The Last Hurrah

by Edwin O'Connor

adapted and directed by Neil Simon

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TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDE
This Teacher Curriculum Guide
for

The Last Hurrah

by
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ABOUT THIS CURRICULUM

This curriculum package has been developed for use in conjunction with the Study Guide for the Huntington Theatre Company's production of *The Last Hurrah* written by Edwin O'Connor and adapted by Eric Simonson. The guide is appropriate for English, social studies, music, history, and drama classes for middle school through high school, and can be integrated into discussions and activities of an historical, social, literary, artistic, or interpersonal nature. Students may explore themes, characters, and issues while using their curiosity, creativity, writing skills, and analytical and critical judgment skills. The curriculum includes classroom activities, discussion questions (both group and individual), research topics which can be worked on in groups or individually with information presented orally or in writing, and suggestions for writing assignments. Teachers are encouraged to pick and choose, and to change and adapt each entry to meet the preferences and needs of individual classes and students.

We recommend that teachers read the study guide for *The Last Hurrah* before approaching this curriculum guide, and then read the curriculum guide in its entirety.

This curriculum includes the following sections:

A _Audience Etiquette_ introduces students to the concept of drama and audience etiquette.

Objectives provide the teacher with measurable goals.

Preparation offers background information and introduces issues of the play without requiring special knowledge.

Critical Viewing and Reading helps students to develop specific skills by encouraging them to focus on particular elements of the play.

Question and Answer Breakdown of the Action of the Play helps students assess the main points of the play.

For Further Discussion encourages students to develop independent judgments about the issues and a clearer understanding of some complexities of the play, and helps them to relate such issues to their own lives.

For Further Exploration allows students to explore independently and creatively some of the issues and background of the play.

Writing Assignments affords students opportunities for self-expression and analytical thought and for developing their writing skills.

Questions for After Attending a Performance of the Play encourages students to consider the aesthetic and practical elements of a live performance.

Activities provides hands-on and interactive consideration of the play.

Quotations allows students to approach specific lines of the play in an assortment of ways.

Suggested Readings and Films encourages students to read other literature and to see movies with similar themes, conflicts, and characters.

Vocabulary offers a hand-out sheet without definitions for work with words and language. (The definitions are supplied in the accompanying study guide.)

Bibliography lists valuable sources used by the Education Department in developing the Curriculum Guide.
AUDIENCE ETIQUETTE

Because many students have not had the opportunity to view live theatre, we are including an audience etiquette section in this study/curriculum guide. Teachers, please spend some time on this subject since it will greatly enhance your students' experience at the theatre.

1. What are the differences between live theatre and the cinema?

2. How does one respond to a live performance of a play, as opposed to when seeing a film at a local cinema or watching a video at home?

3. What is the audience's role during a live performance? How do you think audience behavior can affect an actor's performance?

4. How does a play script differ from a novel?

5. What do you know about the theatrical rehearsal process? Have you ever participated in one as an actor, singer, director or technical person?

6. What are some of the elements involved in producing a play? — set, costumes, lighting actors, director stage management, tech direction, etc.

7. What is a professional stage actor's life like?

Unlike at a movie theatre, no food, gum or beverages are allowed at a Huntington Theatre Company performance. Book bags should be left at school or on the school bus. Beepers, cameras, flashlights, laser lights, walk men, and cell phones are also not allowed in the theatre. Hats must be removed.

The acoustics in the theatre are such that whispers in the balcony can be heard as clearly on the stage as the actors' voices are heard in the balcony. Audience members should refrain from talking during the performance.
OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- identify central themes and issues in *The Last Hurrah* including:
  - political idealism and corruption
  - fathers and sons
  - media power in politics

- relate themes and issues of *The Last Hurrah* to their own lives

- identify political, economic and social conflicts of their own while coming to understand those of the characters in *The Last Hurrah*

- understand generational, professional and cultural contexts of the play’s themes and issues

- familiarize themselves with various prominent historical figures of Boston politics

- trace the changing role of Boston’s Irish community

- participate in hands-on arts activities, including acting, visual arts and performing music and movement

- evaluate the Huntington Theatre Company’s production of *The Last Hurrah*
PREPARATION

Background
The Last Hurrah is a story both personal and political that chronicles the final election campaign of Frank Skeffington, the central character of Edwin O’Connor’s 1956 novel and Eric Simonson’s new play based on O’Connor’s book. Like Adam, Skeffington’s nephew in the story, we become the spectators in a political campaign that Skeffington himself compares to the “greatest show on earth.” Unlike Adam, though, we have a historical perspective with which to observe. As an audience we witness how the old political system worked; and we are reminded that no matter how much times have changed, the nature of politics and of the professional politicians involved hasn’t really changed much at all.

The City of Boston
In Edwin O’Connor’s novel The Last Hurrah, the city in which the story takes place is never specifically identified. However, because of O’Connor’s long association with Boston and the novel’s background of the political advancement of an Irish-American community, it was immediately accepted that the novel is a depiction of Boston municipal politics and its four time mayor, James Michael Curley.

1. Divide students into groups. Have each group investigate some aspect of Boston’s history during the 1950’s. Some suggested topics can include: the layout of the city, its architecture, its ethnic make-up, politics, union issues, work conditions. (An excellent resource for this research is The Bostonian Society at education@bostonhistory.org.) Encourage students to find photographs or news articles looking for the spirit of Boston so that they can develop a sense of the environment in which people like the characters of The Last Hurrah really lived and worked. Have students share their findings with the class.

2. Have students identify Boston monuments named for past mayors. Ask them to discuss what it reveals about our culture that we now have monuments named for sports figures, e.g., the Ted Williams tunnel.

3. Visit Boston’s two City Halls, the old one (now housing the restaurant Maison Robert) and the new one. How does each building represent its time?

4. Take a map of Boston and locate the different wards of the city. What changed in 60 years of political history (1900-60) - boundaries, types of population, ethnic culture? What wards today are the city’s most important ones compared to 1950? What has changed the landscape?

5. Make a collage of the homes of important politicians in the Boston area - Curley’s Jamaicaway Estate; JFK’s birthplace in Brookline, etc. What do these homes reveal about the politician?

6. Visit the Holy Cross Cathedral on Washington Street (scene of Skeffington’s funeral). Visit Trinity Church in Copley Square as an example of where the Yankees worshiped. What do the buildings tell us about these two cultural groups from Boston’s past history?
Quick Boston Quiz

1. Which of these firsts did Boston have?
   a. The first public school
   b. The first public library
   c. The first church built by free blacks in America
   d. The first American chocolate factory
   e. The first regularly published American newspaper

2. Boston Common became the first public park in America in what year?
   a. 1702
   b. 1776
   c. 1634
   d. 1906

3. The largest public housing development in Boston is in:
   a. Dorchester
   b. Roslindale
   c. Charlestown
   d. Roxbury
   e. Hyde Park

4. Which is not part of the City of Boston:
   a. Cambridge
   b. Chelsea
   c. Quincy
   d. Readville
   e. Bay Village
   f. Oak Square

5. Which Boston neighborhood was a center for the Women’s suffrage movement?
   a. Hyde Park
   b. Back Bay
   c. West Roxbury
   d. Roxbury
   e. Allston

6. The population of the City of Boston is approximately:
   a. 1.2 million
   b. less than 600,000
   c. more than 750,000
   d. 2.3 million

7. One of the first free African American communities was located in:
   a. North End
   b. Brighton
c. Beacon Hill
d. Roxbury
e. Jamaica Plain

8. The last time the Boston Red Sox won the World Series was in:
   a. never
   b. 1986
   c. 1918
   d. 1927

9. Where did the Back Bay get its name?
   a. The neighborhood is located next to the Charles River Bay
   b. The neighborhood is located on land which was used to fill in a former tidal bay
   c. The neighborhood was once located closer to the ocean
   d. The name is derived from the creole slang word bacquebe which means
      flat place or flat land

Answers:
1. All of the Above, 2. c 3. c 4. a.b.&c. 5. a 6. b 7. c 8. c 9. b
(The preceding Quick Boston Quiz was contributed by the National Conference for Community and
Justice, LeadBoston 2000 Program and composed by Charlie Rose, City Year.)

James Michael Curley - the inspiration for Frank Skeffington
James Michael Curley has been described as an “old ham actor, a political Barnum, the low-brow mayor
of a high-brow city and a combination of Santa Claus, Robin Hood, a Chinese warlord and the late
John Barrymore.” Who was James Michael Curley?
1. Have students, individually or in groups, research a political figure that touched the life of Mayor
   Curley. Ask them to tell all they can find out about the “Mayor of The Poor” “in character” through the
   voices of any of the following:
   Patrick J. Maguire  
   Judge James Cabot Lowell  
   Cardinal Henry O’Connell
   John F. Dever
   Martin Lomasney
   Maurice J. Tobin
   Joe O’Connell
   Charles H. Baxter
   John F. Fitzgerald

2. Have students create a timeline of political events, achievements and scandals that occurred during
   the sixteen years of James Michael Curley’s (non-consecutive) terms as Mayor. Have students draw or
   create computer graphic images that represent these events either in a realistic or a more expressionistic
   manner. Students may also want to include photocopies of artwork from the Curley era in their time line.
   Hang the completed time line up in the classroom so that the class can refer to it while continuing to
   study The Last Hurrah.

3. Identify these nicknamed political figures during Curley’s administration and report through a “street-
corner speech” on Curley’s activities by one of the following:
   Whispering Johnny Hynes
   Albert “Dapper” O’Neill
   Pea-Jacket Maguire
   Honey Fitz
   Sonny McDonough
   Knocko McCormack
   “One-Arm” Peter Whalen
   Bilso Hickey
   the “Goo-Goos”
4. Curley’s political showmanship, his dramatic speeches, his gigantic outdoor rallies, his appeals to ethnic pride, and his glowing promises of a more prosperous city captivated many voters. Research and select a James Michael Curley attack against ethnic injustice. Stage a political rally and re-enact a Curley crusade.

**The New England Brahmin**
The massive influx of impoverished Irish, Italian, and Jewish immigrants throughout the nineteenth century brought major change to Boston’s political, socioeconomic, and cultural character. To analyze ethnicity in Boston, consider the impact of immigration on the city’s traditional influential cultural, socioeconomic and ethnic elite - the Brahmins.

1. For class discussions consider the following questions: Who were the Brahmins and who coined the term, “The New England Brahmin?” What contributions did the Brahmins make to the city of Boston in terms of architecture, literature and art? How did Brahmins and Yankees differ from each other in their character and socioeconomic status? What tied them together politically?

2. Define the word “xenophobia?” As a free writing exercise, ask students to write about their reactions to and their feelings about this fear. Does it exist today in their lives, community, schools and families? How does it affect contemporary local politics? Encourage students to share what they have written with each other and with their class as a whole.

**The Boston Irish**
When the Irish arrived in Boston throughout the middle and late nineteenth century, the city’s Yankee-dominated political, economic, and social institutions were closed to them. Between 1850 and 1900 the Irish worked to establish as complete a society with a society as possible.

Have students gather information about what life in Boston was like for Irish immigrants during the early 20th century. After the students have conducted their research, have them write or present orally their findings in “A Day in the Life of…” stories. For this exercise, students might identify specific kinds of individuals they wish to research, including but not restricted to:

- Housewife
- Teamster
- Scrub woman
- Policeman
- Priest
- Street Peddler
- Dockworker
- Factory worker
- Newspaper Boy

**Introducing the Issues**

**Political Idealism and Corruption**
Curley wrote “if you want to win an election, you must do unto others as they wish to do unto you, but you must do it first.”

1. Have students discuss where they may have heard this quote before and what this quote means to them. Ask them to consider how one acquires a conscience. Make three columns on the board, labeling one **moral**, one **immoral** and one **amoral**. Have students determine the differences among these categories. Under each title have students list behavior that would fall under the various types. After they have viewed the play, place the columns on the board again and ask students to determine which
characters in the play and which of their actions belong in which column.

2. Organize a debate in which students argue whether or not politicians who are convicted of crimes and/or are sent to jail should be ineligible for holding public office? Find out about the career of Marion Barry, Mayor of Washington, D.C., who served time in jail, yet was re-elected as was Mayor James Michael Curley and Providence Mayor Buddy Cianci.

3. Poll your students on the issue of honesty and voting. Would they ever vote for someone dishonest? Would they vote on the basis of loyalty or issues?

4. Frank Skeffington empathizes the supreme importance of the personal aspects of political life as he knows it: “There are twenty men in the outer office right now who couldn’t tell you at the point of a gun where I stood on the matter of low-cost housing, but every last one of them would know to the day just when I moved from Delaney Street to the Avenue.” Create some role playing exercises to allow student to express how they would respond to whether or not the personal life of a politician directs a voters’ decision at the polls.

Fathers and Sons

Adam Caulfield is the substitute son for Skeffington; and Adam, orphaned in childhood by an auto accident, finds a father figure in Skeffington. The two form a type of ideal “father-son” relationship in which each party respects and freely chooses the other.

1. Conduct a general discussion about father/child relationships. Some ideas to consider might include how do they differ from mothers’ relationships with their children? How do son-father relationships differ from sons’ relationships with mothers? What special bonds tie a father and son together? Daughters with fathers? How do we feel close to our fathers? What can be some of the barriers to feeling close? How do our relationships with our fathers differ at different ages? How will our relationships with our fathers change as we grow older? Ask students to talk about what their relationships with their fathers are like? How would they like these relationships to be?

2. Have your class read the following poem:

“The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work;
and if it takes the second must refuse
A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.”

For group discussion, ask students to consider the above lines by William Butler Yeats; and after viewing The Last Hurrah, apply their message to the characters of Francis Skeffington, Jr. and Norman Cass, Jr. Ask them if they believe that the fathers of these men, both successful in their careers, are failures in “life” because they have not raised more capable sons. What do you think their fathers’ expectations were for their sons?

3. Have students list on a sheet of paper all of the “expectations” that their fathers have for them, e.g., study hard, get into a good college. Then have them list their own expectations for themselves. Make two columns on the classroom board, one labeled Father’s Expectations and one labeled Personal
Expectations. Encourage students to share some of the items on their lists. Write their responses in the appropriate column. Ask students what they think motivates their fathers to have expectations that may differ from their own.

4. Have your class discuss the roles and perceived responsibilities of the members of a family. Consider extended families as well as nuclear families. Which family members are traditionally the bread-winners? Why? Does this vary in different cultures? How have patterns changed over the course of time? For what reasons? What types of family activities do members participate in? How do the roles and responsibilities of family members reflect on the community of which they are part? How important is family perception within a community?

Media Power in Politics
Consider the historical and political events of the Curley administration and have students work in groups and, utilizing their research materials, choose one idea from the following list of possibilities to create a media program in a television news/television magazine format for presentation. Each presentation should be 3-5 minutes, using video cameras, music (taped or live), graphics, pictures, etc. Consider the following worksheet as a beginning point for preparation:

INTERVIEWS/EXPERT TESTIMONY: Create at least 5 interview questions that are specific to a Boston politician. Consider: do you want to elicit only facts? How about opinions? Controversy? What kinds of questions will help you obtain the responses you want?

NEWS STORY/"Flash" report from the field/live footage: Brainstorm ideas for scenes that could be considered “news,” taking events from the play or time period of the play as a point of departure. Choose one idea. Students should improvise and then outline their scene in scripted form on paper. Script the interactions between hosts/news anchors and reporters/eye witnesses/victims “in the field.” Prepare at least 2 questions from the anchors/hosts which are unplanned or unrehearsed.

POINT-COUNTERPOINT: Decide who is debating and on what topics. If the debate is between "characters," opening and closing remarks could be thought of as monologues. Script the debate.

EDITORIAL-OPINION: Decide who is delivering the editorial and on what topic. What views and opinions are important to stress?

PREVIEW OF COMING ATTRACTIONS: Brainstorm ideas of actual or imagined events that you wish to preview. How much variety of information do you wish your audience to have? Do you want to "tease" them with certain information? What tone will you set with your preview?
CRITICAL VIEWING AND READING

1. Ask students to research and define the following forms of Drama:

   Tragedy       Comedy       Tragicomedy

   What are the elements of each form? Ask students to consider the similarities and differences between Tragedy, Comedy and Tragicomedy. Do they believe that serious and comic elements can be mixed successfully in Drama? What form of drama do they believe marks director/adaptor Eric Simonson’s play *The Last Hurrah*? Have your class members cite reasons to support their choice.

2. Ideally, a clear point of view should inform and permeate every aspect of a theatrical production, helping to create in each play a world which spectators can enter and inhabit with full belief and truth. Point of view is the perspective from which we view people, places and events -- the way we look at things. It dictates how an audience is led to approach what it is shown, as well as how it assesses a work’s meaning. After your students have viewed the play, have them discuss the director’s point of view for *The Last Hurrah*. How would they describe some ways that the script, acting, and design in this production express a point of view? Are there any ways that the script, acting, and design of *The Last Hurrah* fail to convey a point of view?

3. A dramatic plot is not the same as a story. The novelist E.M. Forster wrote in his *Aspects of the Novel* that there is a crucial difference between the two and cited this example, "The king died and then the queen died" is a story, he said; "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. Have students define in their own words the differences between story and plot. After they have differentiated between plot and story, ask them to describe the plot of *The Last Hurrah*. Ask them, also, to tell the story of *The Last Hurrah*.

4. From the Greek theatre we have the terms protagonist and antagonist. Who is the protagonist of *The Last Hurrah*? Who is the antagonist? Ask your students to define each term and support their choices with specific examples from the play.

5. The conventions of dramatic structure suggest that a play should reach its crisis and climax as a result of conflicts (obstacles and complications) in its plot. Encounters of conflict produce important tension in drama. A play in the traditional mode builds from one crisis to another. The final and most significant crisis is referred to as the climax. Ask students to relate the journey of Adam Caulfield through the plot complications in *The Last Hurrah*. Have students describe the plot’s various crises and the climax of the play.

6. The theory of dramatic structure also has an element called the denouement. The term is from the French meaning "the knot is untied," and it signifies the moment when the final suspense is satisfied. Have students identify the denouement of *The Last Hurrah*. 

11
QUESTION AND ANSWER BREAKDOWN OF ACTION OF THE PLAY

Students may use these questions to guide their understanding of the action of the play or may choose to answer them only when they know how the play unfolds.

1. What is the motive for the celebration at the beginning of the play? What inferences might be made about the characters who attend this celebration?

2. How does Adam Caulfield feel about his uncle running for re-election again?

3. Maeve’s father believes that Skeffington has committed an “inexcusable crime.” What is this crime?

4. Why is Maeve concerned that Adam will become involved in Skeffington’s campaign?

5. Who is Mrs. Santagata and what is her request? What do you believe are Skeffington’s motives in granting her request?

6. What are Amos Force’s predictions about the upcoming elections?

7. What job did Burbank previously hold at the Herald?

8. Burbank refers to himself as a “hatchet man.” What does he mean by that nickname?

9. What was the subject of Burbank’s expose twenty years ago?

10. What does Burbank claim to be the real reason that Amos Force and his newspaper are seeking revenge on Skeffington?

11. Describe the conspiracy that Skeffington’s stratagists believe to be a threat to his campaign.

12. Why do you think Skeffington gives Citronella a key to the city?

13. What does Skeffington’s son, Francis Jr., think of Citronella?

14. How does Skeffington describe his son, Francis, Jr., to John Gorman?

15. Describe the story that Skeffington tells Adam about his mother. Do you believe him? Why? Why not?

16. What is Adam’s reason for accepting his uncle’s offer to “take a seat in the stand” for the campaign? What do you think is Skeffington’s reason for offering Adam this opportunity?

17. What is the convincing factor in Norman Cass, Jr.’s decision to accept the position of fire marshal? What do we later find out are Skeffington’s motives for offering Cass, Jr. this position?
18. What is Burbank’s new job? Who is his new boss and what will his job duties be?

19. Based on what Skeffington, Gorman and Weinberg say about McCluskey, how would you describe his character? Based on what you observed in the Huntington’s performance would you agree with them?

20. What detail of McCluskey’s character does Skeffington’s campaign resolve to attack?

21. Just before McCluskey’s television show is about to be broadcast, a painting of Pope Pius XII is the subject of debate. Why?

22. Describe McCluskey’s television show. What role does McCluskey’s wife, Margaret, play in this scene?

23. What gift does Skeffington give to Knocko Minihan’s widow? What does he say are his reasons for giving her this gift?

24. What are Skeffington’s motives for attending this wake?

25. Skeffington tells Adam the reasons why he entered politics. What are these reasons?

26. How does Maeve’s impression of Skeffington change during their dinner together?

27. On election night, as the first votes start rolling in, it appears as if Skeffington is going to win the election. How and why do the election results change?

28. Upon his defeat, Frank Skeffington announces a plan for the future. What is this plan?

29. What is Katie’s message to Skeffington. Why do you think that she appears to him?

30. What are Skeffington’s last words?
FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

1. Often, when a director chooses a play to direct, he or she does so with a "vision" for the play. The director might wish to give the audience beautiful visual images, or raise questions about human relationships, or address social or political concerns. Can you describe Eric Simonson's vision for the Huntington production of The Last Hurrah? Do you agree with his interpretation? If you were selected as a director, how might you choose to direct this play? What would you emphasize? What would you de-emphasize?

2. Based on your impressions of Frank Skeffington's actions, speeches, decisions and values throughout the play, would you have voted for him? Why or why not?

3. Discuss the role that women play throughout this play. How might this have been different if the play had been set in the year 1999? Can you think of any women involved in current political elections? What might they say about the role of women in this play?

4. The character of Frank Skeffington had a very specific objective/goal throughout this play. What is it? What are some of the things that get in the way of his attaining this goal? What types of things do you imagine that he had to sacrifice as he attempted to reach this goal?

5. If someone who knew nothing about politics in the United States saw this play, what do you think might be their primary impressions about political life in this country.

6. People who disagree with the dominant politics of their era often stage political protests. Do you know of any political protests that have recently occurred in this country? How about in other countries? Are there any political issues that you yourself feel that you would want to protest?

7. Have each student in your class select a memorable line of dialogue from The Last Hurrah that best captures the essence of a particular character. Have students present their lines individually in class and explain the reasons for their selections. After each of the presentations is completed and all the chosen lines have been recited aloud and explained, discuss the rationale for the choices made.

8. Ask class members to “cast” the characters of Skeffington, Adam, Maeve, Sam Weinberg, John Gorman, Junior, Amos Force, Norman Cass Sr. and Jr., Kevin Mccluskey, Burbank and Ditto using popular movie or TV stars. Ask class members to explain their choices. After your class has viewed The Last Hurrah at the Huntington, continue the casting discussion, asking class members if their choices matched the types of actresses and actors cast in the Huntington production.

9. Discuss the significance of Burbank's statement: "That's the reason they foam at the mouth whenever his (Skeffington) name is mentioned. Not because he happens to be a Democrat while they happen to be Republican. Not because he's Irish-Catholic while they're Yankee-Protestant. No indeed, the real reason is deeper, far deeper: he has cost them money."

10. Try to identify Boston media - TV, radio, and newspapers - as “liberal” or “conservative.” Follow the treatment of an issue in their editorials to see what their politics are.
FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

1. The two political parties within this play are the Democrats and Republicans. What are some of the other political parties that exist within this country? What types of political parties exist in other countries? Have various students choose different countries and report on the political structures of these countries.

2. Before your students view this play have each student ask their parents, friends and neighbors what they know about Massachusetts Governor James Michael Curley and Edwin O’Connor’s novel, *The Last Hurrah*. Then have each student locate as many newspaper articles as they can regarding people and events from Curley’s administrations as Governor and Mayor. Finally, after they have seen the play, have the students discuss how the events as reported and depicted in the play differed from:
   a) what they had been told of the events by friends and family;
   b) What the newspapers of the time had reported.
This exploration may lead to further discussions of truth vs. legend, artistic interpretation, and how our interpretations of history can change over the years.

3. Ask each student the question, *If they could elect anyone as Mayor of Boston, who would it be?* Why? Have them write a speech that this person might give as his/her election speech. The speech should highlight the reasons that he or she would be a good city Mayor. The students may want to go further and deliver their speeches in the manner or style of the characters they have chosen. Students may even use music and costumes to appeal to their audience. Following this, a mock election could be held within the classroom. The students could then discuss why they chose to vote for a specific candidate. Did the person that they voted for share any qualities with Frank Skeffington? What were they?

4. We can see in this play many examples of how politicians have traditionally attempted to appeal to the public in order to gain votes. What are some of these strategies? Do other industries use the same tactics? Have each student choose a product, i.e. Coca Cola, and investigate how this product attempts to gain consumers through such things as commercials, charitable contributions, and sponsorship. Can such marketing be considered political?

5. There are many characters in this play who we see only briefly and learn little about. Are you curious about any of them? If so speculate on what the character’s life might have been like, taking into consideration the patterns of the times, political background, social conditions, art and music of the play’s era. What might their typical day have been like?

6. A *Roman a clef* (novel with a key) is a work of fiction based on actual people, setting, or events. Authors such as Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner are well-known for having introduced such recognizable characters into their fiction. Explore the use of this literary device in Edwin O’Connor’s *The Last Hurrah*, and investigate the characters who may be modeled after real-life individuals.

7. If you were assigned to be the dramaturg for a production of *The Last Hurrah*, what research material would you provide for the director and actors at the first rehearsal (e.g., information on the political climate of Boston during the 40’s and 50’s; prominent political figures influential during that
decade, and so on)? Make a list of all the terms in the play that would require definition and make a glossary for your cast. What images, photographic or otherwise, would you display at rehearsal? Bring in some of these pictures and hang them around the classroom.

8. Research the career of former Massachusetts Senate President William Bulger, in certain ways a present day Curley-style, Irish-Catholic Boston politician.

9. Who is the Mayor of Boston today? What is his ethnic background? Trace his political career and report on his campaign, election and administration.

10. Study the successful election campaign of 1949 of John Hynes, who defeated Curley. How did Curley’s own hubris bring on his defeat?

11. Research a well-known example of Boston political folklore: the famous missing “Curley desk.” Has it ever been found?

12. Investigate James Michael Curley’s blackmailing of Boston Mayor “Honey” Fitz (John Fitzgerald, 1906-08, 1910-14) and the “Toodles” affair of 1913. Compare this occurrence to Bill Clinton’s situation almost 80 years later.

13. Identify how different cultures deal with death. If the traditional Irish way is to hold a wake, what do other cultures do?

14. Research the political history of Maurice Tobin, whom some commentators believe was a model for Kevin McCluskey in The Last Hurrah, and compare the real and fictional characters.

15. Read the novel The Last Hurrah. Compare scenes from the novel with scenes in the play to see what was adapted and what was omitted. How faithfully did the adapter, Eric Simonson, capture the feeling of the original Edwin O’Connor work?

16. Research James Michael Curley and compare him to the character of Frank Skeffington. Is the character of Skeffington realistic? Has the politician been made into a legend? Are the harsh and tough realities of politics romanticized in him?

17. After watching the video and/or reading, The Last Hurrah, watch the video and/or read All The King’s Men, and compare the character of Frank Skeffington with the character of Willy Stark.
WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Have students choose a character in The Last Hurrah and write an entry for his or her diary that deals with some events in the play.

2. Assign students to write a paper comparing any two characters in The Last Hurrah.

3. Assign class members to write a sequel or "prequel" to The Last Hurrah. You may want to have students work in pairs to collaborate on this project. Encourage students to share, discuss, revise and perform their plays.

4. The political world presented in Eric Simonson's version of The Last Hurrah introduces the audience to the world of American big city politics in the 1950's. Have students choose one of the politicians, Irish Catholic or English Protestant in the play and create a biographical time line of the ten most important occurrences in his or her life. Students should choose only ten events which are most focal for that character, understanding that you must prioritize. One event might be very traumatic, another may be something simple. Each list should include its character's childhood and finish with the end of the play. Events should be ordered in sequence beginning with the earliest event. Students may draw from information in the play, use research on Boston politics and society, or incorporate events that they might imagine happening. This exercise can also be fun to do for one's self.

5. Ask class members to write a review of the HTC production of The Last Hurrah. Perhaps some review(s) could be published in your school or local newspaper. Be sure to send us a copy. If several classmates write contrasting reviews, hold a forum involving two or three of them in a Siskel and Ebert format.

6. Assign students to write a critical examination of the performance by one of the actors in the Huntington's production of The Last Hurrah. These essays should consider how well the character chosen was portrayed through the actor's use of voice, movement, body language, mannerisms. Was there a "signature gesture?" Also, how well did the actor "play off" the other performers. Was this a solo performance or was this actor a team player? Papers should give examples for each comment or opinion. Remind students that being critical does not mean being negative, but being observant and analytical; critiques should be sure to include both honest appraisals and constructive criticisms.

7. Two campaign slogans that Curley successfully used at different stages of his political career were "Give a Young Man a Chance" and "There is No Substitute for Experience." Write a campaign slogan that best describes yourself.

8. Have students imagine that they have found Kate Skeffington's diary written during the time of her marriage to Frank. Have them write several passages that might be found in it.

9. Assign students to write their versions of scenes that are referred to in The Last Hurrah or would logically have happened, but do not actually take place in the text of the play. Some examples might include scenes concerning: Norman Cass Sr. confronting his son after meeting with Skeffington; Maeve telling her father that she has invited Skeffington to dinner; Adam comforting Francis Jr. after Skeffington's death.
QUESTIONS FOR AFTER ATTENDING A PERFORMANCE OF THE PLAY

Note to teachers: Pass out these questions to your students and go over question #1 with them before they attend a performance of The Last Hurrah.

1. Above the stage of the Huntington Theatre Company there is an inscription that states: "To hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature." There is also an inscription in the theatre's entryway that says "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players; they have their exits and their entrances and one man in his time plays many parts." From what plays are these lines? What do they mean? Why do your class members think the original owners of the theatre had these quotations inscribed? With these quotations in mind, consider the following questions while watching a performance of The Last Hurrah.

2. What did the Huntington’s set design for The Last Hurrah tell the play’s spectators about the characters living in 1955? Encourage students to cite specific details about the set that made them feel as they do.

3. What clues did the costumes of The Last Hurrah give about this play's characters before they said or did anything?

4. How did the actors' physicalization of their characters enhance their interpretations of the individuals in the plot? Urge students to identify specific examples such as the way the actors walked, sat, gestured, handled props, and so forth.

5. Ask students who was their favorite character in this play? What was it that the favorite actor playing his/her role did to make the student feel positively?

6. The Last Hurrah is set in 1955. Do your class members think that the Huntington's production truthfully captures the essence of that time period? Why or why not?

7. Did the physical elements of the Huntington's production (i.e., the sets, props, costuming and lighting) suggest different things about the characters? Have your class discuss the many ways that the sets, props, costumes, and light and sound designs of this production attempt to serve its director and actors. Each element should be considered individually. Note: Teachers may want to assign groups of students one production element (sets, props, costumes, sound, music, etc.) each to concentrate on during the performance their class sees.

8. According to director Eric Simonson, The Last Hurrah is a personal look at politics as seen through the eyes of Frank Skeffington’s nephew, Adam. How did Simonson convey this interpretation in his staging? Ask students to give specific examples of blocking, movement, pacing and rhythm.

9. Ask students to trace the plot development in The Last Hurrah. Can they identify moments of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement in the Huntington’s production?

10. What major design choices are evident in the scenery, lighting and costumes of The Last Hurrah? How did the Huntington’s representations of the political world of Boston, circa 1955, correspond to your class’ preconceptions? Think specifically about the colors, textures, and shapes used in the
Huntington’s production.

11. Ask your class how they would describe the acting style used in the Huntington production? Were there different styles represented within the production? How was the acting similar or different to the acting students have seen in other plays or musicals? Was it effective? Why or why not?

12. Live theatre is fundamentally different from television and movies in that the audience contributes to the energy created on stage. Ask your students how they would describe the audience's response to the performance your class attended? Were there any specific moments which seemed to resonate particularly strongly with the audience, eliciting laughter, gasps, surprise, or applause? Why do your students believe those moments had such strong meaning for a contemporary American audience in Boston?
ACTIVITIES

- **Five Minute Performances**

1. Arrange the class in small groups. Tell each group it is going to have to present the story of *The Last Hurrah* in exactly five minutes. They can use whatever methods seem appropriate -- action, prose narration, mime, movement, song, background music, pictures or whatever. Point out that each group must select the most important features, events, and purposes of the play. Send the groups away for a class to discuss and practice. At the next lesson have them perform their five minute versions to the rest of the class, and then compare versions in terms of what was missing, interesting, important, surprising, in common, and emphasized. Discuss why the versions may have differed.

- **Still Life**

1. This exercise is especially useful if you're trying to talk about relationships between characters. Take a willing student and ask him or her to stand in front of the class. Get the student to stand in a pose which he or she thinks is in some way characteristic of one of the characters -- it could be kneeling and supplicant, or head bowed and despairing, or poking a nose into someone else's affairs, or looking behind or ahead, or... The student no doubt will look hopelessly bemused and embarrassed to begin, but get the rest of the class to make suggestions, either by saying something or by simply coming and moving the student to what seems a better position without speaking. This latter point is quite important. Add another student character to the tableau. The way that the second student stands in relationship to the first person is significant. He or she may be turning away or towards the other, be spurning or supporting, an enemy or a friend, or ambivalent or unrelated in any sense (and note that it is often a revelation to students that characters may not meet or know what the reader knows).

2. You could base a still life on a particular moment in the play and compare it with one of another moments in the work; doing so, see what has changed and why. You can ask for other characters and see what changes or adjustments are needed. Start thinking about groups or factions. Start small groups of students off and ask them to compare versions. Try to get the students to justify what they do, but accept it if they are satisfied that they have expressed themselves clearly just through tableau. Ask the other members of the class if they understand the tableau, and if they can identify particular moments, crises, characters, and groupings.

- **Creating Characterization**

1. Have each of your students choose a character from *The Last Hurrah* that he/she would like to portray. As though they were preparing for the role in rehearsal, have them ask the following questions about their characters:

   a. What do I want in the play? What is my overall objective?
   b. What is in the way of what I want in the play? What are my obstacles? Who is/are my obstacles? Does what gets in the way of what I want change throughout the course of the play? How?
   c. Does my character change during the course of the play? What is my character's journey, or plot of transformations?
   d. What are the contradictions inherent in my character?
   e. If my character were a type of animal, what would it be?
   f. If my character were a type of music, what would it be?
• Role Playing/Improvisation

1. Create contemporary situations suggested by the text, such as a parent’s expectations for his/her child, an issue of dishonesty and manipulation in politics, the role and power of the media in politics, etc. Divide your class into groups, and give each group a situation. Allow the students fifteen minutes to create a scene. Have the groups perform their scenes for the class.

2. Divide your students into small groups. Assign the members characters from *The Last Hurrah*. Have each group perform two-minute dialogues. Tell students that their prime objective is to remain in character truthfully. How well can the students maintain this truth?

3. Have your students choose to be characters from one of the following groups:
   a. Skeffington’s Ward Bosses
   b. Skeffington’s Irish-American supporters
   c. McCluskey’s campaign strategists
   d. The Media

Each student should attempt to create a "person" for himself or herself from one of these groups, giving each person a name and history. Have the students introduce themselves to the class, in character, and have them present a monologue that describes how they feel about Frank Skeffington.

• Acting

1. Have students act out a scene from *The Last Hurrah*. The students should use props and costumes. Have students consider who stands where, who moves when and where, gestures, tone of voice, music, intended emotional impact.

2. Assign students, working in groups of two to five, to develop a situation from *The Last Hurrah* and act it out: first, in pantomime, then with dialogue.

3. Have each student select a character from *The Last Hurrah* and pick a line from the play that best captures the essence of his or her chosen character. Organizing the class in groups of four main characters, have each student present their line and explain the reasons for their selection. After all chosen lines have been read aloud and explained, discuss the patterns of the class’ choices.

4. Have students choose a character from *The Last Hurrah* and prepare a monologue of one to three minutes pretending to be their chosen character(s). The students should begin by saying, "My name is (blank) and I am (blank) and continue describing an event in the play or an imagined event. Students should try to give each monologue a beginning, a middle, and an end. They should try to remain in character throughout their talks. Students could use costumes and props if they choose.

5. Ask students to act out the scene provided in *The Last Hurrah* Study Guide. Before they begin, have the students consider what experiences of the characters might be like experiences of their own, and how the characters’ feelings could resemble feelings of their own. Try to have students relate their own personal truth to each scene. If possible, videotape the performances as a project.

6. Have students develop a concept to update *The Last Hurrah*. In their updated version, they might,
for instance, want to develop a pseudo-sadistic world inhabited by a community that follows extremely absurd rules and regulations. The students should write a story line for their version; choose an event from their story line and write a scene based on that event. Have students rehearse and perform their scene.

**Visual Art**

1. Using plates, papier-mâché, and other materials, have students create masks that represent some of the characters in *The Last Hurrah*. Students might act out a scene from *The Last Hurrah* wearing their masks. Once their performance has been completed, ask the students to reflect on how their masks impacted their performance. Have students perform the scene a second time without the masks. What impression do the masks make on the audience? How do the masks make the scene different?

2. Pass out art paper, paints, brushes. Have students create abstract paintings of a character from the play. Make sure the students do not tell their classmates who their paintings represent. Hang the completed paintings around the room. Ask students to pick out qualities, moods, and feelings of each painting. Next have each artist identify the character his/her painting represents and explain how the various details of the painting depict the character.

**** The concept of abstract imagery may need to be explained to some students. Emphasize that they are trying to capture moods, feelings, and conflicts and that their paintings need not perfectly resemble their character (or anything concrete, for that matter.)

3. Have students choose any character from *The Last Hurrah* and individually create a character collage. They might include pictures (hand-drawn or cut from magazines/newspapers) of actions the character performs, relationships the character has with others, typical moods, feelings, or attitudes, etc. Quotations from the play that reveal something about the character (these can be quotations from the character as well as quotations about the character) could be included.

4. Have students design a set for a production of *The Last Hurrah*. Build a model of the set. Compare your class model to the Huntington Theatre's design.

5. Have students design costumes for *The Last Hurrah*.

6. Assign students to create a "character bag" for any character in the play. For this exercise, each student will need a brown paper bag. Students should place objects in the bag which they feel are in some way representative of the character they chose. The students may use objects that already exist, or create objects (example - a camera for a newspaper photographer). Have students trade bags and try to guess the character based on the objects inside. Have students provide a rationalization for why each object is included (either orally or in writing).

7. Locate some videos of political commercials. Study what props (flag, pictures, dog, etc.) these commercials use to "sell" the candidate. Apply this to the TV commercial scene in the play.

**Music/Dance**

1. Have students create background music and/or sound effects to accompany scenes in the play. Or, assign them to use music and/or effects to supplement any of the role playing activities listed above.
2. Compose a "cast rap." Assign characters to students in the class. Have each student compose a brief rap for his/her character. Have the students write in the first person. Instruct the students that their raps are to be "direct expressions" from the characters. Have students perform together as a class. Whose rap was the most accurately reflective of the character he/she chose?

3. Ask students to create a tape of top hits from the year 1955. Have them bring the tape in to play in class. Extra credit could include dancing in some of the dance styles that were most popular in that year.

- **Improv and Role Play**
  1. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*
     This is an exercise for a group of four. One individual plays the host of a party and the other three group members play guests. Each of the three guests should choose a character from *The Last Hurrah* to portray and, without telling anyone who they are, enter the party as their chosen character. The guests can interact with the host and other guests until the host can guess who they are.

  2. *Choose A Moment*
     Have students improvise a moment from *The Last Hurrah* and then test the effects of changing something -- tone of voice, some important trait in a character, or a vital remark. How does such a change affect the selected moment? Students could improvise what happens before or after some point, or what happens after the play’s end. Both these exercises can help the class understand how a work of art always involves both an ongoing process and an interrupted process, or a decision to stop what could be endlessly revised. See if the students can identify some of Director Simonson’s main points of choice or decision in their story.

- **The Design Process**
  1. Scenic designer James Wolk and costume designer Karin Kopischke collaborated extensively to select a color palette for this production which reflects the world of and the characters in *The Last Hurrah*. Assign students to work in teams and design scenery and costumes which would appear on stage harmoniously. The students should pay attention to color, fabric and materials. Showing the work or painters from a particular artistic period may inspire your students’ work.

  2. Have students imagine a campaign headquarter setting. Using various media (i.e., drawing, painting, collage), they should design this image. Students should compare their designs with their classmates’ designs. What elements are common? What are the qualities of those designs that they think most successfully capture the essence of a political setting?

  3. Discuss the role that Lighting Designer Donald Holder and his work played in the Huntington production of *The Last Hurrah*. Discuss how color, angle, and intensity helped to suggest time of day, mood, focus, and action. Students should look for pictures or use watercolors and create their own pictures to illustrate these properties.
QUOTATIONS

Teachers can use the following quotations to discuss specific scenes in the play in context, or discuss the universal ideas of the quotations projected out of context, or they may use the quotations as springboards to role playing, essay writing, fictional writing, creative writing, or research.

**Burbank**
The (Amos) Forces of the world neither forgive or forget, especially when they’ve been touched in the pocketbook.

**Skeffington**
They’re out to get us by claiming the city is a poor risk under my administration. Not one of them wants to loan the city a red cent, even for a laudable purpose. An inhumane group, bankers. ‘...those whose hearts are dry as summer’s dust.’ Do you suppose Wordsworth ever had any dealings with the Consolidated Trust?

**Skeffington**
You’d be surprised how politics seem to fascinate people. They like it like spectators, don’t they? They know the names and numbers of all the players. They wouldn’t play it for a million dollars, but it’s great fun to sit in the stands and look on.

**Skeffington**
Your friends the journalists are responsible for this curious myth that public men fall out over public issues. I believe it’s called division on a matter of principle.

**Skeffington**
A big political campaign is the greatest show on earth.

**Amos Force**
I suspect he may be incapable. But since it is impossible in this city to elect a decent sort of person to public office, we must select the best of the trash to support.

**Charlie Hennessey**
Dear friends, you’re being asked to cast your precious votes for a good-looking youngster with nothing upstairs but a mass of floating custard.

**Skeffington**
I went into politics because it was the quickest way out of a place like this and up the ladder. You know it was only when we gained a measure of political control that our people were able to come up for a little fresh air.

**John Gorman**
You couldn’t pry his (Skeffington) supporters away from him with a crowbar, but the trouble is they’ve been getting old — they’re dying off and they’re being replaced by kids. And those kids are watching a lot of television. More every year.
SUGGESTED READINGS AND FILMS

Teachers may choose to explore aspects of work within various genres to allow students to continue to expand their understanding and appreciation of elements of *The Last Hurrah* and may also benefit from studying some other plays adapted from novels.

**Books**
*The Proper Bostonians* by Cleveland Amory  
*The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley* by Jack Beatty  
*Mortal Friends* by James Carroll  
*I'd Do It Again* by James Michael Curley  
*The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* by Doris Kearns Goodwin  
*One Boy's Boston* by Samuel E. Morison  
*Angela's Ashes: A Memoir* by Frank McCourt  
*‘Tis* by Frank McCourt  
*All Souls* by Michael McDonald  
*The Boston Irish: A Political History* by Thomas O'Connor  
*All Too Human: A Political Education* by George Stephanopoulos  
*All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren  
*Primary Colors* by Anonymous

**Films**
*The Last Hurrah* (1958 flm available on video) starring Spencer Tracy  
*Wag the Dog*  
*Primary Colors*  
*Good Will Hunting*  
*Southie*  
*Monument Avenue*  

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