THE CHRISTIANS
Study Guide Contents

3.) Production Information
4.) Introduction
5.) Letter from the Director
6.) About the Author
7.) Synopsis
8.) Megachurches
9.) Religious Diversity and Dissidents
10.) Questions for Discussion
11.) Elements of Teaching Theatre
14.) Sources and Resources

Director of Educational Outreach
Lauren Unbekant
(315) 443-1150

Manager of Educational Outreach
Kate Laissle
(315) 442-7755

Group Sales & Student Matinees
Tracey White
(315) 443-9844

Box Office
(315) 443-3275
THE CHRISTIANS

by

Lucas Hnath

DIRECTED BY

Timothy Bond

CO-PRODUCED WITH

Wilma Theatre

SCENIC DESIGNER
Matt Saunders

COSTUME DESIGNER
Helen Huang

LIGHTING DESIGNER
Thom Weaver

SOUND DESIGNER
Michael Keck

PROJECTION DESIGNER
Kate Freer

STAGE MANAGER
Laura Jane Collins

CASTING
Harriet Bass


April 6 - 24, 2016
A FEW REMINDERS...

**BE PROMPT**
Give your students plenty of time to arrive, find their seats, and get situated. Have them visit the restrooms before the show begins.

**RESPECT OTHERS**
Please remind your students that their behavior and responses affect the quality of the performance and the enjoyment of the production for the entire audience. Live theatre means the actors and the audience are in the same room, and just as the audience can see and hear the performers, the performers can see and hear the audience. Please ask your students to avoid disturbing those around them. Please no talking or unnecessary or disruptive movement during the performance. Also, please remind students that cellphones should be switched off completely. No texting or tweeting, please. When students give their full attention to the action on the stage, they will be rewarded with the best performance possible.

**GOOD NOISE, BAD NOISE**
Instead of instructing students to remain totally silent, please discuss the difference between appropriate responses (laughter, applause, participation when requested) and inappropriate noise (talking, cell phones, etc).

**STAY WITH US**
Please do not leave or allow students to leave during the performance except in absolute emergencies. Again, reminding them to use the restrooms before the performance will help eliminate unnecessary disruption.

As you take your students on the exciting journey into the world of live theatre we hope that you’ll take a moment to help prepare them to make the most of their experience. Unlike movies or television, live theatre offers the thrill of unpredictability.

With the actors present on stage, the audience response becomes an integral part of the performance and the overall experience: the more involved and attentive the audience, the better the show. Please remind your students that they play an important part in the success of the performance.
Dear Educator,

Live theatre is a place for people to gather and experience the joys, triumphs, and sorrows life has to offer.

The Syracuse Stage education department is committed to providing the tools to make learning in and through the arts possible. We seek to address varied learning styles while making connections to curricula and life itself. It is our goal in the education department to maximize the theatre experience for our education partners with experiential learning and in-depth arts programming. Thank you for your interest and support.

Sincerely,

Lauren Unbekant
Director of Educational Outreach

---

2015/2016 EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH SPONSORS

Syracuse Stage is committed to providing students with rich theatre experiences that explore and examine what it is to be human. Research shows that children who participate in or are exposed to the arts show higher academic achievement, stronger self-esteem, and improved ability to plan and work toward a future goal.

Many students in our community have their first taste of live theatre through Syracuse Stage’s outreach programs. Last season more than 15,500 students from across New York State attended or participated in the Bank of America Children’s Tour, artsEmerging, the Young Playwrights Festival, the Franklin Project, Young Adult Council, and our Student Matinee Program.

We gratefully acknowledge the corporations and foundations who support our commitment to in-depth arts education for our community.
Lucas Hnath, was raised in the American evangelical tradition in Orlando, Florida, his mother is an ordained minister. His work includes *Death Tax* (2012), *A Public Reading of an Unproduced Screenplay About the Death of Walt Disney* (2013), *nightnight* (2013), *Red Speedo* (2013), and *Isaac’s Eyes* (2012). He has been a resident playwright at New Dramatists since 2011 and teaches at New York University, from which he received his BFA and MFA.

“I like that experience of an audience feeling suspicious of the thing and then having that expectation turned upside down.”

PHOTO:
Above, Lucas Hnath, Playwrights Horizon
SYNOPSIS

Pastor Paul has worked hard to bring his church from a storefront to a very large church with a coffee shop in the lobby and a baptismal font the size of a swimming pool. The road has been hard, but thanks to his charisma and the support of the faithful, the church is now out of debt and the pews are full. In a powerful sermon, he expresses a revelation that God has given him: there is no hell. What follows is a series of confrontations with associate pastor Joshua, church elder Jay, a confused congregant, and finally his wife, Elizabeth.

“PAUL: I have a powerful urge to communicate with you but I find the distance between us insurmountable.”

- The Christians
MEGACHURCHES

Pastor Paul’s church can be classified as a megachurch, a relatively new style of religious worship within very large non-denominational and evangelical churches. According to Hartford Seminary’s Hartford Institute for Religious Research, the term megachurch is the name given to a group of very large, Protestant congregations that share several distinctive characteristics.

These churches generally have:
- 2000 or more persons in attendance at weekly worship, counting adults and children at all worship locations.
- A charismatic, authoritative senior minister
- A very active 7 day a week congregational community
- A multitude of diverse social and outreach ministries
- Weekly small group meetings of less than fifty focusing on accountability and relationship building to supplement the larger weekly worship sessions
- Innovative and often contemporary worship format and a complex differentiated organizational structure

While we think of megachurches as a largely American phenomenon, the largest are outside of the U.S. Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea serves 253,000 congregants. The largest American churches include Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, which has 45,000 weekly attendees and Church of the Highlands in Birmingham, Alabama, with 40,000.

Religious Diversity and Dissidents in America

The foundation of the English colonies that became the United States is very much bound to the history of Christian dissidents. New England, an early haven for those who did not adhere to Anglicanism, became known as the “Bible Commonwealths.” Diversity of course didn’t always include tolerance. For example, after American independence, Catholics were still often banned from holding office. Jews were routinely discriminated against, especially after the great waves of immigration in the late 19th and 20th centuries.
Religious Diversity and Dissidents in America

*The Christians*, Lucas Hnath’s “big little play about faith in America” is set in the nave of an American megachurch, with characters speaking at stand-up microphones and backed by a choir, evoking the origins of drama as an expression of religious concerns. Classical Greek drama took place as part of a religious festival, and the first theatres include an altar. Playwright Hnath has said that the model for *The Christians* is Sophocles’ *Antigone*, which hinges on a religious question, forcing its ancient audience to ask what the gods really want.

*Antigone*, in order of events the second play in the *Oedipus* cycle, is organized as a series of arguments and encounters in single setting. After the civil war brought about by Oedipus’ abdication, both his sons, leading opposite sides have been killed. Creon, the new leader of Thebes and the brother of Oedipus’ hapless wife/mother, has declared that the rebellious brother be left unburied. His sister Antigone refuses to accept this, declaring that the gods have decreed that a body must be given the respect of a burial. Creon’s obstinacy leads to tragic consequences.

The published play script of *The Christians* includes an epigrammatic exchange from Henrik Ibsen’s *An Enemy of the People*, in which the protagonist Dr. Thomas Stockmann has a scientific revelation. The waters that feed the spas providing a livelihood for his town have been polluted by runoff from an upstream tannery. Publishing his finding will destroy the economy, but Stockmann stands firm, losing everything he cherishes.

BILLING. I am a pagan and proud of it. Believe me, before long, we will all be pagans.

MORTEN. And then will we be allowed to do anything we like?

BILLING. Well, you’ll see.

- Henrik Ibsen
  *Enemy of the People*
Questions for Discussion

- Is Pastor Paul’s story a tragedy? What aspects of tragedy does it share?

- How does the onstage church function as a setting for private conversations? Why?

- *The Christians* takes no position on the central question that propels it. What effect does this have?
elements of drama

PLOT
What is the story line? What happened before the play started? What do the characters want? What do they do to achieve their goals? What do they stand to gain/lose?

THEME
What ideas are wrestled with in the play? What questions does the play pose? Does it present an opinion?

CHARACTER
Who are the people in the story? What are their relationships? Why do they do what they do? How does age/status/etc. affect them?

LANGUAGE
What do the characters say? How do they say it? When do they say it?

MUSIC
How do music and sound help to tell the story?

SPECTACLE
How do the elements come together to create the whole performance?

Other Elements: Conflict/Resolution, Action, Improvisation, Non-verbal communication, Staging, Humor, Realism and other styles, Metaphor, Language, Tone, Pattern & Repetition, Emotion, Point of view.

Any piece of theatre comprises multiple art forms. As you explore this production with your students, examine the use of:

WRITING
VISUAL ART/DESIGN
MUSIC/SOUND
DANCE/MOVEMENT

ACTIVITY
At its core, drama is about characters working toward goals and overcoming obstacles. Ask students to use their bodies and voices to create characters who are: very old, very young, very strong, very weak, very tired, very energetic, very cold, very warm. Have their characters interact with others. Give them an objective to fulfill despite environmental obstacles. Later, recap by asking how these obstacles affected their characters and the pursuit of their objectives.

INQUIRY
How are each of these art forms used in this production? Why are they used? How do they help to tell the story?
elements of design

LINE can have length, width, texture, direction, and curve. There are five basic varieties: vertical, horizontal, diagonal, curved, and zig-zag.

SHAPE is two-dimensional and encloses space. It can be geometric (e.g. squares and circles), man-made, or free-form.

FORM is three-dimensional. It encloses space and fills space. It can be geometric (e.g. cubes and cylinders), man-made, or free-form.

COLOR has three basic properties: HUE is the name of the color (e.g. red, blue, green), INTENSITY is the strength of the color (bright or dull), VALUE is the range of lightness to darkness.

TEXTURE refers to the “feel” of an object’s surface. It can be smooth, rough, soft, etc. Textures may be ACTUAL (able to be felt) or IMPLIED (suggested visually through the artist’s technique).

SPACE is defined and determined by shapes and forms. Positive space is enclosed by shapes and forms, while negative space exists around them.
Sources and Resources:

Lucas Hnath and *The Christians*:
“In *The Christians* a Schism Over Fire and Brimstone”

“The Christians Tackles a Schism Among the Flock”

“Church Splits Are Hell. This Play About One Isn’t”

“Lucas Hnath: Frustration Is the Point”
http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/issue/featuredstory.cfm?story=7&indexID=42


Video:
An interview with Lucas Hnath focusing on his play *Red Speedo*, but giving insight into his working process and goals as a playwright.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JqWGo-Mn2E

A short interview focusing on *The Christians* in process.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kpq-8mLLsUg
**Religion in the U.S.:**
“Religion and Eighteenth Century Revivalism”

“Religion and the Founding of the American Republic”
https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01.html
https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/rel01-2.html

“America’s True History of Religious Tolerance”
http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/americas-true-history-of-religious-tolerance-61312684/?no-ist=Court&=&page=1

“Evangelicals Defined: The History Of American Evangelicalism”
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/14/evangelicals-defined-history-american-evangelicalism_n_1277352.html

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Heaven and Hell in Christian Thought”
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heaven-hell/

Hartford Institute for Religious Studies, “Megachurches,”
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches.html

“The Founders’ Constitution: Amendment I (Religion)”
http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions43.html
“America’s True History of Religious Tolerance”
http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/americas-true-history-of-religious-tolerance-61312684/?no-ist=Court=&=&page=1

“Evangelicals Defined: The History Of American Evangelicalism”
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/14/evangelicals-defined-history-american-evangelicalism_n_1277352.html

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Heaven and Hell in Christian Thought”
http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heaven-hell/

Hartford Institute for Religious Studies, “Megachurches,”
http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/megachurches.html

“The Founders’ Constitution: Amendment I (Religion)”
http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions43.html
STEVE MARTIN’S
THE UNDERPANTS
BY STEVE MARTIN
ADAPTED FROM
CARL STERNHEIM
OCTOBER 21 – NOVEMBER 8

PETER PAN
LYRICS BY CAROLYN LEIGH
MUSIC BY MORRIS “MOOSE” CHARLAP
ADDITIONAL LYRICS
BY BETTY COMDEN
AND ADOLPH GREEN
ADDITIONAL MUSIC
BY JULE STYNE
BASED ON THE PLAY
BY SIR JAMES M. BARRIE
FLYING EFFECTS PROVIDED
BY ZFX, INC.
CO-PRODUCED WITH SU DRAMA
NOVEMBER 28 – JANUARY 3

THE CHRISTIANS
BY LUCAS HNATH
APRIL 6 – 24

STUPID F***ING BIRD
BY AARON POSNER
SORT OF ADAPTED FROM
CHEKHOV’S THE SEAGULL
JANUARY 20 – FEBRUARY 7

TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD
ADAPTED BY CHRISTOPHER SERGEL
FROM THE NOVEL BY HARPER LEE
FEBRUARY 24 – MARCH 26

THE SANTALAND DIARIES
BY DAVID SEDARIS
ADAPTED BY JOE MANTELLO
DECEMBER 9 – JANUARY 3

KEN LUDWIG’S
BASKERVILLE: A SHERLOCK HOLMES MYSTERY
BASED ON A NOVEL
BY ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
MAY 11 – 29

SEASON SPONSOR:
syracuse.com

Lila Coogan, Aurelia Williams, and Mary DiGangi in *Hairspray.* Marc Safran Photography.