

The American Dream

by Edward Albee

Theatre 3050-02
MTSU

Presented by:

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What is the play about?

The American Dream by Edward Albee is based around five characters. The characters are as following Mommy , Daddy, Grandma, Mrs. Baker and the young man. Each character has an odd way of presenting their selves in this production. Their relationships are not quite enacted with one another. Each character perspective has a different way on how they view " The American Dream". When you think of an American Dream one would think of prospering in many aspects of their lives. But , with this family the American dream is more about how things look from the outside rather than the inside.

What Inspires?

- **Visual Language**

The description of the hats as far as color goes, I visualize the color of the set being a pure beige color for their apartment. I also visualize the colors representing the intensity of the lighting designs.

The boxes and the meaning of them plays an important role. In each box are a lifetime of emotions, secrets, stories and materialistic things stored from over the years.

What Inspires?

- **Characters**

Grandma is the protagonist of this story. In a way she dissolves the problem by stepping out the family picture so Mommy and Daddy could have the American Dream that they always dreamed of.

Mrs. Baker is the confidante of this story. Mrs. Baker is grandma sidekick , she also helped Mommy and Daddy achieve their goal.

Mommy is the antagonist of this story . Because she is very disrespectful towards grandma and goes against anything anyone says .

Daddy and the Young man are very neutral. They just go along with the flow of things and neither disagree or agree with what is going on.

- **Themes**

The themes are as following confusion , hurt, anger ,naïve and love

Practical Considerations

- **Setting takes place in a small apartment that includes an archway**

The play would be performed in a studio theatre since the set is small. This would be beneficial because since a studio theatre is such a tight space ;It will allow the audience to have more of a connection and a up close view of The American Dream World. The things within the apartment such as the wallpaper would be simple (a beige color). That color will represent the lack excitement that is missing within their lives. The archway will be upstage left of their apartment.

- **Props**

Main props will include different size of boxes scattered throughout their apartment . The boxes are nicely wrapped in different patterns. Such strips , polka dots and plain gift-wrapping papers.

Practical Considerations

- **Costumes**

The characters are dressed in red , white and blue attire. Mommy would be in a blue flowy dress , Daddy and Young man would be in blue jeans and a white T-shirt. And Grandma would be in a red long skirt and white T- shirt . Mrs. Baker. Would be in a white skirt suit.

- **Lighting design**

The angles lighting will be mainly downlight along with backlight and high side angles. The colors that will be present on stage is Red.

About Edward Albee

Edward Franklin Albee is an American award-winning playwright. He not only write plays but , short stories , poetry and novels. Mr. Albee wrote over two dozen plays. Along with *The American Dream*, his other famous works consist of *The Zoo Story* , *The Death of Bessie Smith*, *Whose Afraid of Virginia Wolf?* and so many others. Albee creative method to his plays are based on those he know. As he stated, "*Your source material is the people you know, but every character is an extension of the author's own personality.*" In 1967 he established the Edward F. Albee foundation which allows writers and visual artists to have a retreat in different states or countries.

History of The American Dream

The American Dream one act play was written in 1959 and was the fourth play Albee had written. This play is known to be an absurd comedy. The term absurd is a genre that developed in Europe after World War II. According to theatre critic Martin Esslin , *The American Dream* explores despair and insanity of modernity, and employs several components of the absurdist drama. Albee's language is satirical, and his humor is dark. Edward Albee seeks to show how deprived of meaning Americans' normal human feelings and relationships have become. He points out that people go through the ritualistic motions of loving and caring for one another, and respond to sexual attractiveness or neighborly concerns, but no feelings are engaged.

Aristotle's Poetics

- Aristotle's poetics are the earliest surviving work in history to discuss dramatic theatre theory and literary theory. In Aristotle's poetics he talks about what elements a play must have to be considered a tragedy.

The Element Plot

- Aristotle states that "plot is the soul of tragedy". In other words plot is the foundation of a tragedy. The plot of a play must consist several things. It must have a beginning which is also known as the incentive moment. This gives us backstory to what is panning in the play and will start a cause and effect to move along the plot. A plot must also consist of a middle or a climax. This is the part of the the story that has the highest point of intensity and drama in the story. Finally a plot must have an ending or resolution to the story. This wraps up the story and has created a solution to end the conflict of the story. The plot of the a play must be complete and have a universal significance to maintain its theme and purpose. Aristotle says that plots must have catharsis which is the purification and purgation of emotions. Catharsis has the elements of reversal and recognition in them. Reversal is a paradox or change in the plot to make the the story complete. Recognition is the change from ignorance to knowledge. This helps character discover there inner selfs and identity. This allows this to know if they are detrimental for good or bad fortune.

The American Dream Plot

- The beginning of “The American Dream” starts with the two characters mommy and daddy talking. Mommy is telling daddy about her day and how she went shopping. She found a hat that she was lovey. When she asked what color it was the salesman said it was beige. Mommy was come over joy with hat and bought it. She soon realized that the hat was actually wheat. The store had special lighting to change the appearance of the hat. After this story Grandma comes down to the room and brings down wrapped boxes. The climax is when the young man comes to the house. Grandma sees this as her opportunity to finally leave. The young man can take her place and give mommy and daddy a child that they always wanted and grandma can finally live in peace. The show ends with mommy and daddy coming back to the room and seeing grandma is not there. Believing that she was taken by the van man mommy starts to cry. Then young man comes to the door looking for work. Mommy and daddy are finally satisfied with their live because they have finally found the perfect son they long desired. “The American Dream” does not contain a recognition but there was a reversal. When the young man first comes to the door and talks to grandma he tells her about his twin brother who was adopted. He said that he feels empty inside of the murder of his brother. The adopted parents didn’t like how he said bad words to them so they cut off his tongue, they didn’t like how he tried to play with himself so they cut off his privates. Suffered from bloody tortured he was headless, spineless, and didn’t have guts. The reader finds out that mommy and daddy were the adopted parents who murder this boy because of a story grandma told earlier.

The Element Character

- Aristotle believes that there are three elements that a character should have in a play. He believes that all characters are good. He states “We feel pity for a man who does not deserve his misfortune” this way the audience is more drawn into the story. We fear characters that we can relate to because we see ourselves in them and there misfortunes could happen to us. Another element that a character should have is a character must be true to life. What Aristotle means by this is characters must be realistic. Audiences want to see characters from there life. If there are characters that are aren't relatable they will not be interested. Characters should also be consistent. Meaning they should be true to themselves. Aristotle states that a tragic character should be “a man who is neither outstanding in virtue and righteousness, nor is it through wickedness and vice that he falls into misfortune”. He believes that a tragic hero is best suited be someone famous from noble families. There downfall needs to be a flaw or intellectual weakness that they can not control.

The American Dream Character

- Even though grandma is not part of a noble family she does qualify in what Aristotle believes to be a tragic character. As a reader and an audience member we feel pity for her. She's very misstated even by her own daughter. Mommy always threatens grandma that if she steps out of line she will the van man to go take her away. Grandma says that she would rather be alone than to be treated poorly. She believes the reason old people go deaf is so that they don't have to hear the way people talk to them. Even with the name grandma the reader already has an image of what she looks like because of their own perceptions. They're going to think of someone very personal in their life to connect this character because of how realistic this character is. Like most older people grandma is not afraid to say what she thinks. In fact she doesn't even have a filter. Even towards her own daughter. Grandma wanted her daughter to have a great future but was upset with her that she only married for money and not love. Grandma will never let a moment not to comment that mommy is just in a shameless marriage for money.

The Element Idea

- “Thought is the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in given circumstances” Aristotle believes that idea is the reasoning of characters in the play. This helps explain the characters' actions and can give us background information about them or the story itself.
- The main idea of this play is the American Dream. It is personified by the young man. He's beautiful and physically perfect but still feels incomplete. He has lost all feeling and desire from the murder of his twin brother. Knowing that a bundle of joy is not able to provide happiness or satisfaction to mommy and daddy. This tortures the young man, making him empty inside but perfect in form. He is a figure who can not relate to others but accepts the fact that everyone around him wants to relate to him. He's just like the American Dream, something we all desire but can never fully achieve.

The Element Language

- Language is much more than just the expression of words when it comes to a play. Aristotle states “ Diction; by which I mean,as has been already said, the expression of the meaning in words; and its essence is the same both in verse and prose.”what Aristotle means by this diction refers to the quality of language in a play. The language of a show should be able to reflect character and their the morals.
- A lot is reviled from in this play just from the language. The reader can see characters morals and their motives. It’s obvious that mommy’s morals are very corrupt. She only cares about her wealth and feeling complete in her life. Grandma even points out that even as a little girl her views were even perverted. Mommy talked about how one day she was going to marry a rich man and sit on his lap just like this. Mommy didn’t even marry daddy for love. She just did it for the money. She would sleep in grandmas room just so she wouldn’t have to sleep in the same bed as daddy when we wanted to be physical.

The Element Music

- Melody: Aristotle states that “Song holds the chief place among the embellishments” he believed that the chorus should sound melodic when they speak. This helps break up a character's dialogue that sounds too repetitive or is lackluster. The chorus is there to help move along the plot and help add to the drama. In a way they are basically a character on stage with the rest of the actors.
- Although there is no chorus in the “American Dream” there is still a sense of melody in the play. The rhythm of the play is very distorted. The dialogue of the play is twisted and sharp. There are moments where it's very soft and slow then all of sudden becomes jagged.

The Element Spectacle

- Aristotle ends the last element of special staying that “The Spectacle has, indeed, an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic” spectacle is just what you see in the play like costumes, sets and props. They don’t add anything to the playwrights intent or the acting.
- With this play spectacle would be the least important element of of the show. The set is very minimalistic. On stage are only two arm chairs. The costumes are modern and wouldn’t be too flashy. The most important visual of the show are the boxes. They need to be noticeable and stand out because they play a very important role in the show. They help show how mommy and daddy only care how things look on the surface and what’s inside. They also represent the American Dream. These boxes hold everything that grandma has ever had in her life. She worked hard for these things and didn’t want to see them go.

Theme

The theme of the piece is “Everyone has a box.” Each character has been placed in an archetypal box of sorts, showing the stereotypical ideas of each type of character. Due to the nature of the theme, the plays mood is both dark and comical.



Visual Metaphor

The play *The American Dream* is like the idea of the girl with the red balloon. It is an image of hope and of longing for something that is just out of reach. The girl is nameless, and faceless, and the balloon in love.



Painting

This painting of a lady seemingly created out of boxes encapsulates the idea of the theme. The colors reflect the cool, but playful mood of the piece. The lines provide a plethora of information.

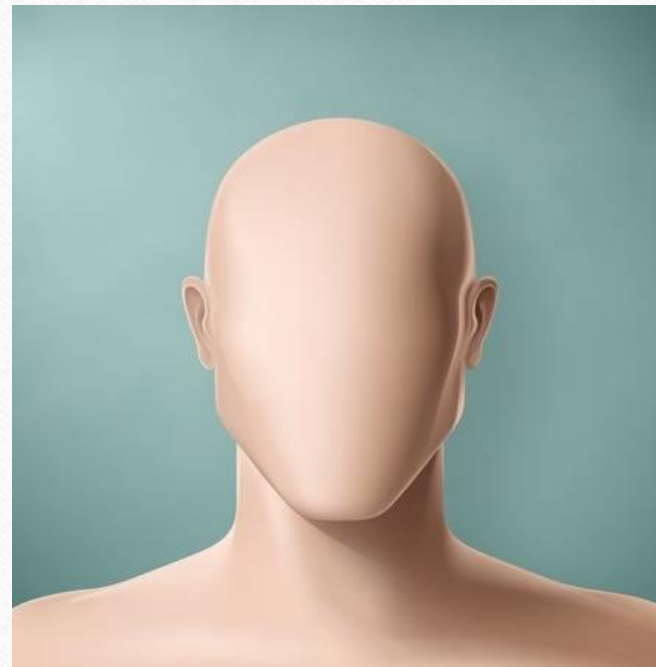
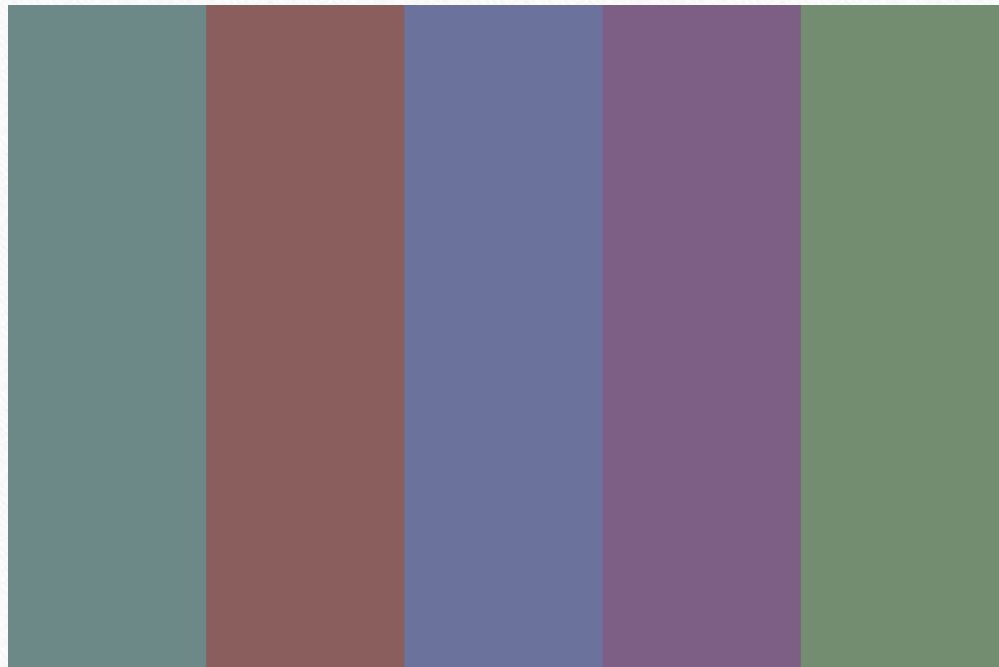
There are lines that are straight and boring, but there are also feminine curves. There are energetic diagonals as well as forced perspectives.



Inspiring Images

The images on the following slides are inspirational in nature. They don't necessarily reflect the chosen artistic direction of the piece. Rather, these images were chosen as inspiration that may guide the artistic direction, whether it be due to the line, color, or texture within each image.

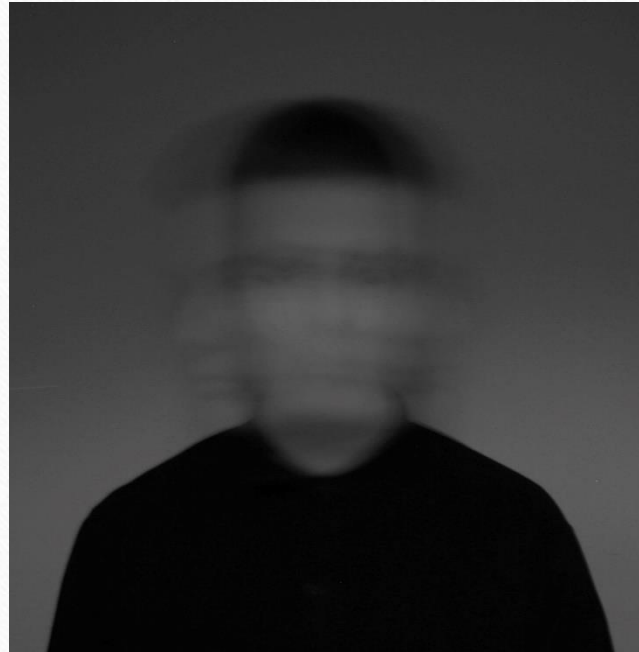
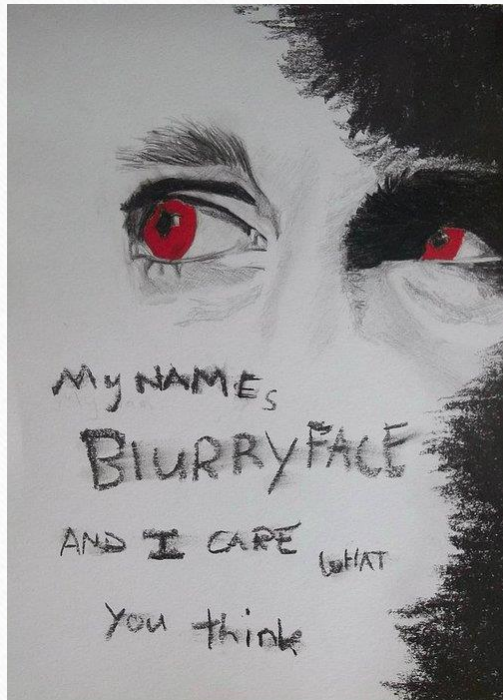
Inspiring Images



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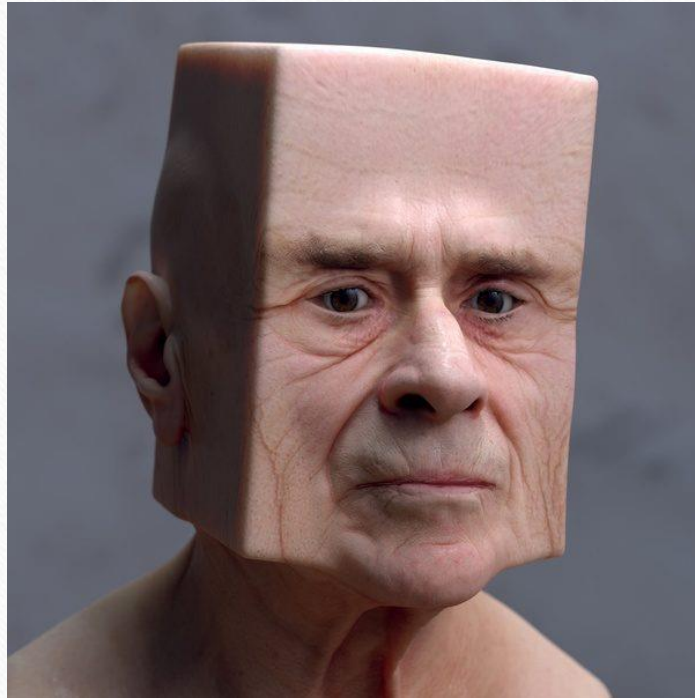
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3-D Collage



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