EDUCATION GUIDE

MR. BURNS,
A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY

by Anne Washburn
directed by Yury Urnov
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANNE WASHBURN AND MR. BURNS</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR. BURNS AT THE WILMA</td>
<td>4-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APOCALYPSE FICTION</td>
<td>7-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A NUCLEAR LANDSCAPE</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE SIMPSONS</td>
<td>10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLOSSARY</td>
<td>12-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IN THE CLASSROOM</td>
<td>19-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX AND WORKS CITED</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This guide was created and compiled by the Wilma Education department

Special thanks to
The Wilma Literary Department
Design by Kristin Finger
**MR. BURNS, A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY**

*Mr. Burns* was originally produced at Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company in Washington, D.C. in 2012 before being produced Off-Broadway at Playwrights Horizon in 2013. In June 2018, *Mr. Burns* was named fourth on the New York Times’ *list of the best 25 plays of the last 25 years*. Laura Collins-Hughes of the Times says, “Not everyone loves this play; not everyone’s meant to. But for the rest of us, it’s the kind of bold, inventive show that sends you staggering out onto the street afterward, stunned and exhilarated, not sure quite what you’ve just experienced because you’ve never seen its like before.”

**THE PLAYWRIGHT**

Anne Washburn grew up in Berkeley, California. She stayed on the West Coast after high school, attending Reed College in Portland, OR. In college, she was going to give up on theater, but then she got cast in her friend’s thesis production. Because of that piece, she began writing plays. She discusses her experience in an interview with Playwrights Horizon Artistic Director Tim Sanford in 2013: “I think of theater as ultimately an aural form, rather than a visual one, and I think that time taught me to hear stories in that way. So when I tried to write a play, I immediately felt that this was the form my brain was geared for. So I became a theater major and wrote my own plays as part of the major and did one as my thesis.”

After moving to Seattle and temping for a few years, Washburn moved back to Portland. She wrote radio plays and produced work in the back of a bookstore. “And then of course, at the moment where I actually thought it might be great to stay in Portland and have this theater company, I got into grad school at NYU. […] It was all very stimulating; I was writing plays I was excited by, and reading plays I was excited by, and was out poking around New York and seeing work I was so excited by.” After grad school, Anne Washburn remained in New York and continued writing plays including *A Devil at Noon*, *10 out of 12*, *Little Bunny Foo Foo*, and *Mr. Burns*.

“I was really curious to see what would happen to a story over time under kind of extreme conditions.”

– Anne Washburn, NPR, 2018

**THE PROCESS**

*Mr. Burns, a post-electric play* was written by Anne Washburn in collaboration with her colleagues from The Civilians. In the “Notes on the Play” from the published script, Washburn writes, “In 2008 I was commissioned by the Civilians, an investigative theater group based in NYC, to work on an idea I’d been wondering about for years: what would happen to a pop culture narrative pushed past the fall of civilization. For a week that summer director Steve Cosson and I hunkered in a disused bank vault/free rehearsal space deep under Wall Street with Civilians actors Quincy Bernstine, Maria Dizzia, Gibson Frazier, Matt Maher, Jenny Morris, Sam Wright, and Colleen Werthmann. We tasked them with remembering Simpson’s episodes, and the dialogue around the remembering of the episode in the first act (and the small section of the episode rehearsed in the second act) is largely verbatim from those sessions.” Washburn discusses this choice in an ACT Interview in 2015. “I wanted to do this because written English is so different from spoken English. We are trained as writers in written English, but this is limiting. Even if you are an exact observer, you can only kind of come up with believable dialogue between two people, but to recreate a group think process without actually hearing people talk it out is really hard.”
PLAY SUMMARY

ACT 1 – THE VERY NEAR FUTURE

The United States has experienced a catastrophic event, causing widespread nuclear-plant failure that has destroyed the country and its electrical grid. After the disaster, five survivors—Matt, Jenny, Maria, Sam, and Colleen—sit around and try to recount The Simpsons episode, “Cape Feare.” As they attempt to remember the details, they disagree over the order of the events, who said what, and how the punch lines were worded. They are interrupted by the entrance of a new survivor, Gibson, who shares what’s happening outside their camp. The survivors have filled journals with the names of their loved ones, as well as the names of everyone they have met after the disaster. They compare notes to see if anyone they know is alive. The group soon comes back to the original topic of conversation: “Cape Feare.” Gibson helps them remember a punch line, and Act I ends with Gibson entertaining the rapt survivors with a Gilbert and Sullivan song: “Three Little Maids from School Are We,” from The Mikado.

ACT 2 – 7 YEARS LATER

The same group of people from Act 1 has become a traveling troupe of performers, specializing in episodes of The Simpsons. The episode they’re performing is again, “Cape Feare,” including some nostalgic commercials of the life before the disaster. As they rehearse, we learn that Simpsons episodes are performed by other traveling troupes along with other television shows, buying and selling dubiously-sourced lines from The Simpsons. The characters compete with several troupes for the most accurate lines, paying audience members who can supply them with missing lines, securing copyright over the material. Tensions are high as the troupe worries whether or not the show is good enough to bring in audiences, as their lives literally depend on it. Outside of the troupe, it’s clear that anarchy reigns; food is scarce and nuclear plants have totally melted down, with constant fear of danger and contamination looming. Act II ends with the troupe under attack by unseen assailants.

“Cape Feare” has now become a staged performance, losing some of its specifics through the fall of civilization and the 7 year span since the grid fell. It has been tweaked, supplemented by hyper-specific nostalgia-inducing commercials and pop culture song mash-up. Washburn’s script notes provide context: “Because we, in our culture, will commonly satirize commercials and pop hits, it’s tempting to bring that spirit of satire to the ‘commercial’ and to the pop medley. But it’s never interesting to satirize something which isn’t powerful and in this new reality commercials and corporations are non-existent, and there are no record companies or pop stars. The commercial is best approached as tantalizing reality porn – Quincy is a good actress who is selling, not products, but the memory and experience of lost foods – and the pop songs are either expressions of power and solidarity, or, they are a way in which the performers AND future audience can touch upon the powerful emotions of fear, confusion, loss, and mourning which no one can indulge in in their normal life.”

ACT 3 – 75 YEARS LATER

By Act 3, we no longer see the making of “Cape Feare” or meet the characters who now inhabit the Simpsons roles. We only see a performance of “Cape Feare,” which, 75 years later, has morphed into a sung-through opera. By Act 3, the villain becomes the namesake of the play, Mr. Burns. Anne Washburn elaborates on the switch: “Sideshow Bob is a clown, which is frightening but not as frightening as the demonic owner of a nuclear power plant – especially in a landscape that is littered with nuclear debris, where you have the problem of radiation and industrial contamination. What makes radiation so frightening, of course, is that you never really know where it is. If you were in a future without detectors, you’d never know which way to go to escape. Someone who represents radiation would become an obvious villain.” (“Survival of the Fittest”, 2015)
MEET THE DIRECTOR

Born and raised in Moscow, Russia, Yury Urnov is a director and translator, with MFA Diplomas from the Russian Academy of Theater Art (GITIS). Yury has directed about 40 productions in Russia, Europe, Africa, and the US. He has worked with Philip Amoult’s Center for International Theatre Development over the past decade on three continents. In 2009-11, he was a Fulbright Scholar in Residence at Towson University. Yury is currently an Artist in Residence with both Towson University and the Woolly Mammoth Theater in DC. In 2016, Yury was named on a list of 7 Theatre Workers You Should Know by American Theater Magazine.

Yury discusses the heart of Mr. Burns. “I think it’s about starting over. For me, it’s about how we are actually surrounded by culture on a daily basis and don’t even notice it. How much music is playing, how many pictures we’re seeing, whatever. I tried to calculate it once; 60-70% of the time we’re interacting with objects of culture. I don’t mean human culture in general; I mean art. I mean, it’s different levels of art, but it surrounds us. It’s one of the main parts of our lives, and suddenly we lose it all. Suddenly we have this need for art. It’s not the cherry on the pie; it’s an integral part of our existence. I’m kind of happy that the playwright takes it away from them, so the characters start experiencing this urge that something is missing, something very freakin’ important is missing. And I think what’s missing is the art. […] There is an interesting third step, obviously, into when it becomes sacred. Something that first was just human need, as food is or as water is or as art is, and then it becomes a product, and then it becomes a monument of some sort.”

Anarchy is very, very, very attractive. It’s certainly I’m sure there would be consequences; there must be consequences, too. But we don’t know until we try.

– Yury Urnov

MEET THE COMPOSER

While Mr. Burns is not technically a musical, music plays an increasingly integral role as the play progresses, with Act 2 featuring an extended pop-song mash-up and Act 3 almost sung through entirely. In an interview with ACT in 2015, Washburn explains, “I was also thinking a lot about Greek drama because it was created by a society that was still in deep trauma over the fall of Athenian democracy, which was the height of civilization at the time. […] All the drama of ancient Greece and the Old World includes music and dance, which are super satisfying when they are combined.”

In the original production of Mr. Burns, the lyrics were written by Anne Washburn, and the music was composed by Tony-award winning composer Michael Friedman (Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson), who was also a founding member of The Civilians. So, for the Wilma’s production of Mr. Burns, we commissioned local Philadelphia composer Michael Kiley to compose a score specific for our cast at the Wilma.

Michael is a Barrymore-winning composer, sound designer, performer and educator based in Philadelphia, working in dance, theater and public installation. He has previously worked with Arden Theatre Company, People’s Light and Theater Company, Theatre Exile, The Lantern Theater, Philadelphia Theater Company, and a recent international tour with choreographer Faye Driscoll. Mr. Burns is Michael’s first production with the Wilma, and we can’t wait to see the soundscape he’s created!
MEET THE CAST

CAMPBELL O’HARE
Act 1 & 2: Maria
Act 3: Nelson, Itchy

ROSS BESCHLER
Act 1 & 2: Matt
Act 3: Apu, Troy, Scratchy

LINDSAY SMILING
Act 1 & 2: Gibson
Act 3: Flanders, Homer

MARY TUOMANEN
Act 2: Quincy
Act 3: Bart

SARAH GLIKO
Act 1 & 2: Jenny
Act 3: Marge, Edna

JERED MCLENIGAN
Act 1 & 2: Sam
Act 3: Mr. Burns

BRETT ASHLEY ROBINSON
Act 1 & 2: Colleen
Act 3: Lisa

Campbell O’Hare: Maria, Nelson, Itchy
Ross Beschler: Matt, Apu, Troy, Scratchy
Lindsay Smiling: Gibson, Flanders, Homer
Mary Tuomanen: Quincy, Bart
Sarah Gliko: Jenny, Marge, Edna
Jered McLenigan: Sam, Mr. Burns
Brett Ashley Robinson: Colleen, Lisa
Every story ends on a dark and raging river...

– Anne Washburn, Mr. Burns

APOCALYPSE FICTION

From the Book of Revelation to The Walking Dead, humans have long imagined the end of the world. Apocalypse fiction has been especially popular in the last several decades, including countless movies, television series, books, and in the case of Mr. Burns, plays. Kellie Mecleary, the Wilma Theater’s Associate Producer and co-dramaturg for Mr. Burns, is hosting Apocalypse Apocacast, a podcast on the apocalypse and how it relates to the Wilma, Mr. Burns, and America at large.

KM: I think it’s fun to think about how people would behave if all the rules suddenly went away. [...] Lately, I also find myself thinking about how I don’t like the way the world works now and I don’t know how to fix it. I’ve just been wondering, would an apocalypse of some kind, could that act as a kind of reset button? Give us an opportunity to try again? Maybe we could set ourselves up in a way that works better for everyone who’s left, as opposed to just a few of us. When I fantasize, I often overlook the death and destruction part that would almost definitely be a part of an apocalypse, which I should probably think more about. But still, I wonder. And I’ve been wondering. What do you imagine when you imagine the apocalypse? Do you find yourself fantasizing about it or worrying more and why? Do you know what you’d miss? Do you know what you’d be glad to see go? Are there things you maybe would feel free to do that you don’t currently feel free to do?
Kellie and Yury are not alone in their thoughts. Jason Heller of NPR says, “These [apocalypse] stories are cathartic as well as cautionary. But they also reaffirm why we struggle to keep our world together in the first place. By imagining what it’s like to lose everything, we can value what we have.” One of the biggest influences on Mr. Burns for Washburn was The Stand by Stephen King. Washburn explains, “The Stand is a vast book I really adore… The first half—where civilization falls apart and the few people to remain struggle to negotiate this new landscape—is especially fun and the first act, especially, is very influenced by it,” (Playwrights Horison, 2013). In one episode of her Apodcalypse Apocacast, Mecleary interviews Burns cast member Brett Ashley Robinson, who discussed her experiences reading both The Stand and Station Eleven. “I read The Stand and I was obsessed with it. The scene where they’re in the Lincoln Tunnel and all the cars filled with all the dead bodies. I just love being terrified. Human beings get so divorced from their own emotion that they have to see the extreme version of that emotion […] Station Eleven feels like an apocalyptic book but in a way that you feel really good about humanity and not terrified of the void. You’re either like, it’s bleak and it’s bleak and it’s bleak forever, or you’re like, humanity resets, and finds a way to survive.

ART IN THE APOCALYPSE

As with Mr. Burns, the 2014 novel by Emily St. John Mandel, Station Eleven, features a traveling troupe of performers in a post-apocalyptic world retelling stories from a bygone era. In Station Eleven, the troupe, whose tagline is “Because survival is insufficient,” performs adaptations of Shakespeare. Brett Robinson explains our need for sharing stories even in times when our basic survival isn’t necessarily a given, “We come together to perform and tell stories for a reason: to comfort ourselves and to give ourselves a sense of connectedness.” In Act II of Mr. Burns, only 7 years post-electric, the theater the troupe makes is the escapist entertainment of a people struggling to survive. The troupe incorporates commercials into their performances as a way of reminding people of the simple luxuries they no longer enjoy. Washburn explains her rationale for the commercials in a 2018 interview with NPR: “A woman comes home from a long, tedious day at the office… And as she’s preparing the bath, she’s talking about someone at work who is stealing lunch bags out of the office refrigerator, which is all sort of careless and merry. But there is no way in that kind of future that anyone would appreciate someone going up onstage and saying, ‘Oh my God, we can be looted or raped or robbed at any moment and there’s very little to prevent anyone from doing it.’ That’s not going to be a welcome commentary. But there is kind of nostalgia, for a time when somebody snatching lunches out of the office refrigerator was the worst thing that might happen to you in a day. But also there is this sense, I think, in which this weird roving figure who steals mysteriously and no one can seem to control, is the very light-hearted shadow of someone which would be of a concern at the time.” (NPR, 2018) Throughout Mr. Burns, Washburn seems to be asking us to consider the role of art and culture in a post-apocalyptic world. Will art inevitably survive the apocalypse? What purpose will it serve? How might that purpose change from 7 years post-apocalypse to 75 years? Is storytelling a basic human necessity?

For more on the apocalypse and Mr. Burns from Kellie, Yury, Brett, and more, listen to the APOCALYPSE APOCACAST. blog.wilmatheater.org
A NUCLEAR LANDSCAPE

Nuclear power plant fires and meltdowns

In Act I of Mr. Burns, there is a discussion regarding the explosions and fires of nuclear power plants, including how far the risk of radiation poisoning stretches. “I heard 10. I heard 20. I heard 50. I heard 50 miles but only for a few days. I heard 50 miles but only for a few months. I heard a hundred, for a hundred million years.” With nuclear plants all over the country and no one to man them, the fires and explosions would lead to nuclear poisoning and water contamination. Gibson’s monologue in Act II specifically addresses the constant fear that has permeated by the seventh year after the fall of civilization.

This is true to life; after the grid goes down, nuclear power plants would either catch fire or meltdown. The latter would cause steam explosions. The *World Without Us* by Alan Weisman explains what would happen. “[Without a power supply], emergency generators with a seven-day diesel supply would kick in to keep coolant water circulating, because even if fission in the core stopped, uranium would continue to decay, generating about 7 percent as much heat as an active reactor.” Heat and pressure would build up, and a release valve would open to release overheating water and then close again once the pressure dropped. At some point, for one of several reasons (generators stop working, a valve sticks, water supply depleted), cooling water will cease being replenished. If the fuel is old, the still-hot uranium fuel will boil off the 45 feet of water in which it sits. In a few weeks at most, the top of the reactor core will be exposed, and the meltdown will begin. A meltdown is when the reactor core is no longer being cooled, and it melts and turns into super crazy hot lava. And when that interacts with water, there’s a steam explosion Weisman explains, “reactor containment domes aren’t designed for steam explosions; as its doors and seams blow out, a rush of incoming air would immediately ignite anything handy.” A better scenario (if the fuel is newer), would be a fire, which would result the following: “with power off and its cooling system gone, heat from the fire and fuel decay would force radioactivity out gaps around seals and vents. As materials weathered, more cracks would form, seeping poison, until the weakened concrete gave way and radiation gushed forth.” (Weisman 213).

Burns is not a PSA, almost to my regret. I have many bossy opinions on the topic of what it is for humans to handle a technology they actually are demonstrably unable to control. Nuclear power is completely safe as long as there is no human failure of any kind, no infrastructure failure of any kind. It’s completely safe as long as it is controlled by a civilization which progresses continuously with, you know, smooth segues from one civilization to the next for a period of about 10,000 years. And that’s something which has never happened in the history of human beings. There are disruptions and there are wars, and under those conditions, nuclear power with its intense dependence for safety on an incredible vulnerable electrical grid is not completely safe. So that was a source of tension, which drove the making of the play.

– Anne Washburn, NPR, 2018
THE SIMPSONS...

Created by Matt Groening, The Simpsons is the longest running prime time television show of all time. The Simpsons has won three Emmys, a Peabody, and it was hailed Time Magazine’s best television series of all time. The Simpsons premiered on December 17th, 1989, and has been running for the last 29 years at 639 episodes and counting.

The Simpsons turned the family sitcom on its head with its cultural satire and parody. In The Simpsons: An Uncensored, Unauthorized History, John Ortved says, “The point is that elements of our popular culture, like television and YouTube, so affect how we think, act, and speak, just as Shakespeare’s plays did during his time.” Washburn touches on this in Mr. Burns: television is part of our history, whether we realize it or not. Time Magazine Editor Bruce Handy elaborates on the likely ubiquity of The Simpsons decades from now. “You can’t talk about twentieth-century art without taking into account pop culture. It’s almost what defines the century. I think when people a hundred years from now want to get a sense of what the nineties were like they could do a lot worse than watch The Simpsons. It will still be being viewed and enjoyed when a lot of contemporary, serious literature is forgotten.”

“

It was not a Simpsons specific idea originally. I had sort of thought Seinfeld or Friends or Cheers or any program which was cheerful which a lot of people had known. And I don’t remember how I arrived at The Simpsons. It turns out to work really well. Partly I think because it’s been around for so long, and also because it’s a cartoon, it has so many characters and it is such a huge, wide world. I think also that a lot of the big, popular comedies are about friend groups and intentionally formed communities. And The Simpsons is very much about the family you’re stuck with and the community you’re stuck with and how you make the best of it, which I think would be more resonant in a post-apocalyptic world. I mean, people would be longing for the families that were gone. They would be struggling with issues of how you create a community which isn’t completely just functional.

– Anne Washburn, NPR, 2018

“
As the protagonist of the show, Homer is a caricature of the American, middle class father. He works as a low-level safety inspector at the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant and is frequently seen as immature, dimwitted and lazy. Marge is a stereotypical sitcom mother, putting up with the antics of her children and her oafish husband. Marge is the moral conscience in her family and often provides a grounding voice in the midst of her family’s foolishness. As the eldest child, Bart is a trouble maker, a prankster, an “underachiever and proud of it, man!” Harboring an intense sibling rivalry with his rule-abiding younger sister Lisa, Bart is mischievous, rebellious, and misunderstood. Lisa is a foil to Bart; she is an intellectual, self-righteous overachiever. Maggie is the baby of the Simpsons, frequently seen sucking on her pacifier. While she is seen as quite a genius for a baby, it was a long-standing joke on the show to never hear Maggie speak, even in episodes set in the future.

Washburn discusses her choice of The Simpsons in the process of making Mr. Burns: “Turned out to be a really useful decision, The Simpsons, partly because it has a slightly more rabid fan base than other shows. People really remember it and they really enjoy remembering it and they really enjoy quoting it and saving up quotes and sharing quotes. So, realistically, you’d have a good base of people who could start remembering The Simpsons,” (Playwrights Horizon Interview, 2013). Ortved continues: “The Simpsons...has entrenched itself so far into our culture that its content has seeped right into the popular vernacular and ingrained itself into our imaginations. We, as a culture, speak Simpsons.” A direct line can be drawn from The Simpsons to primetime cartoons – from Beavis and Butthead to Family Guy to Rick and Morty; these shows exist because of The Simpsons zeitgeist.
p. 1 Cape Fear
“Cape Feare” from The Simpsons
Season 5, Episode 2. First aired October 7th, 1993.
This is the episode that the survivors are telling around the fire at the top of Act 1. Anne Washburn describes it best from an On the Media interview in August 2018: “In the episode, Bart was involved in putting Sideshow Bob away to prison for his various incredible misdeeds and Sideshow Bob is sending him death threats. And finally the family to sort of escape him goes way on a houseboat in the middle of a river. And of course Sideshow Bob shows up again and there’s a kind of a duel to the death, which gets very involved with Gilbert and Sullivan. And there’s a climactic scene on the river with the performance of H.M.S Pinafore. And finally Bart is saved when the ship runs aground next to a brothel. And a whole bunch of police come streaming out and eventually decide to arrest him.”

Cape Fear is a 1991 psychological thriller directed by Martin Scorsese. This is the movie that The Simpsons writers parody in “Cape Feare.”

SUMMARY: After spending eight years in prison, Max Cady (played by Robert De Niro) is released. He promptly tracks down Sam Bowden (played by Nick Nolte), a lawyer whom he blames for his conviction. Cady begins to stalk and subtly threaten Bowden’s wife (played by Jessica Lange) and his daughter (played by Juliet Lewis). Bowden hires a private investigator, but he can’t prove that Cady is committing any of the crimes, so he and his family flee to Cape Fear. Unknown to the Bowden family, Cady stows under their car and they lead him directly to their house boat. During a storm the next night, Cady cuts loose the boat and he attacks the Bowdens. They eventually best him, Cady drowns in the river, and the Bowdens are safe.

Cape Fear is a 1991 film directed by J. Lee Thompsons, and the source material for 1991 Cape Fear. This stars Robert Mitchum as Max Cady and Gregory Peck as Sam Bowden, both of whom make appearances in the 1991 remake. Same plot as 1991 Cape Fear. The Executioners is a 1957 thriller novel by John D. Macdonald. It is the source material for both the 1991 and 1962 Cape Fear.

p. 2 Itchy and Scratchy: Violent cat (Scratchy) and mouse (Itchy) cartoon on Krusty the Clown’s show. They specialize in dismembering each other in hundreds of different ways (though Scratchy is more often than not the victim). Itchy and Scratchy predate The Simpsons, first appearing on The Tracey Ullman Show on November 20, 1988. Their first Simpsons appearance was in the series’ fourth episode, “There’s No Disgrace Like Home.” Their episodes run between 15 and 60 seconds.

“Almost everyone is confused about which is the mouse and which is the cat.” In each mini-episode, Itchy the Mouse wrecks bloody havoc on Scratchy the Cat. According to Mike Reiss, they “were actually inspired by Herman and Katnip, a cheap, ultraviolent knockoff of” Tom and Jerry. In contrast to Act 3’s portrayal, Itchy is the Mouse and Scratchy is the cat. Click here for more on Itchy; Click here for more on Scratchy

p. 4 Cape Fear Theme song: “whomp whomp whomp whomp” Click here to listen!

p. 5 Sideshow Bob voiced by Kelsey Grammer, was a sidekick to Krusty the Klown and is Bart Simpson’s arch nemesis. In “Krusty Gets Busted” (ep. 12), he attempts to frame Krusty for robbery, but is foiled by Bart and sent to prison. In “The Black Widower” (ep. 56, Season 3, 21), he is released from prison and marries Marge’s sister Selma, with the intent of murdering her. Bart again foils his plans and Sideshow Bob is sent back to prison. “Cape Feare” was his next appearance.

Sideshow Bob is the villain in the “Cape Feare” episode of The Simpsons
Mr. Burns—Charles Montgomery ‘Monty’ Burns. 104-year-old tyrannical owner of the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant in which Homer works. ‘Exxxxxcellent!’ while tapping fingertips together. He has been a regular on The Simpsons since the first episode. In the script notes, Washburn discusses Mr. Burns in the script notes for Act 3. “Burns is scary and real as well as supernatural – a brutal villain who sometimes amuses himself by playing something of the fop.

Blinky is a three-eyed mutant fish, a victim of radioactive runoff from Mr. Burns’ nuclear power plant. He first main appearance is in Season 2, Episode 4 “Two Cars in Every Garage and Three Eyes on Every Fish.” Marge attempts to serve him to Mr. Burns for dinner, and Mr. Burns can’t bring himself to eat the fish. [Click here to watch the episode.]

“Feets don’t fail me now” The first appearance of this phrase was in The Ghost Breakers, a 1940 Bob Hope movie, spoken by Willie Best as ‘Alex.’ Bob Hope starred as a radio broadcaster on the run from the mob who flee to an island off Cuba with heiress Paulette Goddard and his butler. Plenty of silliness and lots of Hope’s trademark one-liners, but the most memorable one is spoken by Best: “Feets, don’t fail me now!” It is also paraphrased in Eminem’s “Lose Yourself.” [p. 34]

Gilbert and Sullivan: W.S. Gilbert (dramatist, 1836-1911) and Arthur Sullivan (Composer, 1842-1900) worked together to write and compose 14 comic operas between 1871 and 1896. Both British. Both very influential in the trajectory of musical theater through the 20th century. [Click here for more information.]

Anne Washburn includes details about Gilbert and Sullivan in her script notes as well. “There are numerous Gilbert and Sullivan quotations in that episode of The Simpsons, and Gibson, as it turns out, was a member of his local Gilbert and Sullivan Society. So he has that information. There’s a little parenthetical in the stage directions. ‘Please note that these are people who in normal life would never been interested in the introduction of more Gilbert and Sullivan into their immediate social environment.’ But in the context, they’re thrilled.” (Anne Washburn, On the Media, NPR, 2018)

HMS Pinafore: Gilbert and Sullivan’s first international hit, satirizing the rise of unqualified people to positions of authority, the Royal Navy, and the British obsession with social status. The story takes place aboard the ship HMS Pinafore. The captain’s daughter, Josephine, is in love with a lower-class sailor, Ralph, but her father has other plans for her to marry a high class lord. Ralph and Josephine declare their love for each other and plan to elope. The captain discovers this plan, but, as in many of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, there’s a twist ending. [Click here to watch 1997 stage production, filmed for TV, starring Jon English]

The Mikado; or, The Town of Titipu is a comic opera in two acts. Setting the opera in Japan, an “exotic” locale far away from Britain allowed Gilbert to satirize British politics and institutions more freely by disguising them as Japanese. Gilbert used foreign or fictional locales in several operas, including The Mikado; Princess Ida; The Gondoliers; Utopia, Limited; and The Grand Duke, to soften the impact of his pointed satire of British institutions. [Click here for full synopsis; Click here to watch the 1982 Stratford Festival Mikado, Act 1; Click here to watch the 1982 Stratford Festival Mikado, Act 2]

“Mr. Burns, who just is the force which cannot be stopped, cannot be reckoned with, cannot be vanquished.” – Anne Washburn, NPR, 2018

“Three Little Maids”: Song from Gillion and Sullivan’s The Mikado. [Click here to hear it in full.]

Sideshow Bob performing HMS Pinafore at the end of “Cape Feare”
ACT 2

In the 7 years between Acts 1 and 2, the characters have moved from the Northeast to the high plains, seeming to spend most of their time in Oklahoma: there are indications of a general retreat from the East Coast, perhaps as a result of the concentrations of nuclear plants there. In Act 1, they are “about 30 miles” from the Indian Point nuclear reactor in Buchanan, NY. The distance from Buchanan to Muskogee, the easternmost town mentioned in Act 2, is nearly 1,400 miles, using I-70.

p. 64-66 Gibson’s math: “if you figure population 300 million…etc.” As of July 1, 2017, population was 325,719,178. “half of that is women” – female population 50.8%; “like, 50 million are under 10 or over 70” – roughly 36.3 mil are under 18, 25.7 mil over 65.

p. 68 Heretic Homer. Actually, Homer the Heretic (ep. 62, 3rd episode in Season 4). It originally aired on October 8, 1992. In the episode, Homer decides to forgo going to church and has an excellent time staying home. His behavior quickly attracts the wrath of God, who visits him in a dream. Click here to watch the full episode.

p. 69 The Springfield Files (ep. 162, 8, 10) First Aired January 12, 1997. Rife with sci-fi culture references but most notably The X-Files. Homer sees what seems to be an extra-terrestrial, but turns out to be Mr. Burns hopped up on drugs taken during a life-extending procedure, glowing in the dark due to his years at the nuclear plant. Detectives Sculder and Mully come to investigate Homer’s sighting, but give up. Click here for full episode.

p. 71 “North Carolina every time it rains” – It can’t be said exactly why terrible things might happen after every rainfall in North Carolina in the 7 years the nuclear apocalypse, but there are examples of rainfall carrying radiation from the site of a meltdown elsewhere and contaminating whole towns (click here for an article about the rain that fell on Novozybkov, a town 100 miles away from Chernobyl after the disaster there); and of course there is the famous radioactive black rain that fell over Hiroshima after the nuclear bomb fell on that city (more on that here). It’s also worth mentioning that there are three Nuclear power plants in North Carolina with 5 reactors between the three plants. Incidentally, the Brunswick Nuclear Generating Station in Brunswick, NC, uses water from the Cape Fear River to operate.

p. 74 “and what if we’ve picked the wrong religion . . .” From “Homer the Heretic.” (see above for more on this episode)

p. 76 “Calm thyself, Bartron . . .” is a line from Space Patrol, a Simpsons short which premiered on the Tracy Ullman Show. Synopsis: As Bart, Lisa, and Maggie are home alone, they decide to play Space Patrol. Click here to watch Space Patrol.

p. 77 Heart of Bartness. Actually “Bart of Darkness” (ep. 104, Season 6, episode 1). It originally aired on September 4, 1994. In the episode, Bart breaks his leg and becomes increasingly isolated in his room. He starts spying on neighbors with a telescope and begins to suspect that Ned Flanders has murdered his wife. The episode is largely a parody of the film Rear Window.

p. 77 “Lisa the Vegetarian.” (ep 133, Season 7, Episode 5) First aired October 15, 1995. After visiting a petting zoo and learning about the horrors of the American meat industry, Lisa decides to become a vegetarian. She and Homer get in a huge fight during a big barbecue Homer throws, after Lisa runs away with the roasted pig. Homer and Lisa reconcile. Lisa remains a vegetarian for the rest of the series.

“Much Apu About Nothing” (ep 151, Season 7, Episode 23) First aired on May 5, 1996. In the episode, a referendum is created that will require all illegal immigrants from Springfield to be deported. Though initially an advocate for the referendum, after learning that Apu will be deported, Homer decides to help Apu prepare for a United States citizenship test so that he can become a legal citizen.
p. 79 “A Streetcar Named Marge” (ep. 61, Season 4, Episode 22) First aired October 1, 1992. Marge gets cast in a musical version of *A Streetcar Named Desire* at the Springfield Community Theater as Blanche DuBois. In the end, the family sees Marge in *Streetcar* and Homer is impressed, moved, and humbled, seeing parallels between Stanley and himself. This episode is full of pop culture references, including Hitchcock’s *The Birds*, the film *The Great Escape*, and various Ayn Rand references.

p. 80 “Toxic” – song by Britney Spears from her album *In the Zone*. It was released on January 12, 2004, the second single released from the album. Also heard in Chart Hits. Click here to hear the song/watch the music video.

pg 82 “Chart Hits” (these are the songs referenced in Michael Kiley’s version of this number)

“Let’s Go Crazy” – song by Prince from his album *Purple Rain*. It was released July 18, 1984 and is classified as hard rock, funk-rock, and new wave. Click here to hear the song/watch the music video.

“Take Me to Church” – song by Hozier from his debut EP of the same title. It was released September 13, 2013. The song was nominated Song of the Year at the Grammys. Click here to hear the song/watch the music video.

“Firework” – song by Katy Perry from her third studio album *Teenage Dream*. It was released as the album’s third single on October 6, 2010. The album was nominated for Record of the Year at the Grammys. Click here to hear the song/watch the music video.

“Three Little Birds” – song by Bob Marley and the Wailers. It was the fourth track on the second side of their album *Exodus*. The album was released June 3, 1977, and the song was released as a single in 1980. Click here to hear the song/watch the music video.

“Everything’s Alright” – from the album *Jesus Christ Superstar*, by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice. Sung by Yvonne Elliman. The studio album was released in September 1970. Elliman later released the song as a single in 1971. Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice were nominated for Best Original Score at the Tony Awards. Click here to watch the scene from the movie played over the original album.

“Hold Up” – song by Beyoncé as a part of her visual album *Lemonade*. It was released as the third single from the album on August 16, 2016. “Hold Up” was nominated for Best Pop Solo Performance at the Grammys. Click here to watch the scene from the visual album.

“I Will Always Love You” – song by Dolly Parton. It was released as a single on June 6, 1974. It reached Number 1 on the Billboard Top Country Songs. The song was also recorded by Whitney Houston. Houston’s cover spent 14 weeks as Number 1 on the Billboard Top 100 making it one of the best-selling singles of all time. It’s the best-selling record by a woman in music history. Click here to listen to Dolly Parton’s original version. Click here to listen to Whitney Houston’s cover.

“Chandelier” – song by Sia from her sixth studio album “1000 Forms of Fear.” The song was released on March 17, 2014. Click here to watch the music video and listen to the song.

“No One” – song by Alicia Keys from her third studio album *As I Am*. The song was released September 11, 2007. Click here to watch the music video and listen to the song.

“I Want Your Sex” – song by George Michael released as a single in June 1987. It was the third hit from the soundtrack to *Beverly Hills Cop II* and was the first track on Michael’s debut album *Faith*. Click here to watch the music video and listen to the song.
“It Takes Two” - song by hip hop duo Rob Base and DJ Ez-Rock. It was released as a single on August 2, 1988. The song was a Top 40 hit and was later certified platinum. [Click here to listen to the song and watch the music video.]

“Can’t Touch This” – song co-written, produced, and performed by MC Hammer as a part of his album Please Hammer, Don’t Hurt ‘Em released on January 13, 1990. [Click here to listen to the song and watch the music video.]

“Me Myself and I” – a song by hip hop trio De La Soul. It was released as a single a part of the team’s debut album Three Feet High and Rising in 1989. [Click here to listen to song and watch the music video.]

My Lovin’ (Never Gonna Get It) – song by female group En Vogue. It is the lead single on their multi-platinum album Funky Divas released November 17, 1991. [Click here to watch the music video and listen to the song.]

“Whip It” – song by rock band Devo from their third album Freedom of Choice released on August 13, 1980. [Click here to listen to the song and watch the official video!]

p. 89-90 Sideshow Bob’s rakes. One of the iconic bits from the “Cape Feare” episode: Sideshow Bob encounters a seemingly never-ending line of rakes. He steps on each one, getting hit in the face. [click here to watch this moment]

ACT 3

p. 93 Opening “ahhs” in score for “Nobody thought to Flee” references the “Cape Fear Theme.” [Click here to listen!]

p. 93 Principal Skinner: Seymour Skinner, Interim principal of Springfield Elementary. Springfield school leader who lives with his mother. [Click here for more on Principal Skinner.]

p. 93 Edna Krabappel: (pronounced kruh-BOP-el) 4th Grade teacher at Springfield Elementary. She is a disenfranchised, bitter teacher, seen smoking and drinking in class. In the script notes, Anne Washburn states, “Edna Krabappel, is a killjoy on the Simpsons, but a teacher -- a keeper of knowledge -- would have a very different significance then, and be much more revered.” [Click here for more on Edna Krabappel.]

p. 93 Chief Wiggum: Referencing Springfield’s chief of police, Clancy Wiggum. He personally insists on handling all calls involving donut shops, ice cream parlors, and food-processing plants. Wiggum also manages to be dumber and fatter than Homer Simpson. [Click here for more on Chief Wiggum.]

GLOSSARY
Apu: Owner of the local Kwik-E-Mart. Came from India in search of the land of opportunity. Known for his squishees and vegetarian chili-dog. On how the characters have changed by the third act, Washburn states in the script, “Apu is a sincere businessman” and a “noble trope”. Click here for more on Apu. Click here to watch Hari Kondabalu’s documentary, The Problem with Apu, which points out the racism inherent in this character’s portrayal of Indians.

Troy McClure: Washed-up television star that now narrates commercials and videos. In the script notes, Washburn says, “Troy McClure is not a fatuous newscaster (something they wouldn’t have a real concept of) but something along the lines of a noble but flawed messenger character, a herald.” Click here for more on Troy McClure.

“you may know me…”: McClure’s tagline on The Simpsons was “You may remember me from such films as…” (and then the film titles were always absurd). Here’s a compilation.

Willy: The rather kooky groundskeeper at Bart and Lisa’s elementary school. On how the characters have changed by the third act, Washburn states in the script, “Willy a hard-working man of the soil” stating he is a “noble trope”. Click here for more on Willy.

Thelma: Thelma is actually Selma, one of Marge’s two sisters - twins Patty and Selma. They work at the DMV. Raspy voiced, chain-smoking, snort-laughing, Homer-hating, MacGyver loving, 40-ish twins. Click here for more on Selma and Patty.

Ned Flanders: The Simpsons’ always pleasant Christian neighbor. Puritanical religious zealot and next door neighbor to the Simpsons. Click here for more on Ned Flanders.


Mayor Joe Quimby The corrupt, lascivious, and incompetent eternal Mayor of Springfield. With a Kennedy-style Boston voice, he has a penchant for victorious public appearances. His voice is modeled on former Senator Ted Kennedy’s. Click here for more on Mayor Quimby.

Moe: Moe Szylak runs the tavern that Homer and his pals frequent. He has been a character since the first broadcast episode. According to Wikipedia, “He is easily irritated, frequently threatening the patrons at his bar with a shotgun he keeps behind the counter. He is also gullible, and Bart’s unending chain of successful prank calls to his bar are particularly infuriating to him, inevitably prompting a torrent of Red Deutsch-style threats of gruesome bodily harm in return.” Click here for more on Moe.

Kent: Kent Brockman is a television reporter and anchorman in Springfield. The character was based on Los Angeles anchormen Hal Fishman and Jerry Dunphy. The director of “Krusty Gets Busted,” Brad Bird [now known for directing The Incredibles and Ratatouille], designed the character and modeled him after anchorman Ted Koppel. Click here for more on Kent.

– “upside inside out,” “this is the vida loca, we are living the vida loca”: lyrics from “Livin’ la Vida Loca” by Ricky Martin, released on March 23, 1999, off the self-titled debut English-language album. Click here for the music video

– “my family is safe and we’re Sailing away” – In composition, Michael Kiley is referencing the song “Sailing” by Christopher Cross, specifically on the lyric “Sailing away” here. The song was the second single from Cross’ debut album Christopher Cross. It was released June 15, 1980. Listen to the song here
Springfield: The Simpsons’ hometown. According to Mike Reiss, “The name Springfield was chosen by creator Matt Groening for its generic blandness…There are forty-eight Springfields in forty-three U. S. states, which means there are five states that have two Springfields.”; “In The Simpsons Movie, Ned Flanders says that Springfield’s state is bordered by Ohio, Nevada, Maine, and Kentucky.”

“Everything will be just fine” (and at a few other points) referencing “Three Little Birds.”

Burn’s monologue about love and hate is paraphrasing a monologue from The Night of the Hunter. (Click here to watch the scene).

“So you see, Little Lisa Simpson, I bring you love, Love triumphant, love captivating love”: Kiley’s score is referencing “All You Need is Love” by the Beatles (released as a non-album single in on July 7, 1967).

“this moment you own it…this opportunity to end my lifetime” – lyrics referencing “Lose Yourself” by Eminem from the soundtrack to the film 8 Mile. It was released on October 28, 2002 as the lead single from the soundtrack. Click here for the music video

Fight Song (used underneath Anne Washburne’s lyrics): song by Rachel Platten released as a single on February 19, 2015. The song appears on her EP entitled Fight Song (2015) and her major debut studio album Wildfire (2016). Listen and watch the video here!

Wrecking Ball (used underneath Anne Washburn’s lyrics): song recorded by Miley Cyrus for her fourth studio album Bangerz released on August 25, 2013. Listen and watch the controversial video here!
BEFORE SEEING MR. BURNS

THIS GUIDE: We encourage students and teachers to read through as much as possible of this education guide before seeing the show. However, before digging into the guide too deeply, we might suggest doing numbers 1 & 2 of the pre-show activities below first, and only reading the sections of the guide these specific exercises reference. The first two activities should generate interest and provide context for the content addressed in the rest of the guide.

1. The Simpsons episode, Cape Feare. (Season 5, Episode 2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C1Kws7SgaPkJ) The episode is free on YouTube, though it has to be viewed in 7 parts. They roll automatically into each other so it’s not as disruptive as it sounds. Viewing the episode should take about 25 minutes, and the payoff for watching it before students see (or even read) Mr. Burns is significant.

**For Discussion:** As explained on page 13 of the glossary, The Simpsons’ “Cape Feare,” which is one of the most popular (and critically acclaimed) episodes in its 30 year history, was inspired by the 1991 psychological thriller directed by Martin Scorsese, which is a remake of an earlier 1962 film starring Robert Mitchum, itself an adaptation of a 1957 novel, The Executioners, by John D. Macdonald. What is it about this thriller story that people find so compelling? Are the reasons similar to why people find stories of the Apocalypse compelling? (Read the section on Apocalypse Fiction on page 8 of this guide for greater insight into this phenomenon.)

**Theatrical Storytelling:** How do you tell the same story through different mediums? What tools can a film use to tell a story that live theater doesn’t have? What can live theater do that a film cannot? As a class, try to tell/act out the story of “Cape Feare” together from memory, with volunteers jumping up to act out certain scenes as others in the class piece it together and prompt them with specific lines. Lean into the joy of recreating this story as a class and relish the disagreements about certain moments. Reflect. What did you notice?

2. The Podcast: Listen to episode 1 of the Wilma’s Apodcalypse Apocacast podcast: http://blog.wilmatheater.org/ (for all the ways to access this podcast see the Appendix)

**Writing Exercise:** In her introduction to the podcast, Kellie MeCleary asks listeners to imagine themselves in a post-electric apocalypse: “Do you know what you’d miss? Do you know what you’d be glad to see go?” A.) Make a list of the things you’d miss from your electrically dependent life and a list of the things you wouldn’t miss. B.) What role might you play in a Zombie Apocalypse? Are there things you’d be really good at? Are there things you’d want to try that you haven’t felt free to try in your current life? Share.

3. Theater Making: In Act II of Mr. Burns, which takes place 7 years later, the group has begun to incorporate commercials (for products they no longer have access to) into their performances of Simpsons episodes. Why? Anne Washburn refers to it (in the Apocalypse section of the guide on page 8) as “reality porn.” What do you think she means by that? What purpose is it supposed to serve for audiences? In groups of 3-5, make a commercial for a product (multiple products/luxuries/experiences that you would miss in post electric world might also be referenced) rehearse it and share it with the class.

4. The Play: like most plays, Mr. Burns doesn’t read nearly as well as it plays on stage, particularly the third act. If you want to read the play before seeing it, we suggest reading only the first act or two, and leaving the third act for seeing live at the Wilma. Then you can go back and look at the text as a reference during post-show conversation.
1. As you think back on the production, is there a particular scene or moment that stands out for you? What was its impact on you at the time? Can you identify any specific theatrical elements (i.e. the connection between two actors, a choreographed movement, music, lighting, etc.) that contributed to the impact of this moment, or of another moment in the play?

2. What was most surprising to you or differed most from your expectations in this production of *Mr. Burns*? Did these moments or choices ultimately “work” for you, theatrically speaking? Can you come up with a rationale for why specific choices were made?

3. Each act of this production feels like a decidedly different style. How would you describe these styles? Do these styles seem to serve the script? Why might Anne Washburn have made the unusual and risky choice to make Act III an opera? How did it impact you?

4. What questions do you still have about *Mr. Burns*, either about the play itself or about the Wilma’s production of it? Did it ignite your curiosity in any way? What might you want to know more about?

5. How might the experience of seeing *Mr. Burns* in 2018 differ from the experience of seeing it in 2013 when it was originally produced? Do you think it might feel more or less relevant? Why?
APPENDIX


VIDEO: Playwrights Horizon Interview with Anne Washburn, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dR01Ez6kFZw


VISUAL: Interactive map of all of the locations mentioned in Acts 1 and 2 of Mr. Burns. Act 1: https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/Mr%20Burns Act 2: https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/Act%202%20Mr.%20Burns%20locations

MUSIC: There are many music references in Act II and III. Listen to the playlist and see if you can spot them on our Mr. Burns playlist!

PODCAST:
Listen on our Blog
Listen on ITunes
Listen on Stitcher
Listen on Google

WORK CITED


