

ACU THEATRE
transforming artists

I and YOU

By Lauren Gunderson
Directed by Adam Hester

A Complete Study Guide

An Introduction:

First, a word from the playwright:

"I and You is a play about connection. But how do we connect with a play about two teenagers doing homework? (I wrote the thing and that sounds like a terrible premise.) We start by acknowledging that there is always more going on than the obvious; that everyone is living with contradiction, challenge, mystery and accessible joy if we care to look. We would also be smart to remember who *we* were as teenagers; hopeful, spiteful, wistful, wise. We might also start with generous hearts that recognize the communal hopes of people who do not at first seem to be anything like us. That's the spirit of Whitman that these two characters gradually unpack and then embody during the course of the play you are about to watch, the spirit of strange unity and surprising kinship."

-Lauren Gunderson



About the Playwright: Lauren Gunderson



Lauren Gunderson is 33 years old. Originally, Lauren is from Atlanta, Georgia. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Creative Writing from Emory University. Directly following, she went on to pursue and complete the Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts in 2009. Since then, Lauren has written 19 plays. These plays usually are themed around women in science and history or are comedic

Shakespeare parodies. Most recently, Berkley Central Works produced her play, *Ada and the Memory Engine*, in October of 2015. She has also recently written and received praise for *Silent Sky*. It is clear from her writing and her website/work that Gunderson wants to make her work accessible to young audiences.

History of the Play

The production had a rolling world premiere at the Marin Theatre Company. The play had two subsequent productions before winning the 2014 Steinberg/American Theatre Critics Association New Play Award. The Play is also the winner of the 2015 Helen Hayes new play award.

Who's Who

These are the faces you can look for at the show!



Josh Alexander as Anthony

Josh is a junior theatre major at Abilene Christian University and is thrilled to be a part of his first Cornerstone production. Favorite roles include Von Hussler/Policeman in *Mary Poppins*, Don Price in *Big Fish* and Sam's Dead Body in *Ghost*. He would like to thank his mother, father, Lisa, Michael, Kristin, and Ann-Marie for their love and support, Caleb Robinson for his encouragement and haircuts, Kaitlin Sacco for always listening, and Adam and Mariel for their patience and the opportunity to tell this story. Josh would also like to say a special thanks to Wendy Lee Tedmon and the Tedmon-Bury family, without whom, he would not be here and able to perform today. Yawp.

Mariel Ardila as Caroline



Mariel is a sophomore musical theatre major at Abilene Christian University and is honored to be a part of her first Cornerstone production. Recent roles include Jane Banks in ACU's *Mary Poppins*, and Mrs. Santiago in ACU's *Ghost*. Other credits include Summer Stock Austin's *Footloose* (Ariel), as well as the SSA original production of *Tortoise and Hare* (Brittany/Mara). She also participated in the Greater Austin High School Musical Theatre Awards in its inaugural year, as a member of the Select Ensemble. She would like to thank Kristie Copeland, Adam Hester, and Josh Alexander for their patience and support, as well as her INCREDIBLE mom for her love and general awesomeness.

Specific Content: Caroline's Disease

In the play, Caroline suffers from a liver disease. The disease that is most probable is Type II Autoimmune Liver Disease. We know Caroline has had the disease since birth, but is now having more serious complications and is in need of a liver transplant. Such a liver disease can have a huge effect on a young person, making them feel isolated and alienated from the rest of the world. In this article, 19-year-old Owen Jennings writes about his experience with Type II Autoimmune Liver Disease. Jennings speaks truthfully about many feelings that Caroline also feels.

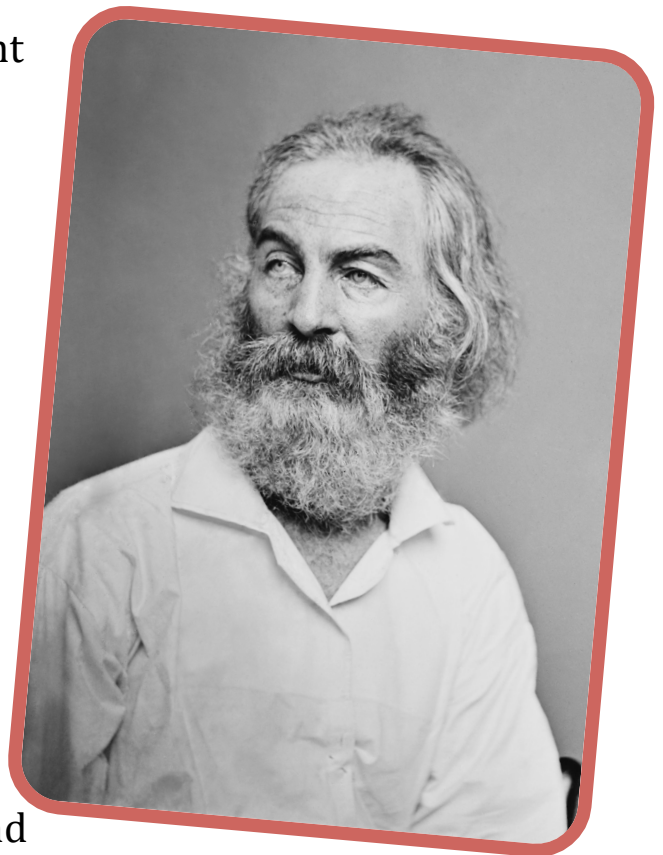
<https://olneyiandyou.wordpress.com/2014/02/14/i-have-liver-disease-but-it-doesnt-have-me/>

In a liver transplant, there are several stages that a person's body may go through. When the new liver first enters the body, it is frequent that the body will reject the new liver. This is often common even when the surgery is finished. Doctors will often prescribe an immunosuppressant to help the body accept the new liver. Second, the body begins to accept the new liver. Lastly, the body will fully accept the new liver and completely embrace its presence. A liver transplant surgery can take anywhere from 6 to 12 hours. Throughout this type of surgery, there can be two types of complications. First, the new body can reject the liver, and the immune system can even begin to attack the new liver. Second, the liver can become infected due to immunosuppressant given to the patient to help the body accept the new liver.

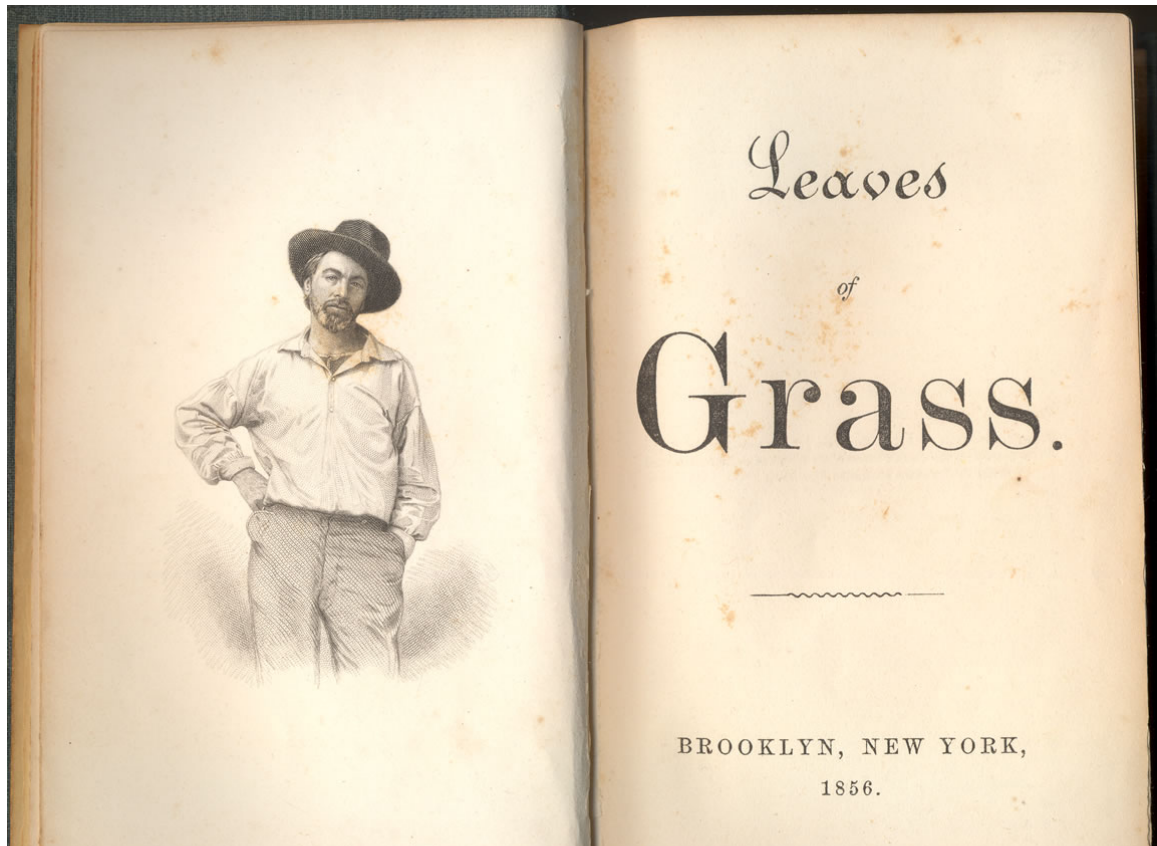
Specific Content: Walt Whitman and *Leaves of Grass*

Walt Whitman was an American Poet who lived from 1819-1892. He was regarded as one of America's most significant 19th century poets. Whitman was born on Long Island and grew up in Brooklyn. He received little formal education, however he worked as a printer, schoolteacher, reporter, and educator at various stages of his life.

Whitman's major life achievement was the self-published *Leaves of Grass*, a collection of poems originally published in 1855. Originally, there were only 12 poems that were a part of the collection. However, Whitman revised and expanded the collection throughout eight subsequent publications. The poems were inspired by Whitman's travels throughout the American frontier and by Whitman's love for poet Ralph Waldo Emerson. The poems celebrated democracy, nature, love, and friendship, and deeply praised the body and soul, taking special notice of beauty and reassurance found even in death. When the original publication was released, critics were uncomfortable.



Whitman openly talked about sex and his life as a working man, using irregular meter and rhyme. Soon after publication, Whitman was fired from his job. Although his work was not well received by American critics, it was well received and celebrated by British writers.

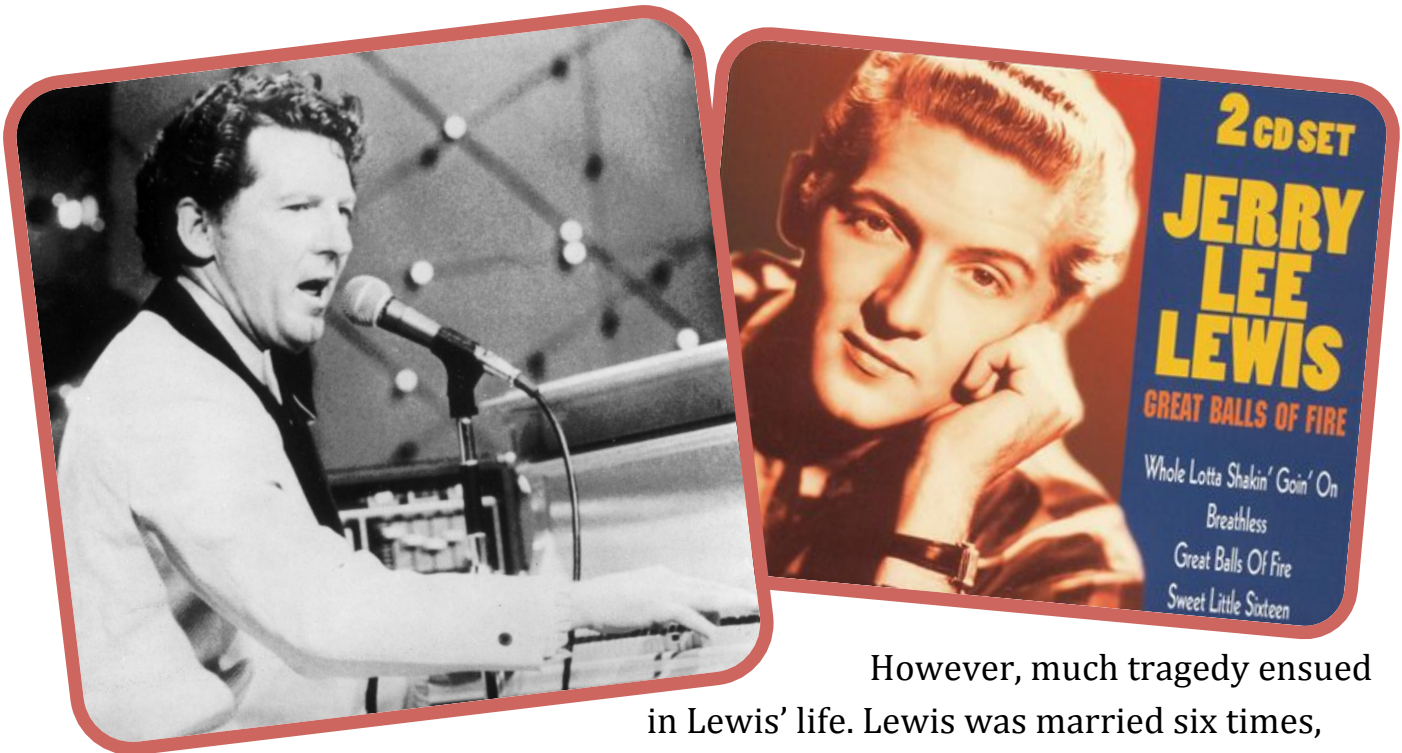


1856 edition of *Leaves of Grass*

Whitman would not see his work highly praised during his lifetime. In 1873, Whitman suffered a stroke and his health continued to decline until 1892, when he passed away at the age of 72. Over 1,000 people attended his funeral and his legacy as the first truly American poet continues today.

The Music: Jerry Lee Lewis

Jerry Lee Lewis was born in Ferriday, Louisiana in 1935. Growing up, he took an interest by playing piano at age 8. By age 14, Lewis had his first public performance with a country band in a car dealership parking lot. A devout Christian, Lewis went to bible school in Waxahachie, Texas after high school. After he was expelled from bible school, he moved to Memphis to further pursue his music. His first few singles, "Crazy Arms," "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On," and "Great Balls of Fire" got Lewis on the charts. "Great Balls of Fire" was named after a southern expression that many Christians considered inappropriate. However, the hit was at the top of the charts during the 50s and reigns as number 96 on *Rolling Stone's* list of the 500 greatest songs of all time.



However, much tragedy ensued in Lewis' life. Lewis was married six times, frequently to very young women, including his 13-year old cousin. The start of these very unconventional marriages brought his career to a halt. His son drowned at age three. Lewis accidentally shot his bassist in the chest. Two of Lewis' wives died. He had only one surviving son.

The Music: John Coltrane

John Coltrane was born in 1926 North Carolina. He attended the Ornstein School of Music and played for the Grandoff Studios. In his time at school, he served in a navy band in Hawaii. As a saxophonist, he was in various jazz groups throughout his career. However, he became famous when he joined Miles Davis' quintet.

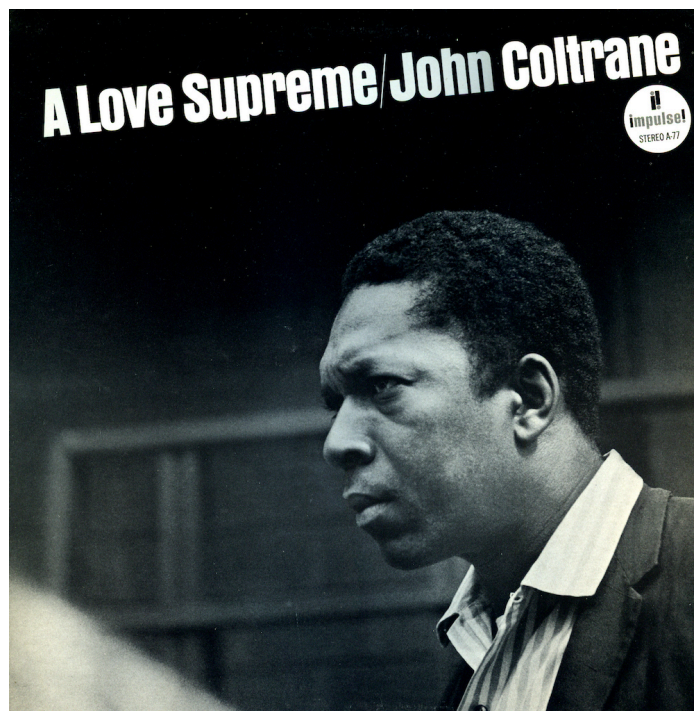


Despite this success, Coltrane had a drug and alcohol addiction that took him away from his career. However, Coltrane soon recovered from these issues and restarted his career. Coltrane rejoined Miles Davis and discovered the soprano saxophone. Now a composer and musician, he released the album *A Love Supreme*. The album celebrated the victory in overcoming his addictions, as well as the strong religious threads that ran through his journey.

Recorded in 1964, the album lays out Coltrane's reaffirmation of faith in four parts: Acknowledgment, Resolution, Pursuance, and Psalms. Here, Reverend Franzo Wayne King further explores Coltrane's four part album,

“When you look at the composition of titles and the sequence in which John has them laid out, we say that there's formula in that album. When he says, ‘Acknowledgements, resolutions and pursuance,’ it's like saying, ‘Father, Son and Holy Ghost.’ It's like saying, ‘Melody, harmony and rhythm.’ In other words, you have to acknowledge and then you resolve and then you pursue, and the manifestation of it is a love supreme.”

After the release of this album, Coltrane was known to have a saintly reputation among both his listeners and his fellow musicians for the remainder of his days. John Coltrane died at age 40 of a liver ailment.



Technology in the Play

Throughout the play, we see frequent uses of current technology. Both teens' cellphones, Caroline's laptop, and apps like Twitter, all make appearances throughout the show. This use of technology is yet another form of connection that achieves Gunderson's goal. Caroline is familiar with technology because she has long periods of time to herself and finds that it is a way for her to connect with the world around her. We know she loves taking photos and her room is covered in them. It is easy to imagine that she would love looking at things like Post Secret or Humans of New York.

Gunderson posted a very interesting article called "My Selfie, Myself" on the *I and You* Tumblr page. The article discusses how the author found an old black and white photo in an antique store of a female pilot on a mountaintop with the plane in the background and how he slowly realized that she was holding the camera herself. The article as a whole makes the point that a selfie is perhaps a bit more timeless than we thought. "It's much more of a moment and a story than a photo."

This is a link to the article, "My Selfie, Myself":

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/sunday-review/my-selfie-myself.html?hp&_r=0



Classroom Ideas

1. Students will consider Caroline's bedroom. What might it be like? What covers the walls? From the play text, we know Caroline loves taking photos, especially of small, everyday objects. Let students take photos with their smart phones of an everyday object that they find extraordinary. Then, the student will write 2-3 paragraphs describing the object they photographed and persuading other students of its extraordinary qualities.
2. The learner will take a selfie (or use an existing selfie from their social media account) and write an original poem mimicking the style of the first four stanzas of Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself*. Together, the selfie and the poem will create a representation and reflection of the student.
Those stanzas can be found here:
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/174745>
"I celebrate myself.... Original energy."
3. Playwright Lauren Gunderson loves staying connected with students through Tumblr. She has a fantastic *I and You* Tumblr page that can be found here: <http://iandyouplay.tumblr.com/>. After seeing the play, each student will explore Gunderson's *I and You* Tumblr page. The learner will then choose a topic found within the play that interests them and create a Tumblr post that could be easily added to Gunderson's page.

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Note:

This study guide is the work of dramaturge Laura Harris. She is a junior Theatre Education major at Abilene Christian University. If this study guide is used for educational purposes, or if your class completes any of the classroom activities, she would love to hear from your class or see your students' work. You can contact her at lah12a@acu.edu.

