocery as part of Crow's Theatre's East End Performance Crawl. He is currently developing a *Frankenstein* adaptation with songwriter Andrew Penner (Sunparlour Players).

He is the touring director for the Canadian Stage production of *Venus in Fur*, directed by Jennifer Tarver coming to Centaur in October, and the creation dramaturge and song translator on the Necessary Angel concert-play, *What Makes a Man*, based on the life and songs of Charles Aznavour, that premieres at Canadian Stage in Toronto this fall.

Other directing highlights include: *Stones in his Pockets* (Centaur), *Taming of the Shrew* (Repercussion), *Scientific Americans* and *Sherlock*

Holmes (Segal Centre). He assisted Robert Falls on the Goodman Theatre's production of *The Iceman Cometh* starring Brian Dennehy and Nathan Lane, which tours to The Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2015.

Andrew has spent 4 seasons as a member of the Stratford Festival company, acting in *Macbeth*, *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Zastrozzi*, and assisting directors Chris Abraham (*For the Pleasure of Seeing her Again*) and Jennifer Tarver (*The Homecoming* and *Waiting for Godot*). He was a member of the Festival's inaugural Michael Langham Conservatory for Classical Direction (2010 & 2011).

Andrew produces a Stratford live music series (*The Church Sessions*) as part of the Festival's Forum programming. Guests have included such Canadian musical luminaries as Royal Wood, Sarah Harmer, Danny Michel, Jill Barber, David Myles, Leif Vollebakk, Justin Rutledge and Matthew Barber.

He was Canadian Artistic Director of the Montreal/Brooklyn-based creation ensemble SaBooge. From 2000-2007, SaBooge toured original work from Montreal to NYC, Philadelphia, Vancouver, Toronto, Galway and Dublin.

He studied at Queen's University (1995-99), trained at Ecole Jacques Lecoq (1999-01) and currently teaches voice-over at the National Theatre School in Montreal.

In 2013, he was the proud recipient of the first Outstanding Director META (Sherlock Holmes). It's on a shelf in his kitchen.



*"Mike Nichols' 1967 film of **The Graduate** changed the face of American cinema and Simon and Garfunkel's music left an indelible mark on all film soundtracks that followed. So, we have some big shoes to fill and I couldn't have more confidence in our team. From **Brigitte Robinson** and **Luke Humphrey** as the near mythic **Mrs Robinson** and **Benjamin Braddock** to two of Canada's finest songwriters **Matthew Barber** and **Justin Rutledge** composing new songs, you're in good hands.*

The

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ETIQUETTE

1. *The Graduate* will be performed in the main theatre of the Segal Centre. Performances at the Segal are for both groups and the general public. It is important that everyone be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance, so that others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Please do not unwrap candy, play with zippers, or play with your programme.
2. Do not put your feet on the back of the seat in front of you and please do not climb over seats.
3. If you plan to take notes on the play for the purpose of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance. Seeing you do this can be distracting for the actors. Please wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections.
5. **Absolutely no photos or video may be taken** without the express consent of management. Violators’ devices will be seized and they will be removed from the theatre.
5. Use of cell phones, iPods, tablets, or other self-illuminating electronics is **strictly prohibited** in the theatre. The light from these devices is visible from the stage and in the audience. It is extremely distracting to the artists on stage and inconsiderate to your fellow audience members. Composing or reading text messages is **forbidden**.
6. Your seat is only guaranteed until the moment the theatre doors close. Late entry is very disruptive; if a patron is tardy we ask that they please follow the instructions of our front-of-house staff.
7. ENJOY THE SHOW!



LIFE magazine, 1964

Thank you for your

FEEDBACK

Please take a moment to tell us about your experience organizing an educational outing at the Segal Centre. Use the rubric below or contact me at any time with any comments or concerns you might have.

Reply to:
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Thank you,

1. How would you rate your experience?
Extremely positive 1 2 3 4 5 Extremely stressful
2. How much do you feel your group benefited from the experience?
Very much 1 2 3 4 5 Very Little
3. Would you recommend the experience to other group leaders?
Wholeheartedly 1 2 3 4 5 Never
4. Will you consider bringing a group to the theatre again?
Wholeheartedly 1 2 3 4 5 Never
5. What did you enjoy most about coming to see the play?

6. What aspect of coming to the theatre did you find problematic?

We welcome all additional comments.

“ I love you so much I'm terrified of seeing you
CONTACT
every time I step out the door. ”



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THE THEATRE AND YOU:

Encouraging critical participation from your students.

Encourage students to think about the idea of engagement with a work of art. Upon attending the theatre, notice the demographics of the audience. Think about how the theatre is different from a concert, a movie, or a comedy show. Do you attend performances often? Which kind?

Are there art forms at you relate to more than others?

What does it mean to you to “relate” to something?

Theatres in particular often struggle with an aging audience, focusing much effort on bringing a young audience in, through choices in programming, activities, and partial or even total price reduction. What do you think the reason is that theatre audiences are older, and what would you do to counter that?

[Click Here](#) for a pre-addressed printable handout of these questions.

[Click Here](#) to send an email to the Educational Programs Manager at the Segal Centre, or [here](#) to ask directly through our Tumblr blog.

If your students would like to address a specific member of the Segal staff or of *The Graduate* production team, please specify to whom the communication should be forwarded.

The Segal Centre for Performing Arts

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Don't forget to take the QUIZ!

What character from *The Graduate* are you? On PlayBuzz



Title quote: Ben, Act II, scene 1.