

David Lindsay – Abaire

GOOD PEOPLE



The English Theatre Frankfurt 2013

Teacher`s Support Pack - Basic Version

Contents

1. The Author: David Lindsay – Abaire	p. 4
2. The Characters of the Play	p. 4
3. The Play – Synopsis	p. 5
4. The Setting	p. 5
5. Contents Comprehension – Quick check	p. 6
6. What is “Good People” about? Themes and Questions for Discussion!	p. 7
7. Characters assessed - Assignments for group work	p. 8
8. Good People? The title of the play	p. 9
9. Two worlds apart – Analyzing pictures	p. 10
10. Links – Listening Comprehension / Review	p. 11
11. Related Movies	p. 11
12. The production at the English Theatre Frankfurt	p. 12

Notes on Mature Content:

Good People is an example of modern naturalism. This style of play attempts to portray life as it is with characters who look and act the way that people do in real life. Because of this, there is some mature language in this performance. The characters are meant to be accurate representations of people living in what is known as a somewhat rough and tumble area of Boston. The words they use reflect this atmosphere and some of the words they use are ones which would be deemed inappropriate for use in school.

This area of South Boston also has a reputation for its lack of diversity and for being unfriendly to anyone not of white, Irish-Catholic background. This aspect of Southie comes out in the form of several racial slurs throughout the play and the issue of racial prejudices is addressed within the play.

Finally, the play does involve the issue of teen pregnancy. Margaret was in high school when she conceived her daughter. The repercussions of being a teen mother have in many ways shaped the rest of her life.

Students should be aware that the use of language and the issues addressed in this play are there to give us an understanding of the characters and the situations they find themselves in and/or create through the course of the action.

The play is not making a statement about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of the language used or the issues or ideas expressed. Rather the playwright is simply offering the audience what he views as a realistic set of characters and a realistic portrayal of how these characters would behave and speak given the circumstances and events in the play.

A Note for usage of this material:

Sie können dieses **Teacher`s Support Pack** auf Anfrage auch als Word-Dokument bekommen, um einzelne Texte/Aufgaben vor Ausdruck zu bearbeiten. Das bietet Ihnen die Chance, das Paket in der von Ihnen gewünschten Fassung an Ihre SchülerInnen digital weiterzuleiten. Das Bild- und Informationsmaterial kann den SchülerInnen dabei helfen, **sich einen Überblick über die relevanten thematischen Aspekte zu verschaffen und eigene Sichtweisen des Stücks zu entdecken.**

Diese Version ist für die schnelle Vor- und Nachbereitung eines Aufführungsbesuch gedacht bzw. für die Verwendung in der Sekundarstufe I. Wenn Sie das Stück und die Inszenierung ausführlich im Unterricht der Gymnasialen Oberstufe behandeln wollen, benutzen Sie bitte die Comprehensive Version des Teacher`s Support Pack.

Bei allen Fragen bezüglich dieser Materialien oder Interesse an

- **Begleitworkshops zu einem Aufführungsbesuch** für Ihre Lerngruppe
- **Gespräche mit Schauspielern** nach der Vorstellung

wenden Sie sich bitte per Email an uns: michael.gonszar@english-theatre.de

Das Team von T.I.E.S (Theatre in Education Service) wünscht Ihnen viel Erfolg bei der Arbeit mit dem Teacher`s Support Pack. Wir freuen uns auf einen Aufführungsbesuch mit Ihrer Lerngruppe.

We are grateful for a lot of suggestions from our colleagues at the

huntingtontheatre.org/education

Lea Dunbar, Karl Guttzeit, Michael Gonszar

1. The Author

David Lindsay-Abaire, the “Southie” native who wrote *Rabbit Hole*, received the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2007 and multiple Tony award nominations for his play. He grew up in South



Boston, where his mother was a factory worker and his father worked for the Chelsea fruit market. He attended Boston public schools until junior high, at which time he received a scholarship to Milton Academy, a private institution with a tradition of producing student plays. Although Lindsay-Abaire characterizes his early works as “terrible, terrible,” he developed enough confidence to enroll as a theatre major at Sarah Lawrence College. From there, he gained admission to a very selective playwriting program at the Juilliard School. Have students discuss the relative importance of youthful experimentation and formal education to the development of any future professional goals.

In a recent interview, David Lindsay-Abaire spoke about his reasons for writing *Good People*: “I kept hearing over and over again about British playwrights writing about class in their country, and people were asking, where are the new American plays about class? And I asked myself, if I were to write a play on the subject, what would that be? I knew I wasn’t interested in writing any didactic, message-laden play, so I put it aside for a while. Then I went back to the idea of Southie and thought, wait a minute, if I write about Southie in any way, class will inevitably bubble up to the surface.”

2. The Characters of the Play

Margaret

Known to most as “Margie” (hard “g”), she is a 50-year old woman who has lived her whole life in the South end of Boston (commonly known as Southie). With a GED and no college education she has never been able to earn much more than minimum wage. She is the single mother of an adult daughter with severe developmental impairment.

Stevie

The son of an old schoolmate of Margie’s, Stevie has also grown up in Southie but the fact that he is in the younger generation seems to give him a different perspective. He is still looking ahead, not necessarily feeling stuck. He is Margie’s boss at the Dollar Store and is told to fire her in the first scene.

Jean

Margie’s best friend, she has the nickname “Mouthie of Southie” for her tendency to say exactly what’s on her mind. She encourages Margie to go see their old classmate Mike to find out about a job.

Dottie

Margie’s landlady and babysitter to Margie’s daughter when Margie is at work. There is a certain amount of animosity between Dottie and Margie but their situation and backgrounds tie them together and give them at least a tenuous sort of friendship.

Michael

Michael (or Mikey Dillon as he used to be known back in Southie) grew up with Margie and Jean but left South Boston to go to school and eventually became a successful doctor. He now lives in a much more affluent section of Boston with his wife and daughter.

Kate

She is Michael’s wife. She comes from a well-to-do family herself and is a professor at Boston University. Margaret is surprised when she learns that Mike has married an African-American woman. The reasons for her surprise are partially a result of the insular, white Irish-Catholic identity of Southie and partially due to her own memory of a certain event in Mike’s past.

3. The Play (Synopsis)

Margie’s existence hangs by a thread. She is fired from her low-wage job at the Dollar Store because the inconsistent care for her mentally disabled adult daughter causes her to be chronically late. Her landlord, who is also a “friend,” is threatening to kick her out now that she’s unemployed. And the one person who might actually be able to help her, an old boyfriend from Southie who is now a successful doctor, doesn’t even want her to attend his birthday party for fear of embarrassment. The only hope left seems to be a good round of BINGO. And maybe some good people, if Margie can find them.

4. The Setting

South Boston, or “Southie” as the local residents call it, is a vibrant and historic area of Boston well-known for its heavy population of Irish-Americans. While being a largely working class neighborhood, Southie also maintains some of the oldest housing projects in the country. Southie can also claim some of the most beautiful spots in the city, including Castle Island and Thomas Park, which displays an American Revolutionary war monument. Its beauty, history, and unique culture have made it a popular setting for many outstanding pieces of literature and films.



Here’s Tudor Street. The Lower End. This is where Margie lives.

5. Contents Comprehension – Quick check

Act 1

At the top of the play, Margie tells a story to Stevie, the manager of the dollar store, about the time his mother attempted to shoplift a turkey from Flanagan’s when Margie was working the cash. As she tries to push past the register, the turkey falls out of her coat and hits the floor. Without missing a beat, Suzie looks up and yells, “Who threw that bird at me?!”

1. Why does Margie recount “the turkey story” to Stevie?
2. Why is Stevie, the store manager, in trouble with his boss?
3. What are Margie’s excuses?
4. What bad news does Stevie ultimately give her?
5. What is Stevie’s version of “the turkey story”?
6. What happened to Remy Hayes that makes people feel bad for him?
7. Who does Margie ask to watch her daughter? Is this a favor?
8. What does Dottie consider her “real” work?
9. Why does Jean think that Dottie is a lousy babysitter?
10. Who does Jean suggest Margie ask for a job?
11. What is Margie’s relationship to Gobie? Where is he now?
12. What does Mike do for a living? How did they all know him originally?
13. Does Mike have a job to offer Margie?
14. What do we learn about Joyce through Margie and Mike’s conversation?
15. Where does Mike live with his family?
16. What are Mike’s reasons for not visiting “Southie?”
17. How does Margie get herself invited to Mike’s birthday party?
18. What game do Margie, Jean, and Dottie play?
19. What happened to Cookie McDermott? Why does Margie feel responsible?
20. What “scam” do Margie’s friends suggest she try on Mike?
21. Why is Mike’s birthday party cancelled?

Act 2

1. What gift does Margie bring to Mike?
2. Why is Kate confused about who Margie is when she shows up at the house?
3. How did Kate and Mike meet?
4. What secret does Mike want Margie to keep?
5. Kate has also been mistaken for being someone else. Describe the circumstances in which people have confused who she is.
6. How has Mike described his childhood to Kate? Why does Margie disagree with his stories?
7. What shocking story does Margie share with Kate?
8. After putting on her “thinking cap” what job does Kate offer Margie?
What is Mike’s response?

9. Why does Mike ask Margie to leave? What does she say that’s made him angry?
10. What does Margie say about Joyce that is deeply troubling for Mike and Kate? Is this statement true?
11. Why does Kate believe Margie’s story about Joyce is untrue?
12. What arrived in Margie’s mail? Who does she believe it is from?
13. What does Stevie reveal about the origin of the check? What job help does he offer to Margie?

6. What is “Good People” about? Themes and Questions for Discussion!

6.1 Identity – staying in one’s own world

Margie believes that she never had a chance to get out of South Boston. Joyce’s birth brought a series of challenges that, even with unlimited resources, would have been difficult for any mother to face. But why does Margie feel trapped? Mike suggests it was her choices that sealed her fate. Mike claims that he in fact was just “lucky.” Could both perceptions be true? Was Margie’s life simply predestined or does Mike’s success debunk this notion of the “cycle of poverty”? Consider the idea that there may also be a “Cycle of Wealth.”

6.2 Missed options in life – what could have been

Mike says that Margie’s life has turned out the way it has due to choices she has made. How does she explain the “choices” that she’s made? Did Mike ever look back? Did he ever wonder what happened to Margie or her child or to the black boy that he beat up? Margie certainly wonders about the ‘path not taken.’ It is how she clings to hope and the way she reconciles the past. Would Mike have become a doctor if Margie stayed in his life?

6.3 Prejudices - judging a book by its cover

Margie assumes that she is the reason that Mike cancels his birthday party, because he fears humiliation in the event that Margie actually shows up. However, his child is ill. Why would Margie be quick to assume that she is the reason for the cancelled party? Is Margie an open-minded or accepting person herself? Consider her disapproval (although not voiced overtly) of homosexuality, interracial dating/marriage or Mike’s Hispanic secretary?

7. Characters assessed - Assignments for group work



MIKE

Is Mike a “good” person? Why or why not? What might playwright Lindsay-Abair be suggesting about what makes a good person and what makes a bad one?

KATE

Why does she sympathize with Margie in the beginning? Why and when does her attitude change? Describe Mike and Kate's relationship. Are they happy?



MARGIE

Do you agree with Kate's charge that a “good mother” would have done everything she could for Joyce, even if it meant tracking down the father and having a difficult conversation? Does Margie maintain real friendships? Describe her support system.

STEVIE

Stevie was born and raised in South Boston and hasn't gotten out. Do you think he is nevertheless successful? Why is it surprising the way he treats Margie? Does she deserve it?



DOTTIE

Dottie seems to be at odds with her daughter-in-law, Franny.



Why is she angry about the way Franny treats her son, Russell? Do you think her feelings are justified? What is her attitude towards Margie?

JEAN

In which way does she try to support Margie? Is she helpful? Jean implies that Margie and Mike were more than friends.



What does she think happened between them?

8. Good People? Thinking about the title of the play

Make a list of the characters and put their behavior in certain situations into categories (good/bad). Are some people more difficult to categorize? Who are the most complex characters in the play? Explain why it is difficult to label these people – what are the contradictions inherent in their characters?

9. Two worlds apart

This is a play about social class in America. Class perceptions, stereotyping and divisions permeate every scene and almost every moment. *Good People* is a telling portrait of “miserable” poor white working-class Americans encountering the world of the “comfortable” professional class.



Describe and the atmosphere depicted in the two photos! Consider the home surroundings, the furniture, the body language of the three characters.

Which situation and place would you prefer for feeling at home and why?

10. Links

10.1 Listening Comprehension:

See a sample from the play and listen to an interview with the author David Lindsay-Abair and the actor Tate Donovan (playing the role of Mike in the Manhattan Theatre Club Production)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=endscreen&v=YkLOiTmW0A&NR=1>

10.2. A review in Germany

<http://www.dradio.de/dlf/sendungen/kulturheute/1423170/>

You might like to explore these films with similar themes and issues:

- *The Departed (2006)*
- *The Boondock Saints (1999)*
- *Good Will Hunting (1997)*
- *Gone Baby Gone (2007)*
- *Mystic River (2003)*
- *Southie (1999)*

11. Related Movies



12. The production at the English Theatre Frankfurt 2013



**Describe the situation and
the characters shown in
this photo!**



Act out the scene depicted here!