

# COMPANY OF FOOLS

## Study Guide

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# Clybourne Park

by Bruce Norris

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# WELCOME TO COMPANY OF FOOLS

Dear Educator,

Company of Fools and the Sun Valley Center for the Arts is pleased to offer you this study guide to prepare you and your students for our production of *Clybourne Park*. Working with schools is a fundamental part of The Center's mission.

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 11–12.

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

—Company of Fools

## ABOUT THE PLAY: *Clybourne Park*

Bruce Norris's *Clybourne Park* is inspired by Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 drama *A Raisin in the Sun*, the first play written by an African American woman to be produced on Broadway. This critically acclaimed, Pulitzer Prize-winning play takes on the ongoing conversation about race, gentrification, property ownership, and community with biting wit. Set in the same house in two different decades, 50 years apart, *Clybourne Park* is an unforgettable, spiky, sophisticated satire that asks us to consider what makes a neighborhood feel like home, and how it can be preserved.

*Clybourne Park* is set in a fictional central Chicago neighborhood originated by Lorraine Hansberry in her 1959 play, *A Raisin in the Sun*. In Hansberry's play, a black family plans to move to an all-white suburb. Act 1 of *Clybourne Park* takes place in 1959, with a white family planning to move out of their house and sell it to a black family. Act 2 takes place in 2009 and deals with a black couple, Lena and Kevin, trying to sell the same house and hoping to preserve its "architectural integrity." Lena is the niece of the owners, the Youngers, characters in Hansberry's play.

*Clybourne Park* premiered Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizons in New York in 2010, followed by a West End run at the Royal Court Theatre beginning in 2011, and a Broadway run at the Walter Kerr Theatre beginning in 2012.



Lorraine Hansberry



Film version of *A Raisin in the Sun*

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

- What does “Home” mean to you? How about “Community”? How would you describe your “Neighborhood”?
- How do you welcome someone new to your community? Is it difficult or easy to include someone who is different from you in your community? Please explain.
- Language can be very powerful. Explain some of the ways that language has power.
- How do you approach talking about controversial subjects, such as racism?



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

- How would you briefly describe this play's story or what this play is about in one sentence?  
 “This is a play about \_\_\_\_\_.”
- How did the different design elements add to the story?
- What controversial topics are covered in the play? Did anything surprise you? If so, why?
- What are some of the ways that the playwright, Bruce Norris, uses language to convey controversial ideas?
- Using examples from the play, how much have social attitudes changed in the last 50 years? In what ways have they changed, and in what ways have they stayed the same?
- How are conflicts in your neighborhood resolved? How has your neighborhood changed over time?



### ★ *Teacher Tip!*

## 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

### ANALYZE

Draw a connection to a current  
event or cultural reference

Connect, compare, contrast

### INTERACT

Improvise scenes

Talk to others in your  
community about their story

# ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: Bruce Norris



Bruce Norris is the author of the plays DOMESTICATED, THE LOW ROAD, A PARALLELOGRAM, CLYBOURNE PARK, THE UNMENTIONABLES, THE PAIN AND THE ITCH, PURPLE HEART, WE ALL WENT DOWN TO AMSTERDAM, and THE INFIDEL, among others. In 2011-2012 he received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, as well as the Olivier, Evening Standard, and Tony Awards for CLYBOURNE PARK. His work has been produced by Steppenwolf Theatre, Lincoln Center Theater, Playwrights Horizons, The Royal Court Theatre, ACT, Yale Repertory Theatre, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, Staatstheater Mainz, and many others. He is a recipient of the 2009 Steinberg Playwright Award, The 2006 Whiting Foundation Prize for Drama, and two Joseph Jefferson Awards for Best New Work. He was born in Houston and lives in New York City.

## ABOUT THIS COMPANY OF FOOLS PRODUCTION

### The Creative Team:

Company of Fools Founding Member **Denise Simone** directs the play with scenic design by **Amanda Lavigne**, lighting design by **Amanda Clegg-Lyon** (Steppenwolf's 1984), costume design by **Elizabeth Weiss Hopper** (COF's *Vanya and Sonia and Masha and Spike*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*), sound design by **Russell Simone Wilson** (COF's *Almost Maine*, *Distracted*, *Dead Man's Cell Phone*), and stage management by resident stage manager **K.O. Ogilvie**.

### Cast:



**CHRIS CARWITHEN (Karl/Steve)** is a Company Artist with Company of Fools. Since his Liberty Theatre debut in *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*, Chris has had the pleasure of performing in COF productions including *Good*

*People*; *A Year with Frog and Toad*; *Almost, Maine*; *Grey Gardens*; *ART*; and *Life Sucks*. Most recently he was seen rocking out in the musical *Striking 12*. A theatre arts graduate from Southern Oregon University, Chris has been involved with professional companies including the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, the 5th Avenue in Seattle, the Oregon Cabaret Theatre, ArtsWest, and the Oregon Hult Center. Chris also works as a commercial actor for various industrials in the Seattle area and lends his voice to audiobooks for Audible.com. When not onstage, he plays the role of Administrative Assistant at the Sun Valley Center for the Arts.



**SCOTT CREIGHTON (Russ/Dan)** *Clybourne Park* marks Scott's 13th main stage appearance with the Fools. Roles include Beverly Weston in *August: Osage County*; Smee in *Peter and the Starcatcher*; Marc in *Art*;

George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*; Ben

Hecht in *Moonlight and Magnolias*; H.C. Curry in *110 in the Shade*; Selsdon Mobraay in *Noises Off*; The Preacher in *Violet*; Henry Potter in *It's a Wonderful Life*; Schultz in *Circle Mirror Transformation*; Father in *The Velveteen Rabbit*; and The Old Actor in *The Woman in Black*. Scott began his acting career in Seattle in 1976. He was invited to the valley in 1994 to play the title role in *The Nerd* and moved here permanently the following year.



### CHRIS HENDERSON

**(Kenneth)** Chris Henderson recently graduated from Boise State's Theatre Arts Program with a Bachelor of Arts. He appeared in the ensemble of Boise State's *Urinetown: The Musical*, was assistant stage

manager for Boise State's *Crimes of the Heart* and *This is Our Youth*, and was one of the first graduates to present an acting showcase as a senior project. His two main passions are creating theatre and writing music.



### DAVID JANESKI (Jim/Tom)

has been performing in the Wood River Valley for nearly a decade. He is honored to share in the telling of this important story. David's Company of Fools production credits include *The Glass*

*Menagerie*; *You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown*; *Enchanted April*; *Peter and the Starcatcher*; *August: Osage County*; and *A Day in Hollywood / A Night in the Ukraine*. David has additionally appeared in COF's staged readings of *Mauritius*, *Casa Valentina*, and *A Bright New Boise*. He and his talented wife, Aly, enjoy performing duets around town as The Beverly Lovers; visit [beverlylovers.com](http://beverlylovers.com).



**CLAUDIA McCAIN (Bev/Kathy)** is thrilled to work with Company of Fools on this important play. Last summer she created, produced and performed a one-woman show entitled *Four Stories—One Woman in Michigan*. Recently she appeared as Gingy in *Love, Loss and What I*

*Wore* for Sun Valley Performing Arts and Sawtooth Productions. Favorite roles include Vivian Bearing in *Wit*, Emily Dickinson in *The Belle of Amherst*, and Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*. COF credits include the actor in *White Rabbit/Red Rabbit*, Dorothea in *Eleemosynary*, Ruth in *Collected Stories*, and Clarie in *Steel Magnolias*. She dedicates her show to beautiful John Glenn and her second mother, Alma O'Neal.



### TROY VALJEAN RUCKER

**(Albert/Kevin)** has performed in plays and musicals off-Broadway, regionally, and on European and National Tours. Opera/Concerts: New York City Opera, Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Kennedy

Center, Aretha Franklin with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. Many appearances in film, television, commercials, print and web series.



### MAYA SHARPE (Francine/Lena)

**Musician. Actor. Filmmaker.** Maya Sharpe is a multidisciplinary artist based in New York and Los Angeles. Her passion lies in exploring simplicity in humanity and composition as a means to

demonstrate that there is more of a connection and love between everything than the politically derived disconnect and hatred.



### ALY WEPPL0 (Betsy)

first appeared onstage with Company of Fools in *The Spitfire Grill*. She is now a proud Company Artist whose work at COF includes *Grey Gardens*; *August: Osage*

*County*; *Enchanted April*; *The Glass Menagerie*; *Steel Magnolias*; and *A Year with Frog and Toad*, to name a few. Other professional credits include Fiona in *Shrek! The Musical*, *Time Stands Still*, *Wait Until Dark*, and *Spelling Bee*. Aly is a graduate of the University of Richmond, where her work culminated in the creation of a one-woman show about the evolution of language and our ideas of gender.

# A LOOK AT 1959 AND 2009

**ACT 1 of *Clybourne Park* takes place in 1959, with a white family planning to sell their house to a black family. ACT 2 of *Clybourne Park* is set in the same house in 2009, when the neighborhood has become a predominantly black community.**

## 1959

**Feb 3:** Martin Luther King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, visit India, and discuss the philosophy of nonviolent protests with Mahatma Gandhi's followers.

**Mar 3:** Ho Chi Minh declares a "people's war" to unite Vietnam, formally starting the Second Indochina War.

**Mar 11:** Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* opens on Broadway, starring Sidney Poitier and Ruby Dee. At 29, Hansberry becomes the youngest American playwright and 5th woman to receive the NY Drama Critic's Circle Award for Best Play.

**April 6:** NASA announces The Mercury Seven, America's first seven astronauts selected for the first U.S. orbital flight.

**April 18:** A Youth March for Integrated Schools takes place in Washington, DC, drawing an estimated 26,000 people. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Philip Randolph, Roy Wilkins, and Charles S. Zimmerman deliver speeches.

**May 20:** Japanese-Americans regain their citizenship.

**May 25:** U.S. Supreme Court rules Louisiana's prohibition of black and white boxers sparring unconstitutional, ending segregated athletic competition.

**June 5:** In the San Francisco Bay Area, 40 teachers are subpoenaed by the House Un-American Activities Committee.

**June 9:** The first ballistic missile-carrying submarine, the USS George Washington, launches at Groton, Ct.

**July 23:** Vice President Richard Nixon flies to Moscow to open the U.S. Trade and Cultural Fair in Sokolniki Park, organized as a goodwill gesture by the USSR.

**Aug 21:** Hawaii officially becomes the 50th state in the U.S., with a proclamation signed by President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

**Sept 12:** NBC launches *Bonanza*, the first color western on TV.

**Oct 2:** Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone* debuts on CBS.

**Oct 10:** Pan American becomes the first airline to offer regular flights around world.

**Nov 18:** *Ben-Hur*, the Biblical-era movie spectacle starring Charlton Heston, has its world premiere in New York.

**Dec 1:** The Antarctic Treaty signed by 12 nations with stations there, providing, "Antarctica shall be used for peaceful purposes, only."

## 2009

**Jan 15:** Pilots Chelsey Sullenberger and Jeffrey Skiles safely glide US Airways Flight 1549 onto the Hudson River in NY. The incident becomes known as the "Miracle on the Hudson."

**Jan 18:** Gaza War ends in a unilateral ceasefire.

**Jan 20:** Barack Obama is inaugurated as the 44th President of the United States of America, and becomes the United States' first African-American president.

**Feb 3:** Eric Holder becomes 82nd—and 1st African American—U.S. Attorney General, succeeding Michael Mukasey.

**Mar 9:** U.S. Stocks hit a new low, stressing the severity of the financial crisis.

**Mar 12:** Anthony Doyle, former Chicago police officer, sentenced to 12 years in prison for racketeering.

**April:** "Swine Flu", or H1N1, pandemic breaks out.

**April 20:** Lynn Nottage's play *Ruined* wins the Pulitzer Prize.

**June 1:** General Motors files for chapter 11 bankruptcy.

**June 25:** "King of Pop" Michael Jackson dies at the age of 50.

**July 15:** *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* film based on the books by J.K. Rowling released worldwide.

**Aug 16:** Usain Bolt wins 100m in the 12th World Championships, and soon after wins the 200m.

**Aug 29:** U.S. Senator Ted Kennedy dies at the age of 77.

**Sept 9:** Citizens United v. FEC argued at U.S. Supreme Court.

**Sept 12:** The 9-12 Project organizes multiple marches and demonstrations across the USA to protest government spending.

**Sept 18:** In Chicago, four former members of a now-disbanded police unit admit that they used to barge into people's homes and steal money.

**Sept 23:** *Modern Family* premieres on ABC.

**Oct 24:** First International Day of Climate Action.

**Dec 10:** President Barack Obama accepts Nobel Peace Prize.

# A RAISIN IN THE SUN, LORRAINE HANSBERRY, and THE U.S. SUPREME COURT

Between 1900 and the 1930s, Chicago's black population grew from 30,000 to approximately 236,000, and the city and surrounding suburbs became increasingly racially segregated. Restrictive covenants were developed through efforts put in place by the Chicago Real Estate Board that made it illegal for black people to move into specified areas. By the 1920s, up to 85% of Chicago was covered by these covenants.

Playwright Lorraine Hansberry's 1959 play *A Raisin in the Sun* is the inspiration for *Clybourne Park*, and is based on a real court case that her family went through between 1937 and 1940 to strike down these covenants. When Hansberry was eight years old, her father, Carl, purchased a home in what people considered to be a middle-class "white neighborhood" of Chicago called Woodlawn, where they were threatened and harassed. Her family was sued by a white neighbor who argued the restrictive agreement prevented the sale of homes in the neighborhood to black people, and that case moved through the court system all the way to the U.S. Supreme court. Carl Hansberry won *Hansberry v. Lee* on a technicality, allowing 500 homes to open up to black families in the Woodlawn and set the stage for a 1948 U.S. Supreme Court case, *Shelley v. Kraemer*, that finally ended racially restrictive covenants. Still, in 1959, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights called Chicago "the most residentially segregated large city in America."

April 23, 1964

To the Editor, *The New York Times*:

With reference to civil disobedience and the Congress of Racial Equality stall-in:

My father was typical of a generation of Negroes who believed that the "American way" could successfully be made to work to democratize the United States. Thus, twenty-five years ago, he spent a small personal fortune, his considerable talents, and many years of his life fighting, in association with NAACP attorneys, Chicago's "restrictive covenants" in one of this nation's ugliest ghettos.

That fight also required that our family occupy the disputed property in a hellishly hostile "white neighborhood" in which, literally, howling mobs surrounded our house. One of their missiles almost took the life of the then eight year-old signer of this letter. My memories of this "correct" way of fighting white supremacy in America included being spat at, cursed and pummeled in the daily trek to and from school. And I also remember my desperate and courageous mother, patrolling our house all night with a loaded German Luger, doggedly guarding her four children, while my father fought the respectable part of the battle in the Washington court.

The fact that my father and the NAACP "won" a Supreme Court decision, in a now famous case which bears his name in the law books, is—ironically—the sort of "progress" our satisfied friends allude to when they presume to deride the more radical means of struggle. The cost, in emotional turmoil, time and money, which led to my father's early death as a permanently embittered exile in a foreign country when he saw that after such sacrificial efforts the Negroes of Chicago were as ghetto-locked as ever, does not seem to figure in their calculations.

That is the reality that I am faced with when I now read that some Negroes my own age and younger say that we must now lie down in the streets, tie up traffic, do whatever we can—take to the hills with guns if necessary—and fight back. Fatuous people remark these days on our "bitterness." Why, of course we are bitter. The entire situation suggests that the nation be reminded of the too little noted final lines of Langston Hughes' mighty poem.

*What happens to a dream deferred?  
Does it dry up  
Like a raisin in the sun?  
Or fester like a sore  
And then run?  
Does it stink like rotten meat?  
Or crust and sugar over  
Like a syrupy sweet?  
Maybe it just sags  
Like a heavy load.  
Or does it explode?*

Sincerely,  
Lorraine Hansberry



Lorraine Hansberry

## EXCERPTS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT BRUCE NORRIS

by Steppenwolf Theatre Company's then-Artistic Producer, REBECCA RUGG.  
From Steppenwolf Theatre Company's *Backstage Archive*, 2011–2012, Volume 1

Bruce Norris

**Rebecca Rugg:** *Clybourne Park* is a very complex play about race, among other topics. The experience of watching it, and I'll speak here as a white person, is quite complicated.

**Bruce Norris:** Well, I think the most interesting question that has been put to me about it was the one you put to me last time we talked, which was “did you write this play for white people?” Remember?

**RR:** Yeah, and you said yes.

**BN:** And I said yes.

**RR:** And I was totally shocked. I was sure you were going to say no.

**BN:** No, I think it is a play for white people. It's a play about white people. It's about the white response to race, about being the power elite, about being the people who have power in the race argument, and what that makes us in the present day—the contortions that makes us go through. Because on the Left we really, really like to deny the power that we have. We don't want to seem like we're powerful and have the largest army in the world. We want to pretend that we don't. So, while the play is about white people, it's even better if there are black people in the audience because it makes white people even more uncomfortable.

**RR:** I've heard you say elsewhere that *Clybourne Park* is inspired by Karl Linder, who, before he was yours, was Lorraine Hansberry's character in *A Raisin in the Sun*.

**BN:** I saw *A Raisin in the Sun* as a film in probably 7th grade. Interestingly our Social Studies teacher was showing it to a class of all white students who lived in an independent school district the boundaries of which had been formed specifically to prevent our being integrated into the Houston school district and being bussed to other schools with black students. So I don't know whether our teacher was just obtuse or crafty and subversive but she was showing us a movie that basically in the end—because Karl doesn't come in until the second act—is really pointing a finger at us and saying we are those people. So I watch it at twelve years old and I could realize even then that I'm Karl Linder. To see that when you're a kid and to realize that you're the villain has an impact. For years I thought I wanted to play Karl Linder but then as time went on I thought it's really an interesting story to think about the conversation that was going on in the white community about the Younger family moving into Clybourne Park. It percolated for many years and that's how I ended up writing this play.



# IDAHO CONTENT STANDARDS

Reading Standards for Literature that apply to *Company of Fools* play, *Clybourne Park* (Grades 11–12):

## KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

**RL. 11-12.1** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

**RL. 11-12.2** Determine two or more themes or central ideas in a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.

**RL.11-12.3** Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

## CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

**RL.11-12.4** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or powerful language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors).

## INTEGRATION OF KEY IDEAS

**RL.11-12.5** Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

### Materials for this study guide were gathered from these sources:

Steppenwolf Theatre Company’s *Backstage Archive*, 2011–2012, Volume 1  
[www.steppenwolf.org/articles/race-pulitzers-and-punchlines/](http://www.steppenwolf.org/articles/race-pulitzers-and-punchlines/)  
[www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/community/boise/article149968282.html](http://www.idahostatesman.com/news/local/community/boise/article149968282.html)