


**TAPROOT
THEATRE**
COMPANY

STUDY GUIDE

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Charley's Aunt Study Guide

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Acting Studio

Community Outreach

"Encouraging – Educating – Entertaining"

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Charley's Aunt

By Brandon Thomas

Directed by Karen Lund

Play Synopsis

By George! This is splendid! A quiet afternoon luncheon turns into a hilarious masquerade when college chums attempt to woo a pair of charming young ladies. After persuading a classmate to impersonate their missing aunt (and chaperone), mischief, high jinks and shenanigans ensue. This hilarious classic has been delighting audiences for over 100 years.

Cast

| | |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Don Brady | Brasset |
| Llysa Holland | Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez |
| Anne Kennedy | Kitty Verdun |
| Andrew Litzky | Col. Sir Francis Chesney |
| Emily Fairbrook | Amy Spettigue |
| Nolan Palmer | Stephen Spettigue |
| Eric Riedman | Jack Chesney |
| Josh Smyth | Charles Wykeham |
| Steve West | Lord Fancourt Babberley |
| Samie Detzer | Ela Delahay |

The Setting

Act I & II Jack Chesney's Rooms
at Oxford University 1911

Act III - The Drawing Room of
Spettigue's House

Our Production



**Charley's
Aunt
Act 1 & 2**



**Charley's
Aunt
Act 3**

The Set

The original production of *Charley's Aunt* had a different setting for each act. Act 1 took place in Jack Chesney's Oxford rooms, Act 2 took place in the garden just outside these rooms, and in Act 3 the location shifted to a drawing room in Mr. Spettigue's house. A script's stage directions are only a blue print, however, and every theatre must adapt plays to fit their particular stage. With a few slight alterations to the lines, and some creative wall decorations, scenic designer Mark Lund has created a simple set that allows our story to happen in two locations rather than three.

| Production Team | |
|--|--------------------|
| Director | Karen Lund |
| Sound & Scenic Designer | Mark Lund |
| Costume Designer & Costume Shop Manager | Sarah Burch Gordon |
| Stage Manager | Anne Hitt |
| Lighting Designer | Jody Briggs |
| Props Master | Ellen Sprague |
| Dramaturg | Nicol Cabe |
| Assistant Stage Manager | Kristina Matthews |
| Dresser | Clare Hungate-Hawk |
| Sound Board Operator | Nick Magles |
| Dialect Coach | Gin Hammond |



About the Playwright

Walter Brandon Thomas was born in 1848 in Liverpool, England. In 1866 his mother took in a lodger by the name of Henry Irving. Irving was a working actor who would later become one of the most celebrated theatre professionals of his time. As a child, Thomas was fascinated by the various roles that Irving played and this early exposure gave Thomas a love for the theatre that stayed with him for the rest of his life.

In 1879 Thomas made his professional debut with an acting company run by the famous English acting couple, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal. This was the start of a long theatrical career during which Thomas found employment as an actor, playwright, songwriter, and even performed his own songs in English music halls.

Thomas wrote over a dozen plays in his lifetime, but only *Charley's Aunt* is still performed regularly. It is said that the idea for this script came out during a train journey conversation, when Thomas met up with the great British comedian, W.S. Penley. Penley asked Thomas to write "a pretty little three act comedy with plenty of fun in it and a touch of sentiment."¹

Two years later the new comedy, *Charley's Aunt* opened in London with Penley playing Lord Fancourt Babberley and Thomas playing Sir Francis Chesney. The first appearance of Mr. Penley dressed as Charley's aunt stopped the show. "There were reports of people all over the theatre of people helpless with laughter."⁽²⁾

Other plays written by Thomas include *Comrades*, 1882; *The Colour-Sergeant*, 1885; *The Lodgers*, 1887; *A Highland Legacy*, 1888; *The Gold Craze*, 1889; *The Lancashire Sailor*, 1891; *Marriage*, 1892; *The Swordsman's Daughter*, 1895; *22a Curzon Street*, 1898; *Women Are So Serious*, 1901; *Fourchette & Co.*, 1904; and *A Judge's Memory*, 1906.

Thomas died in London on June 19, 1914.

Sources:

"About the Play." Performance Study Guide: *Charley's Aunt*. Theatreworks for Schools. 4 May 2010.

www.theatreworks.org/media/studyguide.charleysaunt.pdf

JANE BOWERS. "About the Play and the Author" Notes for *Charley's Aunt*. 2002. www.theatrewesternsprings.com. 4 May 2010. <http://www.theatrewesternsprings.com/Actives/archives/ChAunt/CharleysAunt.htm>]

PHYLLIS HARTNOLL and PETER FOUND. "Thomas, (Walter) Brandon." *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*. 1996. Encyclopedia.com. 4 May 2010. <http://www.encyclopedia.com>.

¹ "About the Play." Performance Study Guide: *Charley's Aunt*. Theatreworks for Schools. 4 May 2010.

www.theatreworks.org/media/studyguide.charleysaunt.pdf

² ditto

Charley's Aunt to Film

Charley's Aunt has been adapted to film 13 times.

Here are some stills from various films as well as one from our production.



Don't let the Chaplin moustache fool you, Sidney Chaplin (Charlie Chaplin's half brother) is the one in the dress playing Sir Frances Babberley in the 1925 silent film *Charley's Aunt*.



Comedic legend Jack Benny as Lord Fancourt "Babbs" Babberley in the 1941 adaptation of *Charley's Aunt*.



1975 Soviet Musical Comedy Film *Hello, I'm Your Aunt!* The film's title became a catchphrase for receiving surprising news.



Taproot Theatre's production of *Charley's Aunt*. Pictured left to right Steve West, Eric Riedman, and Nolan Palmer.

What Was Happening? A Brief Timeline: 1912-1914

Although *Charley's Aunt* was written in 1892, Taproot Theatre has chosen to set the play slightly forwarded in history. The years 1912-1914, just before World War 1 began, are sometimes referred to as the Titanic Era because the sinking of the Titanic was one of the major world events that took place around this time. Without being specific to one particular year, the costumes of Taproot's production will indicate to the audience that the play is set in this era.

When an actor is creating a character it's important to know what kind of world that character lives in. What was happening in the world at that time? What kinds of stories might they be reading in the daily newspapers? Below is a brief timeline of events between 1912-1914.

1912

- **Jan 6** New Mexico becomes the 47th State in the USA
- **Mar 13** The Balkan League between Serbia and Bulgaria is formed
- **Mar 23** The Dixie cup is invented
- **Mar 29** English explorer Robert F Scott and his expedition to reach the South Pole are snowbound on the return leg of their journey. None of the expedition survive
- **Apr 9** Electric starter first appears in cars
- **Apr 15** The Titanic sinks at 2:27 am off the coast of Newfoundland
- **Apr 16** Harriet Quimby becomes the 1st woman pilot to cross the English Channel
- **May 7** Columbia University approves plans for awarding the Pulitzer Prize in several categories. The award is established by publishing giant, Joseph Pulitzer
- **May 29** Greece joins the Balkan League
- **June 4** Massachusetts passes 1st US minimum wage law
- **June 7** US army tests 1st machine gun mounted on a plane
- **Aug 27** Edgar Rice Burroughs publishes "Tarzan of the Apes".
- **Sept 3** World's 1st cannery opens in England to supply food to the navy
- **Dec 16** Austria-Hungary engages in conflict with Serbia

1913

- **Jan 11** 1st sedan car (Hudson) goes on display at 13th Auto Show (NYC)
- **Jan 16** British House of Commons accepts Home-Rule for Ireland
- **Jan 19** Raymond Poincar installed as president of France
- **Jan 30** British House of Lords rejects Irish Home Rule Bill
- **Feb 15** 1st avant-garde arts show in America opens in NYC
- **Feb 19** 1st prize inserted into a Cracker Jack box
- **Feb 25** In the US the 16th Amendment is ratified, authorizing income tax.
- **Mar 4** Woodrow Wilson inaugurated as 28th president
- **Mar 10** Harriet Tubman, former slave, abolitionist, conductor on Underground RR, and freedom fighter dies in New York.
- **Mar 25** Ohio Great Dayton Flood. Dayton almost destroyed when Scioto, Miami, and Muskingum River reach flood stage simultaneously
- **Apr 3** British suffragette Emily Pankhurst sentenced to 3 years in jail
- **May 7** British House of Commons rejects woman's right to vote
- **May 30** New country of Albania forms
- **June 16** South-African parliament forbids blacks owning land
- **June 21** "Tiny" Broadwick is the 1st woman to parachute from an airplane
- **Aug 23** Churchill prepares contingency plans paper for Britain to send troops to aid France in a war against Germany

(1913 Continued)

- **Sept 10** Lincoln Highway opens as 1st paved coast-to-coast highway
- **Sept 23** Serbian troops march into Albania
- **Oct 14** Explosion in coal mine at Cardiff kills 439
- **Oct 15** Train crash in Liverpool during "Black Week"
- **Oct 18** Berchtold of Austria sends an ultimatum to Serbia demanding withdrawal of forces that crossed into Albania; Serbs withdrew
- **Oct 23** President Wilson says US will never attack another country
- **Nov 5** Ludwig III crowned king of Bavaria
- **Dec 1** Continuous moving assembly line introduced by Ford (a car every 2:38 minutes)
- **Dec 13** The Mona Lisa (stolen in Aug 1911) is returned to Louvre Museum
- **Dec 16** Charlie Chaplin begins his film career at Keystone for \$150 a week
- **Dec 21** 1st crossword puzzle (with 32 clues) printed in NY World

1914

- **Jan 1** Northern and Southern Nigeria United into the British colony of Nigeria
- **Jan 6** Stock brokerage firm Merrill Lynch is founded
- **Jan 7** First steamboat passes through the newly opened Panama Canal
- **Mar 27** First successful blood transfusion is performed (in Brussels)
- **Apr 9** The first color film, entitled *World, The Flesh and the Devil* is shown in London
- **Apr 11** George Bernard Shaw's play, *Pygmalion* premieres
- **May 6** British House of Lords rejects women's suffrage bill
- **May 25** British House of Commons passes Irish Home Rule bill
- **May 29** Ship rams Canadian ship, *Empress of Ireland*, on St Lawrence River; 1024 die
- **June 28** Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary and his wife are assassinated in Sarajevo, Bosnia. This event will eventually led to the start of WW1

Sources Cited:

DAVID MILLER. "Timeline, 1912". 1998-2005. Miller Internet Publishing PO Box 222 Rices Landing, PA 15357. 4 May 2010. <http://din-timelines.com/bline.shtml>

DAVID MILLER. "Timeline, 1913". 1998-2005. Miller Internet Publishing PO Box 222 Rices Landing, PA 158357. 4 May 2010. <http://din-timelines.com/bline.shtml>

DAVID MILLER. "Timeline, 1914". 1998-2005. Miller Internet Publishing PO Box 222 Rices Landing, PA 158357. 4 May 2010. <http://din-timelines.com/bline.shtml>

“Welcome to 1876 Victorian England: Victorian Etiquette”

From: <http://logicmgmt.com/1876/etiquette/etiquette.htm>

Victorian Etiquette - The Basic Rules of Etiquette

Learn to govern yourself and to be gentle and patient.

Never speak or act in anger.

Remember that, valuable as is the gift of speech, silence is often more valuable.

Learn to say kind and pleasant things when opportunity offers.

Do not neglect little things if they can affect the comfort of others.

Learn to deny yourself and prefer others.

Victorian Etiquette - Etiquette at Dinner

The table-cloth should be of the finest quality.

The room may be lighted with either white or colored candles or lamps. Many prefer to have a portion of the light fall from side brackets or from the wall.

Never make an ostentatious display of wealth.

No more than two vegetables should be served with each entree and potatoes should not be offered with fish.

Victorian Etiquette - Etiquette When Visiting

Do not be in haste to seat yourself; one appears fully as well and talks better, standing for a few moments.

A man should always remain standing as long as there are any women standing in the room.

A man should never take any article from a woman's hands--book, cup, flower, etc.--and remain seated, she standing.

Do not meddle with, or stare at the articles in the room.

Do not walk around the room, examining pictures, while waiting for the hostess.

Do not scratch your head or use a toothpick, ear spoon or comb.

Use a handkerchief when necessary, but without glancing at it afterwards. Also be as quiet and unobtrusive in the action as possible.

Do not enter a room without first knocking and receiving an invitation to come in.

Learning the Lingo

Draw a line to match the Victorian slang term or phrase to its modern definition.

Going down

Got rid of it

Won't they be jolly waxy?

Why the long face?

You're looking quite pulled down

Make a face, sticking your tongue out

Knocked it off

Ladies' makeup, routine of getting ready

Like a boiled owl

Slang term for graduation

Cock a snook

A good fellow; a merry person

Gentle artifices of the toilet

Moping, sometimes crying

You're a brick

Very disappointed, rueful, a little anxious

Charley's Aunt in Translation

Having practiced with the slang terms on the previous page, now it's your turn to do some slang translation.

When *Charley's Aunt* first appeared on the London stage the characters were meant to be as modern and as up-to-date as any ordinary college student, and so Brandon Thomas' dialogue incorporates some of the slang expressions that were popular at the time. Look up the lines below in your script of *Charley's Aunt* so that you have an understanding of the context, and then translate the lines into modern expressions. If Jack, Charley, Babs, Kitty and Amy were modern college students what might they say instead?

Charley: To a "Tee", old chap!

Act 1, pg 12

Jack: He's a jolly cheerful chap. Will amuse your aunt like the deuce and keep her in a rattling good humour.

Act 1, pg 21

Jack: I've noticed he's been jolly hard up.

Act 1, pg 21

Babs: I say, you chaps, don't play the giddy goat! I've got to meet my tutor!

Act 1, pg 25

Babs: I'm teetotal

Act 1, pg 32

Kitty: You've jolly quarters here!

Act 1, pg 36

Jack: Thanks, Dad; you're a brick!

Act 1, pg 40

Jack: By George! Splendid!

Act 1, pg 45

Amy: Oh yes, it is charming!

Act 1, pg 49

Babs: Here you chaps--I won't stand this any longer. Let Charley have a go.

Act 11, pg 101

Story Contest for Students

What I Did for Love...

Charley's Aunt by Brandon Thomas is a love story. In fact, it's several love stories, and in each story there are characters willing to do the most outrageous things for love. Making your best friend dress up as an old lady, for example, or losing a fortune while gambling with a girl's sick father so that she won't be poor when her father dies.

In keeping with this theme, Taproot Theatre is collecting modern day love stories. We're calling the collection, "What I Did for Love..." Do you have a true life story about a crazy thing you did for love? Whether it's that trick you played in second grade to get that one girl's attention, or that note you sent via a friend of a friend to tell that guy you liked him, we want to hear your tale!

Taproot Theatre will be awarding free tickets to our Late Night Comedy Improv Show to three students who submit a story on the theme, "What I Did for Love..."

Teachers, if your students would like to participate in this contest, please follow the criteria below.

- All submissions must be based around the theme, "What I Did for Love..."
- Submissions must be no longer than 1 page single spaced.
- Students should submit their entries to their teacher
- Each entry must be accompanied a release form (provided in this packet). This form includes the student's first name, student's grade, school name, teacher's name and contact details, as well as a permission form to be signed by a parent giving Taproot permission to publish the story online. Stories published online will be credited with the student's first name only and their grade level.
- Teachers should mail entries to **Sonja Lowe at Taproot Theatre Company, P.O.Box 30946 Seattle, WA 98113**. Or email Word docs to sonjal@taproottheatre.org using the email subject line "Student Mat Contest-What I Did For Love"
- **Entries must be received before Monday, May 24th**
- Three winning submissions will receive a pair of complimentary tickets to Taproot Theatre's Late Night Comedy Improv Show. (Running Friday nights, May 21, May 28, June 4, & June 11)
- Winning submissions will also be posted on the Taproot Theatre blog.
- Taproot will send the winners' ticket vouchers to their teachers' email address, so that the information can be passed on to the student.

Release Form

"What I Did for Love..."

Student's First Name: _____

Student's Grade: _____

Name of School: _____

Teacher's Name: _____

Teacher's Email Address: _____

Permission Form:

I give Taproot permission to publish my child's story submission online or in the Taproot newsletter. I understand that my child's work will be credited by their first name and grade level, but will not include their last name or school.

Parent or Guardian Name: _____

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Audience Etiquette

We are so glad you are joining Taproot Theatre for a student matinee performance. Audience etiquette is important so that everyone has an enriching, entertaining and educational experience. See you at the performance!

- It is appropriate to talk quietly until the performance begins.
- If you need to use the restroom, please do so before the performance begins. Restrooms are located in the upper and lower lobbies.
- Be sure to be seated before the performance begins
- No food, gum, candy or beverages are to be brought into the theatre.
- Please don't wear headphones during the performance.
- Please turn off watch alarms, cellular phones and other electronic devices. No texting, please!
- Students who disturb other members of the audience may be asked to leave the theatre and wait in the lobby.
- Remember: You will get an opportunity to talk with the actors and director at the end of the performance. Be prepared with questions about the production!
- Please stay out of the aisles (also called "voms") during the performance.
- Enjoy the show!

Post-show Activities

1. Class Discussion on the Production
 - a. How is a play different than a movie? Different than a TV show?
 - b. *Charley's Aunt* has been adapted into a movie 13 times. If it were remade again, who would direct it? Who would star in it? What would it be titled?
 - c. How did theatrical elements in the show (costumes, set, lights) aid in telling the story?
 - d. What is the purpose of doing a production like this? Did you learn anything from the production?
2. Class Discussion on the Show
 - a. Social interaction between men and women during the Victorian era was governed by long lists of etiquette rules. Which of the rules listed in this study guide still apply today? Which are outdated? Do we have different etiquette rules in our modern society?
 - b. Both classic and modern comedies often involve love stories. Why do you think love stories are so popular? What is your favorite romantic comedy? How is that romantic comedy different from/similar to *Charley's Aunt*?
 - c. Another classic comedic plot shows lies and deceptions which are put in motion by the characters, but cause consequences beyond the characters' control. Who lies in *Charley's Aunt*? What are they trying to get by lying?
 - d. The plot device of a man disguised as a woman has also been used in comedies throughout history. Plays such as Mark Twain's *Is He Dead?*, characters like Francis Flute who plays Thisby in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and even top rated films *Some Like it Hot*, *Tootsie* and *Mrs. Doubtfire* all have this theme in common. Why is this device used so often in comedies? What makes it funny?
3. Have students write a critique of the production. Encourage them to be specific about their likes and dislikes, and their reasons for each. Help them to understand the differences between critiquing the play (text, storyline, character development) and the production (acting, lighting, directing, sound, set, costumes).



By attending Taproot Theatre's production of *Charley's Aunt*, using the study guide and actively engaging in pre- & post-show activities, your students can begin to fulfill the following Essential Academic Learning Requirements.

Arts

- 1. The student understands and applies arts knowledge and skills.**
 - 1.1 Understand arts concepts and vocabulary.
 - 1.2 Develop arts skills and techniques.
 - 1.3 Understand and apply arts styles from various artist, cultures, and times.
 - 1.4 Understand and apply audience skills in a variety of arts settings and performances.
- 2. The student demonstrates thinking skills using artistic processes.**
 - 2.1 Apply a creative process in the arts: **Reflect** for the purpose of elaboration and self-evaluation.
 - 2.2 Apply a responding process to an arts presentation.
 - Engage** actively and purposefully.
 - Describe** what is seen and/or heard.
 - Analyze** how the elements are arranged and organized.
 - Interpret** based on descriptive properties.
 - Evaluate** using supportive evidence and criteria.
- 3. The student makes connections within and across the arts to other disciplines, life, cultures, and work.**
 - 4.1 Demonstrate and analyze the connections among the arts disciplines.
 - 4.2 Demonstrate and analyze the connections among the arts and other content areas.
 - 4.3 Understand how the arts impact lifelong choices.
 - 4.4 Understand that the arts shape and reflect culture and history.
 - 4.5. Demonstrate the knowledge of arts careers and the knowledge of arts skills in the world of work.

Communication

- 1. The student uses listening and observation skills to gain understanding.**
 - 1.1 Focus attention.
 - 1.2 Listen and observe to gain and interpret information.
 - 1.3 Check for understanding by asking questions and paraphrasing.
- 3. The student uses communication strategies and skills to work effectively with others.**
 - 3.1 Use language to interact effectively and responsibly with others.
 - 3.2 Work cooperatively as a member of a group.
 - 3.3 Seek agreement and solutions through discussion

Material for your consideration

Charley's Aunt **Study Guide**

This study guide is available on Taproot Theatre's website, <http://www.taproottheatre.org/study-guide>
Taproot encourages making copies and distributing the study guides to your class.

Preview *Charley's Aunt* at Taproot Theatre

If you are interested in previewing the show before the student matinee performance, you are welcome to do so. Please contact us at 206.781.9708 or groups@taproottheatre.org for a pair of complimentary preview tickets.

Preview Opportunities

May 12th 7:30pm

May 13th 7:30pm

Driving Directions to Taproot Theatre Company

From I-5: Take the N. 85th St. exit. Go west on N. 85th for about 2 miles, crossing Aurora Ave. N. and Greenwood Ave. N. The theatre is a half block west of Greenwood Ave. N. at **204 N. 85th St.**

Bus Parking

Heading west on 85th, pass Taproot Theatre (**204 N. 85th St.**) and pull into the Fred Meyer parking lot, a block and a half west of Taproot. You are allowed to park in their lot along 85th St.

Language Issues

Please remember that you're the best judge of what's appropriate for your students. On this page you'll find a thorough account of everything in the script which might be found to be objectionable to students and adults. If you have questions about the content of the script, please read it - don't rely 100% on this page or what you've been told about the show. If you would like a perusal script (copy of the play) or more information about the potentially objectionable material, call Zandi Carlson at 206.529.3668 or e-mail her at zandic@taproottheatre.org.

Objectionable Language:

Two uses of the word "Demned" in lieu of "Damned."

Objectionable Content:

Nothing objectionable.

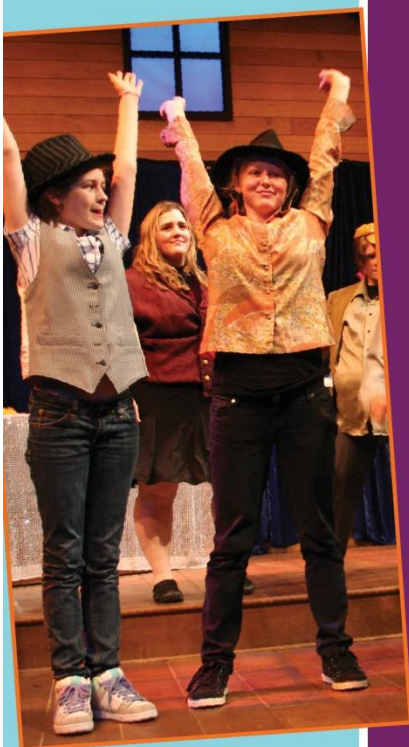
TAPROOT THEATRE
ACTING STUDIO

*It's Time
to Act!*

Summer Daycamps

Dynamic & fun-filled theatre camps for
4 - 18 year olds!

This summer enjoy week- long and two-week-
long acting camps with Taproot Theatre's Act-
ing Studio! Classes range from Shakespeare
to Musical Theatre to the Art of Comedy to
Acting for the Camera and more!



Questions?

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