

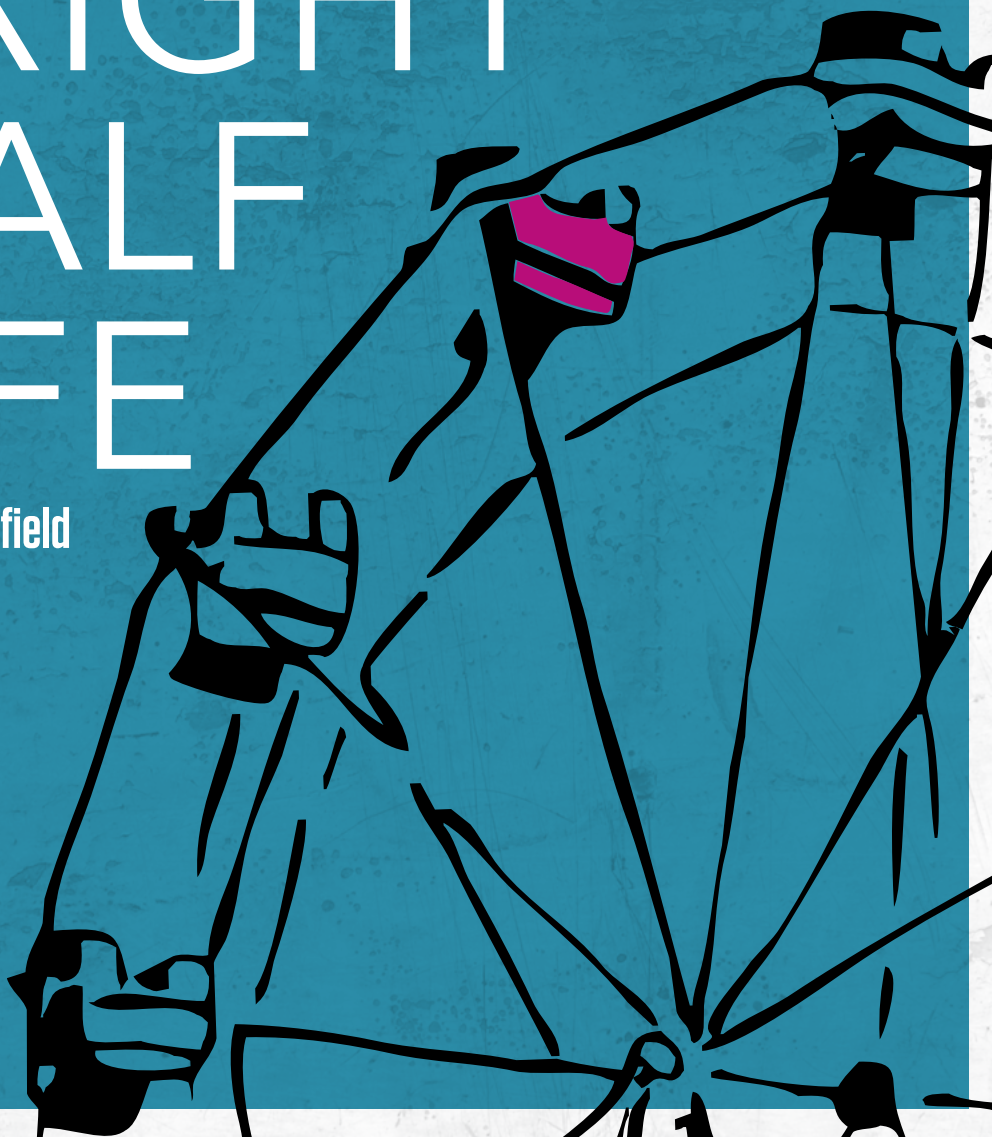
# COMPANY OF FOOLS

## Study Guide

---

# BRIGHT HALF LIFE

by Tanya Barfield



---

### COMPANY OF FOOLS 22nd SEASON SPONSORS:

Anonymous, The Shubert Foundation, Carr Foundation, Linda & Bob Edwards, Ken Lewis, Scott Miley Roofing, Priscilla Pittiglio, Linda & Bill Potter, Mary Ann & John Underwood, Barbara & Stanley Zax and media sponsor *The Weekly Sun*

---

[sunvalleycenter.org](http://sunvalleycenter.org)

---



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1 WELCOME TO COMPANY OF FOOLS**
- 2 HOW TO BE A GREAT AUDIENCE, ABOUT THE PLAY & PLAYWRIGHT**
- 3 ABOUT THIS COMPANY OF FOOLS PRODUCTION**
- 4 THOUGHTS FROM THE COMPANY**
- 5 THE INTERVAL'S INTERVIEW WITH TANYA BARFIELD**
- 6 LGBTQ RIGHTS TIMELINE**
- 7 LGBTQ RIGHTS TIMELINE cont. & REGIONAL RESOURCES**
- 8 MEMORY STUDY**
- 9 ENGAGING STUDENTS BEFORE & AFTER THE PLAY**



# WELCOME TO COMPANY OF FOOLS!

Dear Educator,

Company of Fools is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of BRIGHT HALF LIFE. Working with schools is a fundamental part of the mission of Company of Fools and the Sun Valley Center for the Arts.

We hope this Study Guide will serve as a useful resource for you as educators and parents. It is designed to enhance student learning both before and after the performance, to support your classroom lesson plans and deepen the educational value of your students' experience. The resources and activities in this study guide support the Idaho Core Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy for grades 9–12.

Thank you for sharing the magic of performing arts with your students!

—Company of Fools

## CREATIVE TEAM

### CAST

Vicky ..... Liz Morgan\*  
Erica ..... Sophie Hassett

### PRODUCTION STAFF

Direction ..... Ilana Becker  
Stage Management ..... K.O. Ogilvie\*  
Scenic Design ..... Joe Lavigne  
Lighting Design..... Mike Inwood\*\*  
Sound Design..... Emma Wilk\*\*  
Production Assistant ..... Chris Henderson



\*Member of Actors' Equity Association

\*\*Member of United Scenic Artists, I.A.T.S.E. Local 829

# HOW TO BE A GREAT AUDIENCE!

Live theatre productions are exciting and vibrant. Actors, audience, technical artists and the theatre staff members are all part of making the experience—the conversation between a play and its audience. As audience members, your students will play an important role in this exchange.

To ensure that everyone has a great time, please share these expectations with your students:

- Please remain seated throughout the entire performance.
- Restroom visits are best made before leaving school. *Bright Half Life* is 65 minutes without intermission. A 10-minute Q&A conversation will follow the performance.
- Please do not drink, eat, or chew gum during the performance.
- Turn cell phones off or to the “silent” setting and do not text or take pictures during the performance.
- Please be respectful to audience members around you. Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
- While you know not to speak or whisper to one another during the performance, as another accomplished playwright, Dominique Morrisseau, has shared: “You are allowed to laugh audibly...to have audible moments of reaction and response... This is...live theatre and the actors need you to engage with them, not distract them or thwart their performance. Please be an audience member that joins with others and allows a bit of breathing room. Exhale together. Laugh together. Say ‘amen’ should you need to. This is community. Let’s go.”

We hope you and your students will enjoy your visit to the Liberty Theatre!



## Teacher Tip!

**Spark conversation with your students** by asking them to remember a time when they were in an audience. Was it a great audience? Were there distractions? What are the differences between engaging and distracting? Have students make their own criteria for what a **GREAT** audience is and have them share their thoughts.

## ABOUT THE PLAY: *Bright Half Life*

*Bright Half Life* is a stunningly human and humorous depiction of a life in love. Vicky and Erica navigate the peripatetic present through a lifetime of courtship and marriage, kids and parents, death and divorce, Ferris wheels and skydiving, in a moving story that spans decades in an instant.

“In Tanya Barfield’s engaging new play...two women meet at work in their twenties, date secretly, fall in love, have children, get married (when it becomes legal), fight a lot, split, and, separately, watch their kids grow up. This well-written portrayal of smart women finding, losing, and finding themselves and each other again is profound, and it’s made more so by the fact that Barfield, rather than telling the story linearly, mixes up the chronology like someone taking the pieces of a puzzle and throwing them on a table: one moment the women are breaking up in middle age; the next, one is telling the other for the first time how beautiful she is. As a result, past, present, and future are contained in each moment, and every one of them feels full.” — *The New Yorker*



## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: Tanya Barfield



Tanya’s plays include *BRIGHT HALF LIFE* (*Time Out New York Critics’ Pick*), *THE CALL* (*New York Times Critics’ Pick*), *BLUE DOOR*, *OF EQUAL MEASURE* (Center Theatre Group), *CHAT* (New Dramatists’ Play-Time Festival), and *THE QUICK* (New York Stage and Film). Tanya is a Lilly Award and Lilly Award Commission recipient, in addition to the 2011 Helen Merrill Playwriting Award. She is a proud alumna of New Dramatists and a member of The Dramatists Guild Council. Tanya is currently developing a limited series for HBO with client Beau Willimon, based on the life of Jack Johnson. She is an executive story editor on Alan Ball’s new one-hour series, *Here, Now*, and previously worked on Alejandro Inarritu’s *The One Percent*, FX’s *The Americans*, and the VH1 hip-hop series, *The Breaks*.



# ABOUT THIS COMPANY OF FOOLS PRODUCTION

## THE CREATIVE TEAM:

Ilana Becker directs guest artists Liz Morgan as Vicky and Sophie Hassett as Erica. Rounding out the creative team for *Bright Half Life* are Joe Lavigne (Scenic Design), Mike Inwood (Lighting Design), Emma Wilk (Sound Design), and K.O. Ogilvie (Stage Management).



**SOPHIE HASSETT (Erica)** is a NYC-based actress and comedy writer. She's performed in *The 24 Hour Plays: Nationals Best Worst Birthday*

*Party in the History of the World*, the Naked Angels Issues Lab's *Tiny Bird Cries* by Kara Lee Corthron, and at The Brick Theater, The Barrow Group, Dixon Place, The Wild Project, The Tank and more, as well as recently filmed *The Brunch Club*, *How to Be a Startup in 21 Days*, and *My Ex Next Door* web series. Sophie holds an Acting BFA & Feminist Studies BA from University of California, Santa Barbara, where favorite roles include *The Fairytale Lives of Russian Girls* (Annie), and *Appoggiatura* (Sylvie/Young Helen). *Bright Half Life* is her heart and she is so happy to dream it forward.



**LIZ MORGAN (Vicky)** is a NYC-based actor and writer best known for her poem "Why I Was Late Today, And Will Probably Always Be

Late As A Black Woman" featured on the *Huffington Post*. She is very excited to be working with Ilana Becker again and making her Company of Fools debut. Recent acting credits include: Perseverance Theatre (*The Mountaintop*), Capital Rep (*The Mountaintop*), Trinity Rep (*Boeing-Boeing*), Huntington Theatre Company (*Start Down; All Times; Shelter*), Harlem Shakespeare Festival (*Othello*), Playwrights Rep (*The Hunchback of Seville; Principal Principle; Chicken Grease is Nasty Business*), Rites and Reason Theatre (*Na Luta; Inkblots*) and a collaboration

with Ntozake Shange on her choreoessay in development, *Lost in Language and Sound*. Film: *Ted 2* with Seth Macfarlane. MFA: Brown/Trinity Rep. [lizmorganonline.com](http://lizmorganonline.com)

**ILANA BECKER (Director)** has directed and developed new work with National Black Theatre, New York Theatre Workshop, O'Neill Theater Center, Ars Nova, Dixon Place, The Lark, The Flea, NYU, Columbia University, Disney/ASCAP Musical Workshop, and 54 Below, among others. Ilana is a proud member of The Civilians' R&D Group, Lincoln Center Theater Directors Lab, DirectorsLabChicago, Bastard Playground, Fresh Ground Pepper's PlayGroup, a Playwrights Horizons Robert Moss Directing Fellow, an Emerging Leaders of NY Arts Fellow, and an Associate Member of SDC. As a producer, Ilana has led community-driven projects throughout NY and is Artistic Director of *Argument Sessions*, an ongoing series of immersive events taken from SCOTUS transcripts. Ilana moved to the Wood River Valley to work with COF and directed this summer's production of *Life Sucks*. [ilanabecker.com](http://ilanabecker.com)

**K.O. OGILVIE (Stage Management)** worked in the L.A. area as a stage manager for theatre and dance, an event coordinator for Universal Studios, and an art department assistant in film before becoming a full-time Valley resident in 2004. She has been Stage Manager for the Fools since the 2005/2006 season and is now the Company's Production Manager. When not managing at work, K.O. manages to have fun with her wife, two dogs and her cat.

**MIKE INWOOD (Lighting Design)** Previously with COF: *Life Sucks*. Past productions include the Off-Broadway premieres of *Small Mouth Sounds* (Signature Theatre), *Stupid Fucking Bird* (Pearl Theatre Company), *Out Cold/Zippo Songs* (BAM), and *HIR* (Playwrights Horizons). Regionally, Mike has designed productions with companies including Boston Lyric Opera, Magic Theatre, Portland Opera,

Philadelphia Theatre Company, Pittsburgh Opera, Perseverance Theatre, and The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival. Mike was nominated for the American Theatre Wing's Henry Hewes Design Award in 2014 for his design of *The Essential Straight and Narrow* (Mad Ones, NYC) and earned a 2010 Emmy Award for his work with NBC Sports (Vancouver Winter Olympic Games). [mikeinwood.com](http://mikeinwood.com)

**JOE LAVIGNE (Scenic Designer)** has been a resident of the Wood River Valley since 1995. He holds a degree in theatre with an emphasis in scenic design from Boise State University. While at BSU, Joe's first realized set design, *Dante*, earned a regional KCACTF scenic design award. Since 2006, Joe has built every set and designed numerous plays for each season at Company of Fools. Highlights include *August: Osage County*, *K2*, *Doubt*, *God of Carnage*, *Other Desert Cities*, *Enchanted April* and *Proof*. Joe is eternally grateful to Denise and Rusty for starting the journey, to John for his keen insight, to Dennis for his eye for color and—as always—to Jen and Ava for their support and spark.

**EMMA WILK (Sound Design)** is a NYC-based sound designer. Recent/favorite credits include: *Raisin* (Astoria Performing Arts Center), *Crane: on earth, in sky* (premiered at The Lied Center in Lincoln, NE), *The King Stag* (The New School), *Lost Voices* (HERE Arts Center), *Miss Oriental* (Glicker-Millstein, Barnard), *Big River*, *Gypsy* and *Quartet*, (Sharon Playhouse, Sharon CT), *Gorey* (Sheen Center and HERE Arts Center), *Visiting Hours* (TheaterLab), *The Way We Get By* (American Theater Group), *Loose Canon* (Soho Playhouse), *Sex of the Baby* (Access Theater), *After the Fall* and *The Crucible* (Atlantic Stage 2), *Zwerve* (Dixon Place), *Tigers Be Still* (Drilling Company), *Mass: A New Musical* (The Brick), *The Shape of Things* (45th St Theater), *PS Jones and the Frozen City* (co-design, The New Ohio), *Ghost Girl* (Workshop Theater). [emmamwilk.com](http://emmamwilk.com)

# THOUGHTS FROM THE COMPANY

## From Playwright **Tanya Barfield** FOR BLAINE COUNTY STUDENTS



**In life: Event A leads to B which leads to C.** But, in one's mind, all three events might happen concurrently or out of sequence. Dream logic governs. *Bright Half Life* flashes through almost fifty years of a relationship.

The biggest challenge in writing the play offered me a creative opportunity: how do I structure a satisfying dramatic arc with a nonlinear narrative? How do I calibrate momentum through a series of short scenes? And although it unfolds out of sequence, the play follows a traditional structure in terms dramatic tension and rising action. The penultimate moment of *Bright Half Life* is chronologically the inciting incident—but it is also the climax. We see the catalyst for the entire play just before the story ends. This structure provides a very active experience for the audience as they constantly have to orient themselves in time and place.

For many years, I wanted to write a romantic play. But, I didn't want it to be saccharine sweet. I wanted it to feel as real and as complicated as an entire life. So, I wrote a mixed up love story about the highs and lows of a long term relationship. When I first began writing, I didn't realize that I was actually writing the play because many of the scenes are quite short—like flashes of memory. (I constantly lecture my students to write longer scenes. "Don't write plays as if you've written them on Twitter," I say). But, slowly, like developing old film, the play began to emerge as flashes of story.

The "politics of being gay" grace notes *Bright Half Life*. I never intended for the story to be political. But, like it or not—up until Obama legalized gay marriage—there has always been something inherently political about being gay. (Unfortunately, the Obama reprieve was brief as the politics of love is reemerging in our national arena today). In contrast to our country's political landscape, Erika and Vicky's romance was out of synch: their personal marriage proposal is juxtaposed against national uproar over the Defense of Marriage Act during the Clinton years and the couple's most turbulent times occur as the nation becomes more open-minded during the Obama years.

But, ultimately, the play is intended to transcend politics. It's my hope that Erika and Vicky's story can reach any person of any gender or race or age—their story is for all of us that have been touched, at one time or another, by love.

—Tanya Barfield





# THOUGHTS FROM THE COMPANY

★ This play is about \_\_\_\_\_.

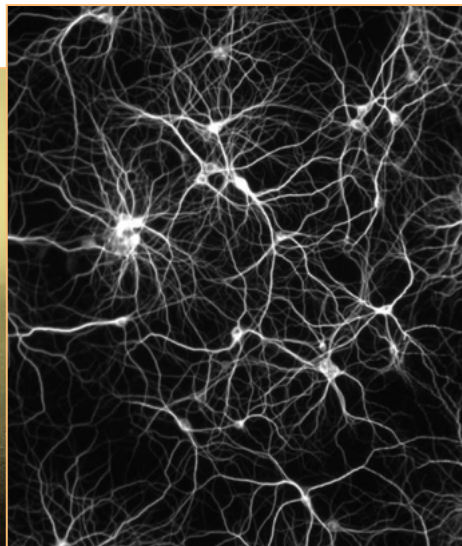
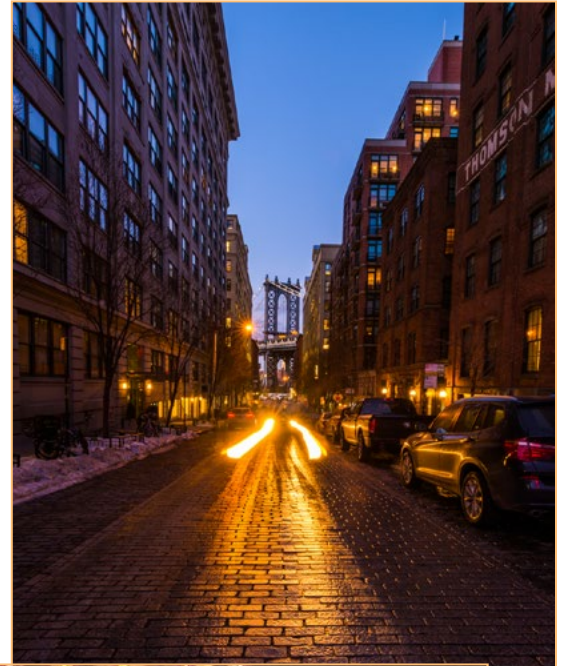
This play mirrors pieces of my own life. I've been in queer, interracial relationships, and reading *BRIGHT HALF LIFE* makes me feel seen. Telling all kinds of stories in the theater is so important because when we feel seen, we feel powerful and valued.

—SOPHIE HASSETT (Erica)

“PEOPLE WILL FORGET  
WHAT YOU SAID,  
PEOPLE WILL FORGET  
WHAT YOU DID,  
BUT PEOPLE WILL  
NEVER FORGET  
HOW YOU  
MADE THEM FEEL.”

MAYA ANGELOU

—shared by LIZ MORGAN (Vicky)



When I think of the play, I think of how our memories are uniquely structured: the way thoughts cascade into one another, and how one thought sets off another. It feels random, but each of our past experiences inform the way that the cascade happens. Every person's cascade is unique; it's our own set of dominoes that we're continually setting on end in rows, knocking down, and resetting again.

—MIKE INWOOD (Lighting Designer)



## AN EXCERPT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH TANYA BARFIELD IN THE INTERVAL, WRITTEN BY VICTORIA MYER

**We read that you didn't want to give too much away about *Bright Half Life*.**

It's not so much giving it away, but I think because of the structure of the play—it moves back and forth through time, and you see fragments, and you see something that happened in 2010, and then you see what started it in 2009—**part of the pleasure for the audience, I think, in watching the show, is figuring out the sequence of events.** When we've done readings of it there have been different moments for different audience members of when the light bulb has gone off like, "Oh, that's connected to this and I connected it to that in that way." **So, the structure of the show is thematically relevant to the play, but also gives the viewer a different kind of experience.**

**When you were conceiving this play did you always know how you wanted to structure it? Or did that come later as you saw how the emotional life of the story was unfolding?**

The structure of it came later. When I started the play, I thought that I was just writing scene fragments to explore the world of the play and the characters. **Then I realized, after I'd written several scenes, that what I was writing was the play; that the fragmented nature of the scenes was actually what the play was about on a larger level.** It's very different than the play (*The Call*) that I just had two years ago at Playwrights Horizons, which unfolds linearly, has long scenes, and traditional structure. This play is quite different, which I find very exciting.

**Language plays a major structural role in this play. Would you mind telling us a little about that?**

The rhythm of the language is important. **It's important to me that the language sound real and true to life.** Oftentimes, we don't construct our sentences with subject, verb, object, so I might say, "The telephone over there, hand it to me." And in many ways, the sentence structure with the beginning, middle, and end being out of order, is very much how the play works. But what I tried to do was give the audience the sense of rising action, beginning, middle, and end, and Aristotelian dramatic structure rhythmically. So, they're going on a ride that feels almost traditional, but it's all scrambled and mixed up.



**It sounds almost musical.**

Actually, even though the play is comprised of many short scenes, I've divided into ten parts that we've called **movements**, and they function very differently.

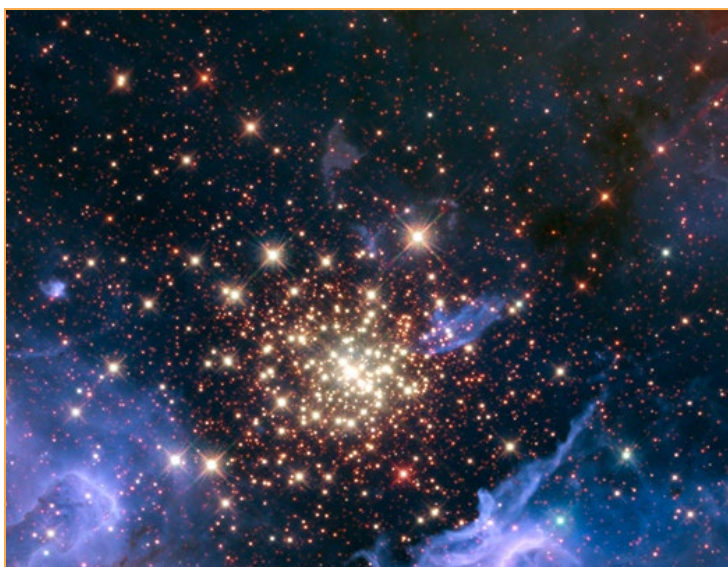
**What's your process like as a writer?**

**I usually start with writing something that I'm resisting writing.** My play *The Blue Door*, which is ultimately about blackness and internalized racism, was something that I didn't want to explore. And my recent play, *The Call*, was about adoption and I thought, "Well, that won't make a good play." And for this, somebody many years ago said, "Why don't you write a love story?" and I thought, "Eh, I don't want to write a love story." Then I wanted to write about the challenges in long term relationships, so the play became a hybrid of both those things. But it came out of, "I don't really want to write about that." That tends to be how I end up writing. **My best plays, or plays that I'm most satisfied with, are plays that I either thought would make a terrible play, or I thought, "Maybe that would be a good play, but I don't want to write it because it scares me."** I tend to start from a place of resistance.

**How do you go from resisting to actually sitting down and writing?**

I usually say, "Well, I just need to get this out of my system, and once I just free-write a little bit of this, then I'll sit down and write the real play, the good play." It's an act of purging this creative material that ultimately ends up being the play.

**For the rest of this interview with playwright Tanya Barfield, visit: [theintervalny.com/interviews/2015/02/an-interview-with-tanya-barfield/](http://theintervalny.com/interviews/2015/02/an-interview-with-tanya-barfield/)**



# LGBTQ RIGHTS TIMELINE

**The Gay Rights Movement (or LGBTQ Rights Movement—Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Questioning or Queer) is a civil rights movement that advocates equal rights for LGBTQ individuals. Legislation and milestones related to the LGBTQ community predate the acronym. This timeline contains just a small handful of pivotal events.**

1924: Henry Gerber founds the Society for Human Rights, the first documented gay rights organization in the U.S.

1928: Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel, The Well of Loneliness, is published. As a result, homosexuality becomes a topic of conversation in the U.S. and England.

1948: Alfred Kinsey's landmark book, Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, is published. Kinsey proposes that sexual orientation lies on a spectrum.

1950: Activist Harry Hay founds the Mattachine Society in order to organize and advocate for homosexual rights and to reduce the isolation felt by many gays and lesbians.

1953: Pres. Eisenhower signs an Executive Order for the dismissal of gov. workers who engage in "sexual perversion." Hundreds of people lose their jobs as a result.

1962: Illinois becomes the first state to decriminalize homosexual acts between two consenting adults in private.

1969: The Stonewall Riots, named after the historically gay-frequented bar, The Stonewall Inn, take place in NYC.

1970: The first gay pride marches are held in multiple cities in the U.S. on the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots.

1973: The American Psychiatric Association removes homosexuality from the DSM-II, concluding that it is not a mental illness. Evelyn Hooker's pioneering research on homosexuality plays a crucial role in this decision.

1974: Elaine Noble of Massachusetts becomes the first openly gay person to be elected as a state legislator.

1977: Quebec, Canada prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation. And Harvey Milk is elected supervisor in San Francisco. Milk is then assassinated, along with Mayor Greg Moscone. The Rainbow Flag is first flown.

1979: Over 100,000 people participate in the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) chapters are founded across the U.S.

1982: The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force initiates a project aimed to counter the rise in homophobic violence.

1983: The first National Lesbians of Color Conference is organized in Los Angeles.

1984: After an 8-year legal battle, Duncan Donovan wins the right to receive the death benefits of his life partner.

1985: Pride Foundation founded in support of the LGBTQ communities in AK, ID, MT, OR and WA.

1993: Department of Defense issues "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

1994: Idaho voters, by a close vote, rejected an initiative that would have forbidden state and local governments from granting minority rights based on homosexual behavior.

1996: In *Romer v. Evans*, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) rules that Colorado's 2nd amendment, which denies gays and lesbians protections against discrimination, is unconstitutional. Pres. Clinton signs DOMA, which defines marriage as a union between one man and one woman, into law.

1998: Coretta Scott King speaks out against homophobia.

1999: CA adopts a domestic partner law, allowing same-sex couples equal rights, responsibilities, benefits, and protections as married couples.

2000: Vermont becomes the first state to legalize civil unions, a unity similar to domestic partnerships. Israel begins recognizing same-sex relationships for foreign partners of Israeli residents.

2004: MA legalizes same-sex marriage and NJ legalizes domestic partnerships; eleven other states ban such legal recognitions. Same-sex marriage is also banned in Australia, although the neighboring nation of New Zealand passes legislation recognizing gay civil unions.

2006: Discrimination based on sexual orientation is banned in Illinois, and Washington state adds sexual orientation to its existing anti-discrimination laws. In the same year, Idaho bans same-sex marriage.

2008: Proposition 8, an amendment banning same-sex marriage in CA, is passed into law. NOH8 campaign begins.



# LGBTQ RIGHTS TIMELINE (CONTINUED) & REGIONAL RESOURCES

---

2009: Pres. Obama signs the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, expanding Federal Hate Crime Law to include crimes motivated by a victim's actual or perceived gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

2010: "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" is repealed following a Senate vote; homosexuals can serve openly in the Armed Forces.

2011: The Obama administration states they will no longer support DOMA.

2013: SCOTUS rules that the key parts of DOMA are unconstitutional and that gay couples are entitled to federal benefits such as Social Security survivor benefits and family leave. The Court's ruling on CA's Proposition 8 results in gay marriages being resumed in that state. Ketchum also becomes the 3rd ID city to pass an LGBT non-discrimination ordinance, following Sandpoint and Boise.

2014: In the Idaho case Lotta vs. Otter, four Idaho lesbian couples declared Idaho marriage laws that ban same-sex marriage unconstitutional under the 14th Amendment. They won, and the Ninth Circuit upheld the district court ruling. The organization Add The Words, Idaho began advocating for adding the words "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" to Idaho's human rights act.

2015: SCOTUS hears argument in Obergefell v. Hodges over whether or not gay marriage is a right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, and whether or not gay marriages performed in states where it has been legalized must be recognized in states which ban the practice. The Court ruled 5-4 that gay marriage is a constitutional right, meaning that all 50 states must allow it and that all existing bans are invalid. The decision concluded a decades-long battle over whether gay marriage would be federally legalized.

2016: Hailey PFLAG chapter founded, the 5th in ID. A record number of "out" athletes compete in Olympic summer games. Kate Brown is elected governor of OR, becoming the highest-ranking LGBTQ person to hold office in the U.S.

2017: As the time goes on, so do local, national, and international conversations and legislation about LGBTQ rights regarding marriage, adoption, jobs, the military, bathrooms, and more—truly every aspect of people's lives.

---

## RESOURCES:

**Local and regional resources for LGBTQ community support and information:**

**The Pride Foundation**

[pridefoundation.org](http://pridefoundation.org)

**The Community Center**

[tccidaho.org](http://tccidaho.org)

**Breaking The Prejudice Habit**

[breakingprejudice.org](http://breakingprejudice.org)

**The Advocates**

[theadvocatesorg.org](http://theadvocatesorg.org)

**PFlag**

[pflag.org](http://pflag.org)

# MEMORY STUDY



Do you have a favorite memory?

How does your current mood affect that memory when you think about it?

While working on BRIGHT HALF LIFE, we've been thinking about the ways our memories of past experiences might help inform the decisions we make in the present. We also wondered if how we feel in the moment we're remembering a past experience might change our experience of the memory we're having—or even the memory itself. So we've been reading about the ways people receive and experience memories, including the University of Texas at Austin study, via *ScienceDaily*, excerpted below.

## MEMORIES SERVE AS TOOLS FOR LEARNING AND DECISION-MAKING

According to psychology research from the University of Texas at Austin, when humans learn, their brains relate new information with past experiences to derive new knowledge.

The study, led by Alison Preston, assistant professor of psychology and neurobiology, shows **this memory-binding process allows people to better understand new concepts and make future decisions.** The findings could lead to better teaching methods, as well as treatment of degenerative neurological disorders, such as dementia. Preston says, "Memories are not just for reflecting on the past; they help us make the best decisions for the future."

In the study, 34 subjects were shown a series of paired images composed of different elements (for example, an object and an outdoor scene). **Each of the paired images would then reappear in more presentations.** A backpack, paired with a horse in the first presentation, would appear alongside a field in a later presentation. The overlap between the backpack and outdoor scenery (horse and field) would cause the viewer to associate the backpack with the horse and field. **The researchers used this strategy to see how respondents would delve back to a recent memory while processing new information.**

Preston and her team were able to see how the respondents thought about past images while looking at overlapping images. The researchers found the subjects **who reactivated related memories while looking at overlapping image pairs were able to make associations between individual items** (i.e. the horse and the field) despite the fact that **they had never studied those images together.**

To illustrate the ways in which this cognitive process works, Preston describes an everyday scenario. Imagine you see a new neighbor walking a Great Dane down the street. At a different time and place, you may see a woman walking the same dog in the park. When experiencing the woman walking her dog, the brain conjures images of the recent memory of the neighbor and his Great Dane, causing an association between the dog walkers to be formed in memory. The derived relationship between the dog walkers would then allow you to infer the woman is also a new neighbor even though you have never seen her in your neighborhood.

**"By combining past events with new information, we're able to derive new knowledge and better anticipate what to expect in the future."**

### Excerpts from:

"Memories serve as tools for learning and decision-making."  
University of Texas at Austin. *ScienceDaily*, 11 July 2012.  
[sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/07/120711154223.htm](http://sciencedaily.com/releases/2012/07/120711154223.htm)



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER **BEFORE** SEEING THE PLAY

- What was a big decision you have had to make in your life? What previous experiences came to mind while making that decision?
- Do you have a favorite memory? How does your current mood affect that memory when you think about it?
- How do you take a risk when you can't know the outcome? What helps you find the courage?

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER **AFTER** SEEING THE PLAY

- Did you relate to Vicky at any point? Did you relate with Erica? Do either of them remind you of anyone you know? What was it about their behavior and experiences that felt familiar or relatable?
- How did you experience time while watching the play?
- Did you know when and where scenes were taking place? If so, how? If not, what was that experience like?
- What did you notice about the sound design? About the lighting design? About the scenic and costume designs? How would you describe the ways in which each of those elements helped to tell the story?
- How would you describe what this play is about in one sentence?  
"This is a play about \_\_\_\_\_."
- How might you phrase that sentence as an open question?
- If you had to write a play or story with that question at its core, how might you begin? Who would be the characters? What kind of structure might you use?



### WAYS TO ENGAGE STUDENTS **AFTER** SEEING THE PLAY

Using the above questions as potential prompts, here are some ways to encourage further examination of the play-going experience:

#### EXPLORE

- ★ Free-write a Journal Entry
- ★ Write a Scene, Short Play or Story
- ★ Write a Poem or Song Lyric

#### ANALYZE

- ★ Draw a Connection to a Current Event or Cultural Reference (Book, Movie, Play, etc.)
- ★ Connect, Compare, Contrast

#### INTERACT

- ★ Hold a Debate
- ★ Improvise Scenes