

A Case for the Existence of God

by **Samuel D. Hunter**

Directed by **Timothy Douglas**

March 28 - April 12, 2025

SPOTLIGHT STUDY GUIDE
For Teachers and Students



Pioneer Theatre Company's Student Matinee Program is made possible through the support of Salt Lake County's Zoo, Arts, and Parks Program, The Simmons Family Foundation, and The Meldrum Foundation Endowment Fund.

A yellow office chair is centered on a dark green background. Overlaid on the chair and background is the title 'A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD' in large, bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. The text is arranged in four lines: 'A C A S E', 'F O R T H E', 'E X I S T E N C E', and 'O F G O D'.

**A C A S E
F O R T H E
E X I S T E N C E
O F G O D**





A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

SETTING: A cubicle inside a small business in Twin Falls, Idaho.

SYNOPSIS: Ryan is straight, white, undereducated, awful with money, and reeling from a painful divorce from the mother of his child, while Keith is black, polished, financially savvy, and the gay single caretaker of a foster daughter. When Ryan seeks Keith's help to secure a loan and buy back land that his family lost, the two men discover they share "a specific kind of sadness" and unexpectedly choose to bring one another into their fragile worlds.

Infused with humour, honesty and grace, Hunter's extraordinary play shows us that, maybe, there's hope for us all.

CHARACTERS



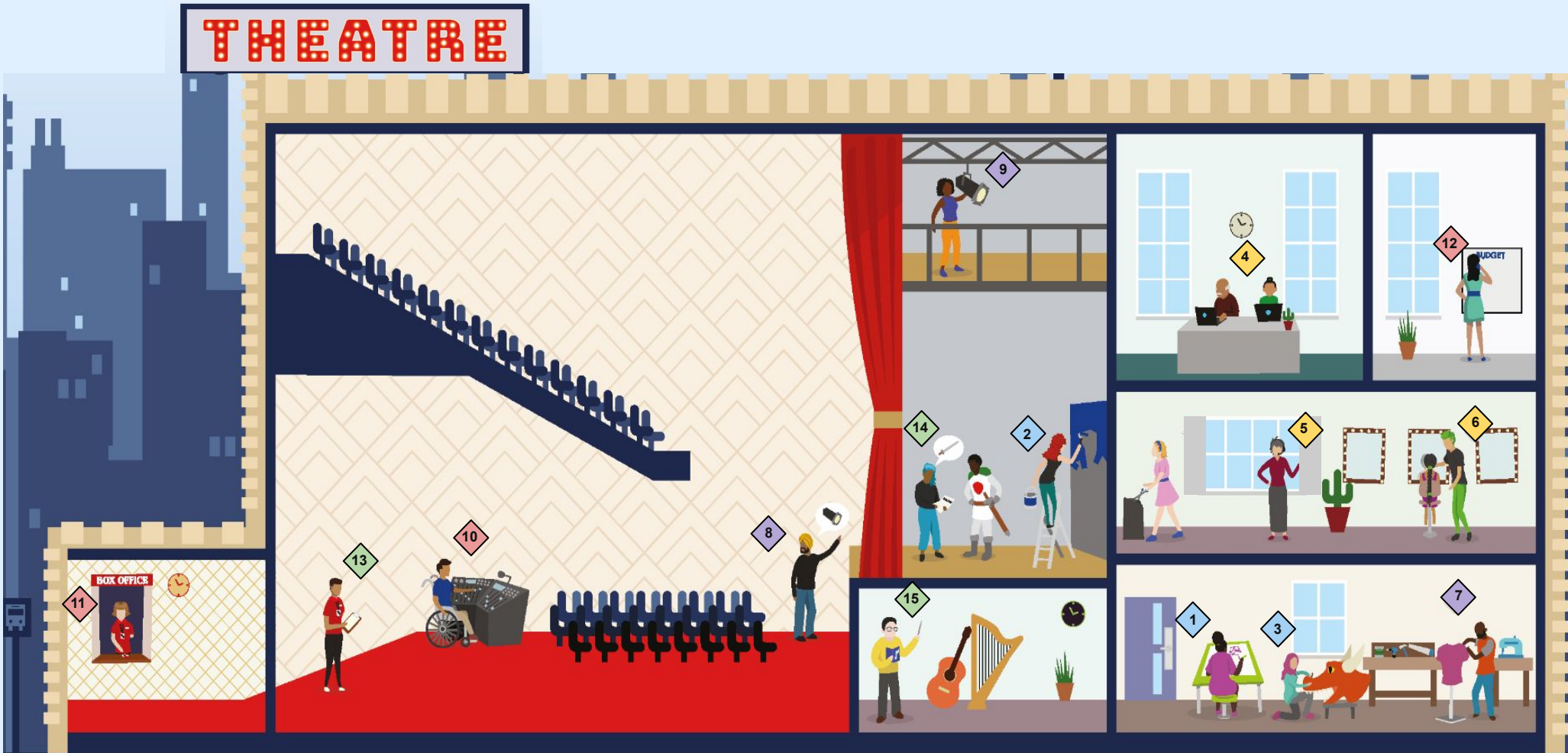
KEITH: Black... Thoughtful, methodical, and 'feels' deeply. Single dad to a young foster daughter - making every effort to do right by her with the goal of full adoption.

RYAN: White ... Impulsive, strapped, and imperfectly practical (minded). Single, estranged dad to his young biological daughter - making every effort to do right by her with the goal of gaining co-parenting custody.



Jobs in the Theatre

While there may be only 2 people on the stage for A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD, it takes a team of people who work well together to make any kind of theatre. Here's a rundown of some of the jobs available in the theatre arts.



- 1 **Set Designers** draw and create models of what the scenery onstage will look like
- 2 **Set Builders and Scenic Painters** build and paint the show's lifesize set
- 3 **Props Managers or Coordinators** source, buy, make, and look after all of the objects that the actors touch and use onstage
- 4 There are many **office-based roles** like HR, Marketing, Business Manager, and administration
- 5 **Stage Managers** manage the people, places, and technical elements in a production and make sure it all runs smoothly for every performance.
- 6 **Wigs, Hair & Make-Up** design and style the performers
- 7 **Costume Designer and Wardrobe Roles** design, create, and manage all the show's costumes
- 8 **Production Managers** make sure the set, lighting, and sound are in order
- 9 **Lighting Designer, Technicians and Operators** design, program and operate the lighting used in the show
- 10 **Sound Designers and Operators** work the microphones, sound effects, and music used during the show
- 11 **Box Office Staff** provide show information to visitors and sell tickets
- 12 **Artistic Directors / Producers** plan and oversee everything including casting, technical, and sales.
- 13 **Front of House Staff** look after the public on their visit and ensure their safety.
- 14 **Directors** decide how the entire onstage production should look and run, working with actors from rehearsals until performances
- 15 **Music Directors** teach the music and lead the musicians and singers in a musical production

Meet Playwright Samuel D. Hunter

What was your inspiration for writing A Case for the Existence of God? (ACFTEOG)

A little over six years ago, my husband and I bought an apartment and adopted a child, pretty much right on top of one another. And it was staggering to me how difficult both of those processes were—these very normal, middle-class goals, to own property and have a family. I think it said something about our current moment, how difficult it is for so many Americans to lead middle-class lives. So I wanted to write a play that actively wrestled with that.

Tell us the thought behind the title. Why such an epic title for such an intimate play?

I know the title seems almost absurd, but that's sort of the point—the audiences enter into this play under this almost impossibly large title, and they are met with two guys in a cubicle who spend the first twenty minutes talking about a relatively small home loan. So hopefully it puts the audience on the hunt—what exactly is this play up to? And hopefully, by the end, it meets the grandiosity of its title.

Do you see ACFTEOG as a religious play? A spiritual play? How would you describe it?

I don't know if I would call it religious, but I think it's spiritual in the sense that it's about searching for greater meaning in a deeply complicated present moment. I recently was able to see a production of the play in the Netherlands, and I met a Dominican monk afterward who told me he felt the play was about grace. And I think he's right.

You set most of your plays in your native Idaho. Why is Idaho the correct setting for your work?

I grew up in Idaho and my family is still there, and has been there for quite a while. So obviously I feel connected to it. But—at risk of sounding pretentious— I think it's become a really useful “canvas” as it's a way of writing about a huge swatch of America, much bigger than just Idaho, that rarely gets represented on our stages and screens. So hopefully, in its specificity, it finds a kind of universality.

What was your experience growing up in Idaho? Do you go back regularly?

I do as much as I can, though I joke now that living in New

York City, it's far easier for me to get to Europe than it is to my hometown. But I usually go at least once a year; and nowadays, my husband runs a playwright's residency in Sun Valley, so we go there with some frequency as a family. There were a lot of amazing things about growing up there—access to nature, small-town community. But it's also fairly homogeneous and isolated. And being a gay kid there was tricky. So I think that complicated relationship with Idaho shows up in my plays.

You have been a parent for some time now. How has your experience of being a parent altered or enhanced your experience/appreciation of ACFTEOG?

I started writing the play when my daughter was still an infant, and now she's six. So when I read or see the play now, I feel a sense of optimism or gratitude, I guess. But also the reminder that her childhood is happening so, so fast. One of the characters late in the play says something along the lines of “I just want to hit pause on everything” and I'm definitely feeling that nowadays.

What do you see as the unique challenge and/or unique joy of fatherhood?

I think that now I'm a father, I don't have the luxury of being cynical. Cynicism is easy and fashionable and perversely comforting, and you see it absolutely everywhere nowadays. But I can't usher my kid into a cynical world. And that's difficult work!



Meet Playwright Samuel D. Hunter (cont.)

Do you have a favorite quote or piece of advice about fatherhood or parenting that you have embraced?

I think it's just the idea that your kid is your kid is your kid. Don't try to change who they are. You can guide them but you can't fundamentally change who they are.

Was it difficult to write a play about male friendship? Why do you think it is so rare to see male friendships depicted onstage or in movies?

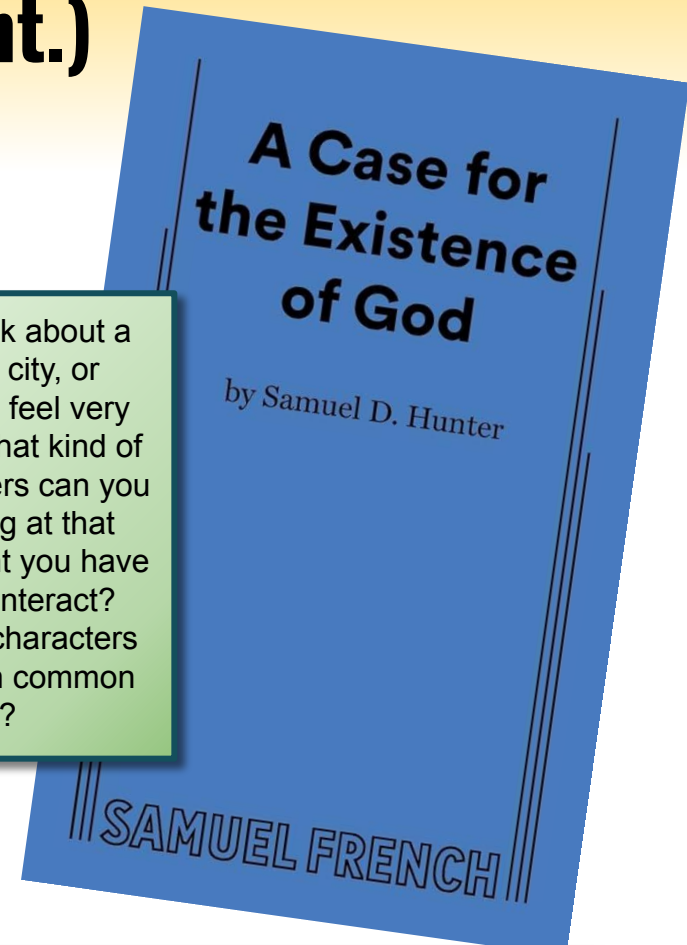
Something that really bothers me about depictions of male relationships in our media is that we have an expectation that they are either going to punch each other or have sex. And I think that's a real disservice to young men, teaching them that any kind of platonic male love is impossible. It's a real reflection of the kind of toxic masculinity that is still so, so predominant in our culture.

What do you hope people take away from seeing this play?

I always hope that my plays have some utility for audiences, something that is useful or applicable to their own lives. With this one, I really hope the audience leaves with a sense of hope. But a kind of hope that isn't twee or simplistic, a kind of hope that is complex and hard-won.



ACTIVITY: Think about a specific place, city, or location that you feel very connected to. What kind of made up characters can you imagine meeting at that place? How might you have the characters interact? How could your characters find something in common together?



“In the play, there are moments of lashing out on both characters’ parts — and I think it’s because culturally we don’t have a language for platonic male love, especially between a straight man and a gay man. The expectations of gender norms compacts men’s—and especially straight men’s—emotional and spiritual lives as they grow up. In the play, as their lives cave in and they lose the little control they have, the friendship they cultivate for one another is really through the condition of being bound up in a ball.”

-Samuel D Hunter
Playwright

<https://playbill.com/article/a-case-for-the-existence-of-god-receives-2nd-extension>

Welcome to Twin Falls, Idaho

Twin Falls, Idaho, is a small city located in the Magic Valley region of the state. While it may not be as well-known as some of the larger cities in Idaho, it is the largest city in a 100-mile radius, and is the regional commercial center for south-central Idaho and northeastern Nevada.

Twin Falls city was founded in 1904 as a planned community, designed by celebrated Franco-American architect Emmanuel Louis Masqueray, with proceeds from sales of townsite lots going toward construction of irrigation canals. Twin Falls was incorporated as a village on April 12, 1905. The city is named for a nearby waterfall on the Snake River of the same name.

A Thriving Agricultural Industry

After Milner Dam was constructed, agricultural production in south-central Idaho increased substantially. Twin Falls became a major regional economic center serving the agriculture industry, a role which it has sustained to the present day.



Twin Falls
IDAHO
Grow With Us



A few miles east of its namesake city, Twin Falls is a waterfall on the Snake River in southern Idaho. They are upstream of Pillar Falls and Shoshone Falls and just downstream from Milner Dam.

Water flow over Twin Falls is controlled by the Twin Falls Dam, built in 1912, which is used for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation. The falls were so named because there were originally two parallel falls on the river. However, the Twin Falls Dam altered the falls and permanently diverted the flow of the Snake River, leaving a single waterfall.



Perrine Bridge // Truss Arch. Idaho's famous Perrine Bridge is a four-lane truss arch span on U.S. 93 over the Snake River in Twin Falls.

The city became a processing center for several agricultural commodities, notably beans and sugar beets. In later years, other food-processing operations boosted the local economy. The high-quality crops produced here include feeding the world, livestock feed and biofuels production. The area's abundant water supplies, fertile soil and ideal climate create good growing conditions that produce high-quality potatoes. Other popular crops in the area include sugar beets, wheat and alfalfa.

By 1960, Twin Falls had become one of Idaho's largest cities, even though its beginnings were still within living memory for many.

Welcome to Twin Falls, Idaho (cont.)

Did you know...

Twin Falls is the Home to the "Niagara of the West"

One of the most popular tourist attractions in Twin Falls is Shoshone Falls. Dubbed the "Niagara of the West," Shoshone Falls is a breathtaking, 212-foot waterfall that is even taller than Niagara Falls. Visitors can view the falls from several lookouts and hiking trails in the surrounding park.



Twin Falls became the center of national attention in September 1974, when daredevil Evel Knievel attempted to jump the Snake River Canyon in a specially modified steam-powered rocket cycle. Watched by millions on closed-circuit television on a Sunday afternoon, the attempt ultimately failed due to high winds and a premature deployment of Knievel's parachute. The jump site is northeast of central Twin Falls, midway between Shoshone Falls and the Perrine Bridge.



Knievel prepares for the Snake River Canyon jump

Twin Falls is the home to the World's Largest Yogurt Factory

Another unique aspect of Twin Falls is that it's the home of the world's largest yogurt factory (probably the inspiration for the yogurt factory that the Character Ryan works at). The Chobani Yogurt factory, which produces over a million cases of yogurt every week, has become a point of pride for the local community, providing thousands of jobs for residents.



Knievel after the Snake River Canyon jump

Robert Craig "Evel" Knievel (October 17, 1938 – November 30, 2007) was an American stunt performer and entertainer. Over the course of his career, he attempted more than 75 ramp-to-ramp motorcycle jumps. Knievel was inducted into the Motorcycle Hall of Fame in 1999.

Types of Stages

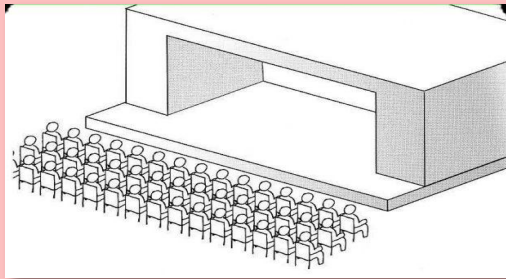
There are different types of stages that vary based on its usage and the relation of the audience to them.

ACTIVITY: Pioneer Theatre Company currently produces shows on 2 different types of stages during the season. Can you tell which type of stage is at the Medrum Theatre where A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD is being performed?

PROSCENIUM

This is the most common type for classic theatres, especially larger ones and opera houses. The proscenium stage is like a picture frame with the audience sitting on one side. This frame around the playing space creates a distancing effect so the play is as if it's in a self-contained world.

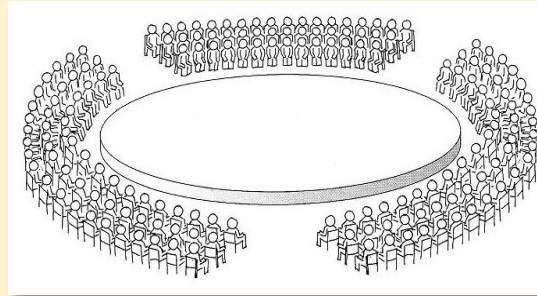
Because the audience looks at the stage from roughly the same angle, sets can oftentimes be designed with one side in mind. There can also be fly space above the stage and/or wing space on the sides of the stage for storing scenery.



THEATRE IN THE ROUND

This is where the audience sit 'around' the stage, which is most often circular in shape. The audience is close to both the stage and the performers giving performances a more intimate feel. Actors must enter and exit through the audience which can make the audience more part of the action.

Sets cannot include backdrops, flats, or large furniture that would block the view of the audience. And directors must stage the show carefully so no section of the audience misses an important piece of the action for too long.

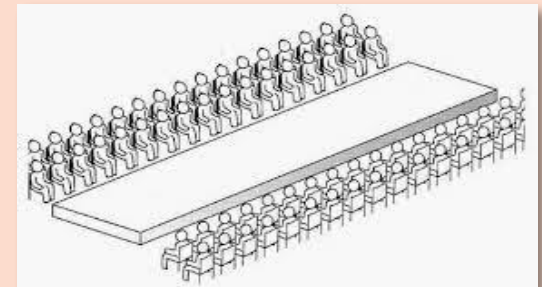


ARENA STAGE

Like theatre in the round, an arena stage has an audience on four sides 'around' the stage, usually in a rectangular shape - similar to a sports arena with tiered seating. Similar rules of staging and design apply here as to theatre in the round.

TRAVERSE STAGE

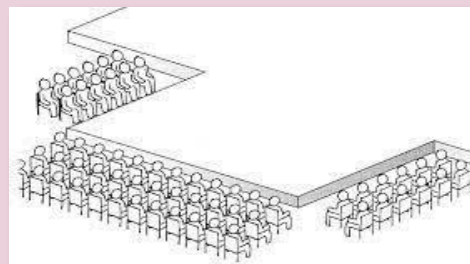
On a traverse stage the acting area is a long, central stage with the audience seated on the two opposite sides. It looks just like a catwalk. Not only does the audience feel close to the action, but they can also see the reactions of the audience facing them, which works well for audience interaction and acknowledgment. Sometimes the ends of the stage can be used to create extra acting areas. Design elements must also be very careful with blocking an audience's view.



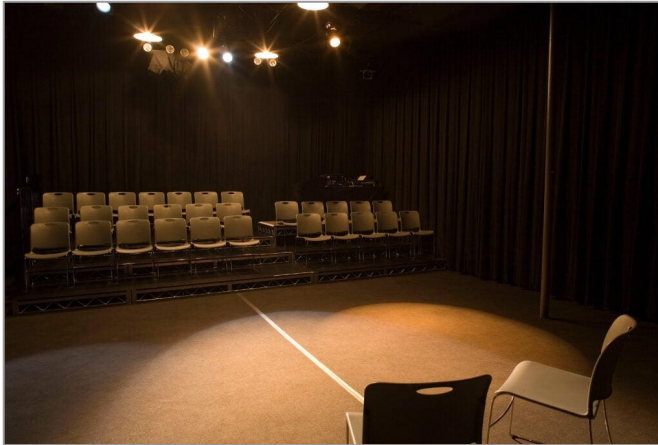
THRUST STAGE

A thrust stage comes out and 'thrusts' into the auditorium with the audience on three sides.

It combines the best elements of proscenium and in the round staging. Because there is no audience on one side, backdrops, flats and large scenery can be used. And the audience may feel closer to the stage as there are actually three front rows on each side.



Types of Stages (cont.)



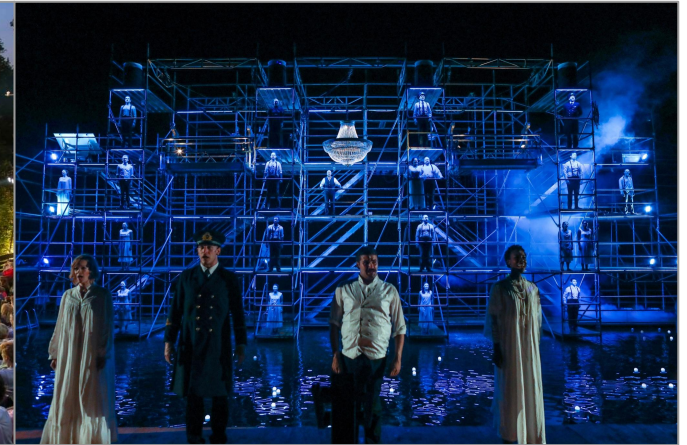
BLACK-BOX / STUDIO THEATRE

This is a flexible and versatile performance space which basically is a single room painted black. Usually this space allows for the temporary setup of seating in a number of different configurations so that a wide variety of productions can be presented. It is also known as an open stage.



OPEN AIR THEATRES

These are theatres that do not have a roof, although sometimes parts of the stage or audience seating will be covered. These stages may make use of both artificial lighting as well as the natural light as it changes during the day, particularly sunset.



SITE-SPECIFIC THEATRE

Site-specific theatre is usually performed in a non-traditional theatre space such as a bar, home, or warehouse, often reflecting the history, atmosphere or experiences of a particular location. The above photo is a production of TITANIC where the set and cast sunk into the water at each performance.

PROMENADE / IMMERSIVE THEATRE

This type of theatre actively involves the audience by either directly placing the audience in the middle of the action and/or by moving the audience from place to place to follow the actors and performance.



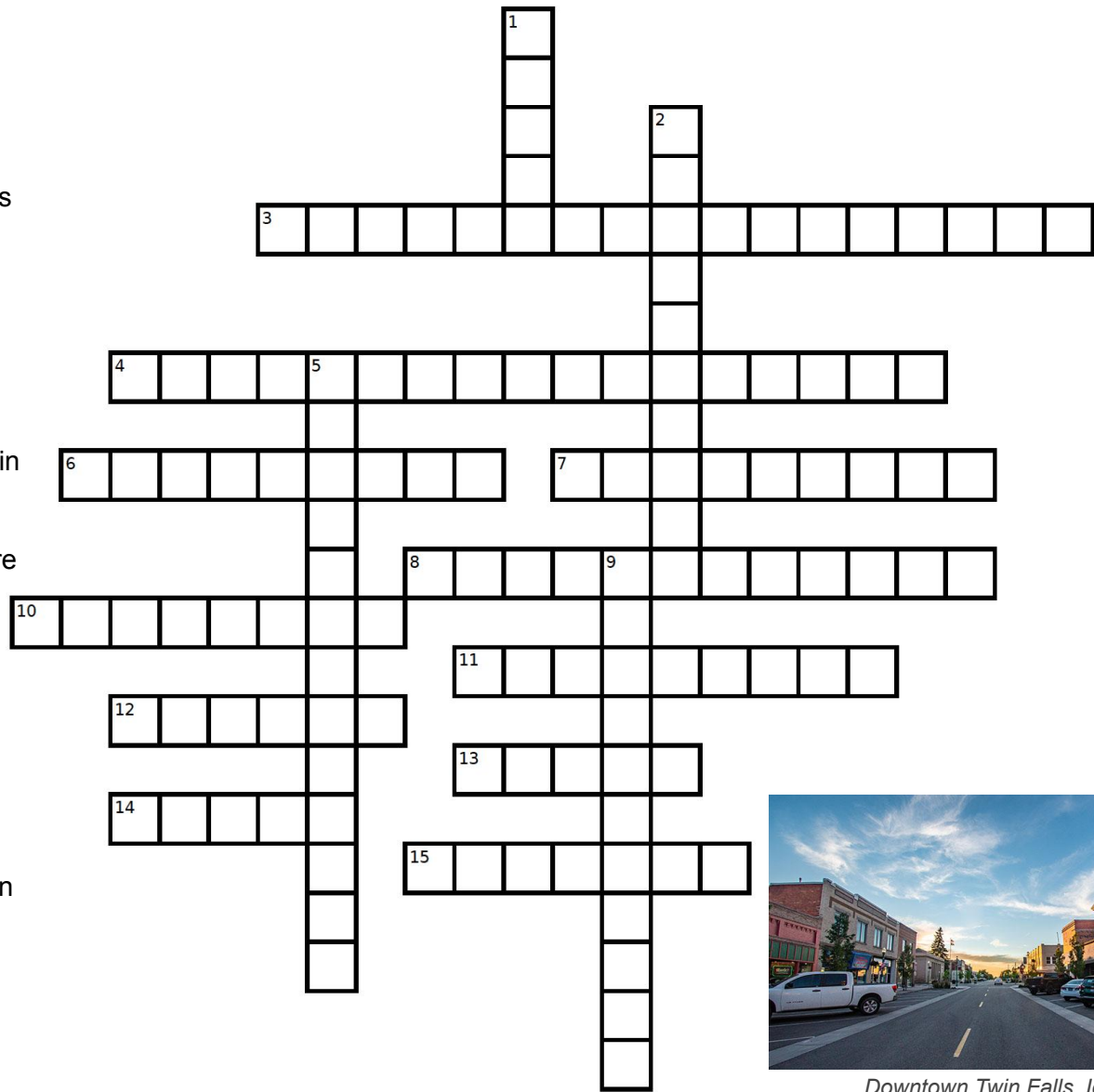
Crossword Puzzle

Down:

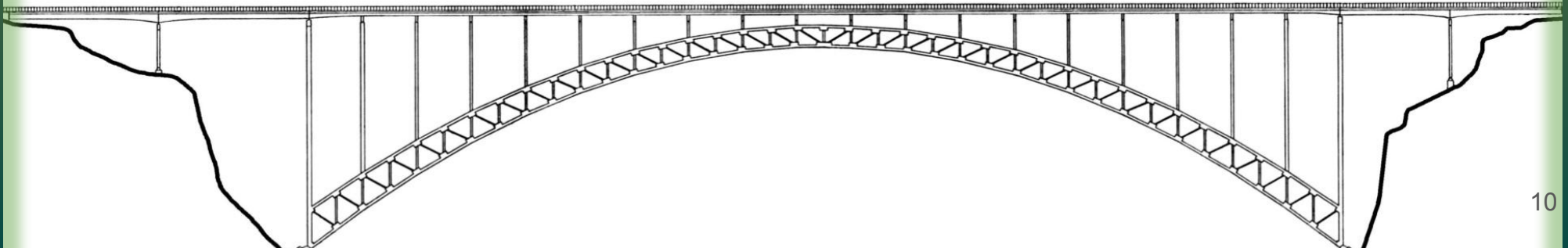
1. the valley region of Idaho where Twin Falls is located
2. most common theatre for classic plays
5. the "Niagara of the West"
9. famous American stunt performer and daredevil

Across:

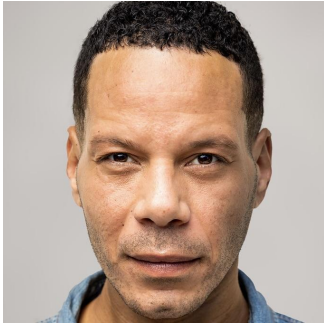
3. makes sure the set, lighting, and sound are in order in the theatre
4. those who plan and oversee everything including casting, technical, and sales in theatre
6. actor playing the character Ryan
7. city in which the play takes place
8. manage the people, places, and technical elements in a production
10. role of Timothy Douglas
11. type of theatre that places the audience in the middle of the action
12. A CASE FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD playwright
13. the river where the Twin Falls waterfall is on
14. stage that has an audience on four sides "around" it
15. famous Twin Falls bridge



Downtown Twin Falls, Idaho



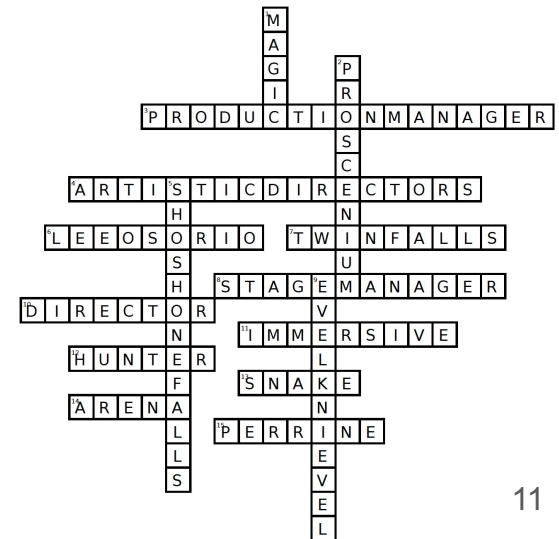
Meet the Cast



JON HUDSON ODOM* (Keith) *No Man's Land, Describe the Night, The Seagull, Ms. Blakk For President, (Steppenwolf); An Octoroon, Botticelli in the Fire, Ain't No Mo, Shipwreck (Woolly Mammoth Theatre); Toni Stone (Goodman Theatre) Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf? (Denver Theatre Center) On Clover Road, The Reclamation of Madison Hemmings (American Blues Theatre); Witch (Writers Theatre); Angels in America (Round House & Olney Theatre Center).* Six-time Helen Hayes nominee and a recipient, Two-time Jeff Award nominee, and Henry Award nominee. He is a company member at Woolly Mammoth, and an Artistic Affiliate at American Blues Theatre. TV: *Lovecraft Country, Somebody Somewhere, South Side (HBO Max) Chicago PD (NBC).* Film: *The Year Between, A Savage Nature, Reporting for Christmas.*



LEE OSORIO* (Ryan) is an Atlanta-based actor and playwright. A seven-time Suzi Bass Award nominee, Lee won Best Lead Actor for *Richard II*. Select television credits include *True Detective, Your Honor, The Resident*, and Lee currently recurs as Ethan Rana on NBC's *Found*. In 2024, two of Lee's plays received world-premiere productions: *PrisonTown* at Savannah Rep and *A Third Way* at Actor's Express. Lee is a proud member of Actors' Equity Association and SAG-AFTRA. Learn more at www.LeeOsorio.com.



*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States