



A Wrinkle in Time

Based on the novel by Madeleine L'Engle

Adapted by James Sie

Directed by Elise Kauzlaric

Educator Study Guide

Written by Lifeline Theatre Education Director, Julie Ganey
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Dear Educators,

Welcome to Lifeline Theatre's production of *A Wrinkle in Time*! Lifeline's award-winning adaptations of literature inspire a love of reading that will activate your students' imaginations and stay with them throughout their lives. Every year, Lifeline Theatre's Student Matinee Program serves over 3,000 students, 40 schools, 129 classrooms, and 222 teachers with school-day performances of our season productions.

This Study Guide is designed to enhance your students' experience of our production. The guide includes a thorough play synopsis, historical context, writing and drama activities, and discussion questions to help students process the production afterwards. We hope it will inspire you! There is also a teacher comment form and student review sheet, ready for printing. We love to receive student reviews, as we take to heart their response to the show.

If you have any questions about the information or activities in this guide, please don't hesitate to contact me. We do this work for you and your students, and we want to make it beneficial and user friendly!

Thank you again for your support of Lifeline Theatre, and we'll see you at the show!

Sincerely,
Julie Ganey, Education Director

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A Synopsis of Lifeline Theatre's Adaptation of A Wrinkle in Time

Meg Murry has the problems of a typical teenager: she can't seem to make friends in school, her teachers underestimate her potential, and she feels misunderstood, even by her own mother. But in addition, Meg's younger brother, Charles Wallace, is a mind-reading genius and her father, a physicist who works for the U.S. government, disappeared on a mission 10 months ago and hasn't been heard from since.

We meet Meg on a dark and stormy night, weighed down by her loneliness and a sense that she can't seem to do anything right. Meg's night is interrupted when an unexpected visitor arrives, a mysterious old woman called Mrs. Whatsit. Enigmatic and jolly, Mrs. Whatsit lives with her two friends, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, in an abandoned house in the woods nearby. Stopping in to dry off from the storm, Mrs. Whatsit reveals that she knows something about the Murry's father's disappearance. But before Meg, Charles Wallace, or Mother can ask any questions, Mrs. Whatsit is gone.

The next afternoon, after another day of bullying at school, Meg is convinced by Charles Wallace to go to the abandoned house to find out what the three ladies know about Father. On their way, the siblings come upon Calvin O'Keefe, a popular jock from Meg's school, who is also wandering in the woods. Charles Wallace quickly senses that there is something special about Calvin and they share an immediate connection: Calvin also had a strong, inexplicable sense that he had to go to the abandoned house that afternoon. Charles Wallace invites Calvin to go with them and when they arrive at the house, they are greeted by Mrs. Who, another mysterious woman. Mrs. Who confirms that their father needs the children's help and that soon they and the three ladies, the W's, will set out to find him! The three children return home to process this and prepare for the journey, but suddenly the three W's appear out of nowhere and they are all transported to a beautiful, serene planet called Uriel.

The three W's explain that the children just "tessered", or wrinkled, the fabric of space-time to travel an extraordinary distance. Meg and Charles Wallace's father had been studying the concept of tessering, they explain, and just before disappearing, he experimented with tessering himself. The three W's take the children to meet The Happy Medium, a seer who observes the universe using her starry globe. The Medium shows them her perspective of Earth—it is shrouded in a great shadow. It is in danger from the Dark Thing. The Dark Thing is Evil and has been plaguing Earth for thousands of years. But just as long, artists and scientists have been fighting back, defending humanity. Meg and Charles Wallace's father is a fighter too, and must be rescued so he can keep up the fight. The W's explain that he accidentally tessered to a Dark Planet, one that has given in to the Dark Thing. It is up to the three children to save him.

The children tesser to the planet Camazotz, where their father is held captive. Camazotz looks a lot like Earth, except that everyone looks and behaves alike. There is eerie, complete conformity. Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace find their way to an imposing building at the center of the city: Central Central Intelligence. They meet Camazotzians who, robotic and afraid, keep mentioning a mysterious, "IT", an entity that controls them and the planet. Nervous but determined to find Father, the children venture deeper into the labyrinth of the building. They meet a strange figure, Red Eyes, the Prime Coordinator.

Red Eyes boasts that IT is the force that has taken over Camazotz, and, generously, taken over the tiresome responsibility of decision-making from the planet's inhabitants. IT thinks for everyone, so everyone is accepted and relaxed. There is great happiness and safety in uniformity, she says.

Red Eyes invites the children to give in as well and give up their power to IT. When they refuse, she begins to bargain. If Charles Wallace gives in, she coos, he will find out where their father is being held captive. Despite Meg's misgivings, Charles is confident that he can disconnect from IT once he gives in just a little. He is a 5-year old mind-reading genius, after all. He locks eyes with Red Eyes and suddenly becomes as blank and robotic as all the other Camazotzians. Meg is devastated. Charles was betrayed by his pride. But she must think fast because, just as Red Eyes promised, Charles Wallace leads them to a lonely cell, where they finally find Father.

Meg sets Father free from his cell, using a pair of magical glasses given to her by Mrs. Who. Reunited with Father, Meg is certain that everything will be alright: Father will know what to do: he will save Charles Wallace and find them all a way to get home. But to her disappointment, Father is as overwhelmed and upset as she is. Meg is overcome by disillusionment and disappointment in her father. Meanwhile, Charles Wallace grows more and more connected to IT. He mocks them and leads them right to IT. Confronted by IT's full power, Meg's resolve weakens and she too begins to give in. Father tesser her and Calvin away from Camazotz, saving them but leaving Charles Wallace behind.

Meg awakens from the tesser paralyzed, wounded by her struggle with the Dark Thing. Suddenly, creatures unlike anything they've ever seen, surround them. Though at first Meg, Cal, and Father are terrified, the beasts turn out to be generous and kind. The beasts accept Meg, with all her anger, confusion, and doubts, and heal her with their love. Replenished with hope, Meg rejoins Cal and Father and calls upon the W's, certain that they will save Charles Wallace, if Father could not. The W's, however, will not intervene. It is Meg who must save Charles Wallace. At first Meg refuses to accept this; she does not believe that she can succeed. But as she misses her little brother and is bolstered by the beasts' love, she comes to peace with her responsibility and her potential. Bidding everyone goodbye, thanking Cal for his help, apologizing to Father for expecting him to save the day, Meg tesser back to Camazotz.

Meg racks her brain: what does she have that IT doesn't have? How can she set her brother free from his horrible trance? Meg confronts Red Eyes and Charles Wallace, who taunts and insults her. At first Meg is furious and uses her anger as fuel. But she realizes that IT feeds on hate, on a lack of empathy and love. She realizes that many people love her: the W's, Mother, Father, the beasts, and Charles Wallace himself. Furthermore, she realizes that she loves Charles Wallace and that it is this love that can set him free. Rather than fighting Charles, Meg implores him that she loves him, no matter what, and finally breaks IT's spell. In an explosion of emotion, Meg and Charles Wallace tesser away from Camazotz, landing back in their garden on Earth.

Father and Calvin have tesserred back as well, and the Murry family is finally reunited. As the Murrys and Calvin share a moment of love and harmony after their adventure, the W's appear in the skies above. The mysterious ladies, defenders of Good, congratulate the children on their hard work and victory, reminding them of the power of accepting yourself and your responsibility to do good. The sun sets on a victorious day for the Murry family, the first of many glorious struggles to come.

Madeleine L'Engle – Biography

Madeleine L'Engle, beloved author of *A Wrinkle in Time* and more than 60 other books, librarian, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, was born on November 29, 1918. L'Engle spent her early childhood in busy New York City, preferring to write stories and poetry in school rather than focus on her lessons. Although her teachers pushed her to conform, from a young age, L'Engle was compelled to write and follow inspiration, rather than the rules of others—somewhat like our protagonist, Meg Murry. At the age of 12, L'Engle and her family moved to the French Alps, where she attended an English boarding school. Here, her love for writing was first formally encouraged. Years later, armed with journals full of stories and a mature sense of confidence, L'Engle enrolled in Smith College, where she studied English, focusing on classics and her creative writing. After graduating with honors, L'Engle returned to New York, to work as an actress and continue her writing.

In her early years, while living in a studio apartment in Greenwich Village and supporting herself on an actor's salary, L'Engle published her first 2 books, met her husband, fellow actor Hugh Franklin, and gave birth to her first daughter. Eventually, the family moved to Connecticut, settling in a tiny farm village. There, L'Engle enjoyed solitude and the village community. She and Hugh had 2 more children and together the family revitalized an old general store that became a humming village center. It was during these years that L'Engle wrote *A Wrinkle in Time*. At first, L'Engle struggled to have her novel published, as editors warned her that it was too mature for children, but not quite a book for adults. But L'Engle would not change her work, declaring that it was a novel for and about people, adults and children alike. *Wrinkle* was finally published in 1962 and garnered immediate success, winning the prestigious Newbery Award "for the most distinguished contribution to American Literature for children" in 1963.

After years in the peaceful countryside, L'Engle and her family returned to New York. There, L'Engle became the writer-in-residence and librarian at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, where she would maintain an open office for 30 years. L'Engle continued writing, lecturing, and serving as a librarian and mentor in her community until her death in 2007.



“A book, too, can be a star, ‘explosive material, capable of stirring up fresh life endlessly,’
a living fire to lighten the darkness, leading out into the expanding universe.”

Newbery Award Acceptance Speech: *The Expanding Universe* (Aug 1963)

An Interview with *A Wrinkle in Time* Director Elise Kauzlaric

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

Julia (Assistant Director): Thank you for taking the time to chat, Elise! To begin, can you tell me a little about your relationship to the material? A lot of people, in both the audience and the creative team, read *A Wrinkle in Time* as children. How did you get introduced to the story?

Elise (Director): I had not read it as a child, and that was certainly something I was thinking about as I was coming to the production. I read the book in preparation for my conversation with Jamie Sie [the playwright]. And I actually read the play first. So I wasn't coming with any childhood memories, although I did know, of course, that it has a tremendous following. And so I certainly had that on my mind, that I would be coming to material that is beloved.

Q: What is the process of adaptation like at Lifeline?

A: I would say we always approach adaptation with extreme respect for the material but at some point we put the book aside and we respond to the play. And we go back to the book when we have questions of clarity. But we really start to respond more to, is the play making sense? Is the play speaking to us? Is the play providing the satisfaction that we get from reading the book, maybe not the same satisfaction but we still want to feel a sense of completion and journey at the end of it. At Lifeline there is a strong partnership between the director and the adaptor, and James and I consider both perspectives. Because there will be audience members who have a strong history with the book and some who don't and there will be people who watch it who are 10 years old and people who are 60. And we want it to speak to all ages.

Q: How did you approach this production? What was your "in" when you were first talking to James? What struck you?

A: I read it in June for the first time, I believe, and it was the state of the world. Even though we didn't know where things were heading then, it felt so relevant, in terms of telling the story now. So while I might have approached reading it for the first time as, I'm going to read some sci-fi, adventure, young adult material, I left feeling like this is a really important story to tell right now, for all ages. And that's really where the conversation with James started: what are we doing with the story now, in 2016, 2017?

Q: And did you settle on a perspective of that?

A: The wonderful thing about the material is that you don't really need to change it. It's sadly relevant. It's been really striking to me, over the past few weeks, how many quotes I've heard from the book, or from the play, that have come up in life. It is unfortunately still timely. Like, the one from James Baldwin ("Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced").

Q: What would you like the audience to be thinking about as they are leaving the performance?

A: This play has been so important for me in helping me to question and consider my personal responsibility and that is what I hope audiences leave thinking and talking about with their families, of what do each of us, as individuals, offer to the human experience and the human fight? And what are we afraid to confront? Meg is afraid. How can we be braver?

Before you see the play:

Historical Context: Though *A Wrinkle in Time* has timeless appeal, the story reflects what was on the minds of Americans in the 1960's, when it was written. The idea of space exploration was very exciting and new, since the first manned rockets were sent into space in 1961, a year before the book was published. Additionally, in the 1960's the United States and Russia were in the midst of the Cold War, with very different political systems. Many people saw Camazotz as a representation of Communist Russia, where many aspects of life were controlled by the government, and regarded Madeleine L'Engle's book as an affirmation of a society that protects freedom and individuality. Other issues that citizens were grappling with in the 1960's, such as the changing roles of women and the civil rights movement, can also be seen in the themes of the play.

Characters: Lifeline's adaptation of *A Wrinkle in Time* uses only 11 actors to play all of the roles. This means that some actors play more than one character, which is a fun challenge for most performers! You'll also notice that some of the characters in the book do not appear in our stage production. This is one of the strategies a playwright can use to streamline the story, and adapt a 12-chapter book into a two-hour play.

In our production, you will meet:

- **Meg Murry:** a very intelligent 13 year-old girl, who has a hard time fitting in at school, and whose physicist father has gone missing.
- **Charles Wallace Murry:** Meg's gifted younger brother, who has a keen ability to penetrate and understand the minds of others.
- **Mr. Murry:** Meg and Charles' father, a brilliant physicist who works for the U.S. government.
- **Mrs. Murry:** Meg and Charles' mother, a brilliant scientist and loving mom.
- **Calvin O'Keefe:** a popular, good-looking schoolmate of Meg's who gets along with everyone, but feels out of place in his own family.
- **Mrs. Whatsit:** though appearing in many forms, a determined fighter against The Darkness.
- **Mrs. Who:** a mysterious neighbor who speaks mostly in quotes in all languages.
- **Mrs. Which:** the leader of the three Mrs. W's, wise and mysterious.
- **Happy Medium:** A cheerful medium with a crystal ball that shows all the good and evil things happening in the universe.
- **Aunt Beast:** a kind and loving tentacle beast on the planet Ixchel, who nurses Meg back to health.
- **Red Eyes:** a mouthpiece through which IT communicates.

After you see the play:

Themes in the Play:

One of the reasons *A Wrinkle in Time* has been beloved for decades is that beneath the unique characters and the extraordinary plot, are rich, universal themes with which we can all identify:

- **Good vs. Evil:** In *A Wrinkle in Time*, Good is associated with love, individual creativity, moral responsibility and free will. Evil is associated with conformity, hatred, submission to authority, and lack of personal responsibility and initiative.
- **Appearances Can Be Deceiving:** Charles Wallace looks the same when under IT's control, but is not the same inside. Aunt Beast appears frightening and strange at first, but proves to be loving and compassionate.
- **Wisdom and Knowledge:** Meg is brilliant, yet is a failure as a student, implying that true wisdom lies outside the confines of education, in her ability to trust her emotions. IT is portrayed as a disembodied brain—all reason with no heart. Charles Wallace is warned that though he understands much, he does not know everything.
- **Fate and Free Will:** The novel's portrayal of Camazotz suggests that happiness is meaningless in the absence of free will.
- **Love:** In the play, love conquers all. Yet, love blinds Meg to her father's weaknesses at first. Love is seen as both a universal, cosmic force for good, as well as a personal, human quality that binds family and friends. The Evil in the play can be defeated only by those who love others. This suggests that world's condition relies on each individual's ability to give and receive love in return.

Discussion Questions:

- Mrs. Whatsit says to Meg, "I give you your faults." Do you have a quality that could be considered both strength and a weakness? How has it helped and hindered you?
- Tessering illustrates that "Sometimes a line is not the shortest distance between two points." Meg has the ability able to "wrinkle" and solve math problems easily because her mind can work them in a completely unique way. Charles Wallace is able to understand others thoughts. Where have you noticed a "wrinkle", a shortcut that is completely different?
- The people on Camazotz have no crime, no responsibility, and no decisions to make. What is so wrong with their society?
- Mrs. Whatsit and the children name well-known figures from our civilization who have fought against the darkness. Whom would you add to the list?
- Meg says, "Alike and equal are not the same at all." Can you think of examples that support this idea?
- How were the special effects of tessering and Mrs. Whatsit's transformation created in Lifeline's production? Can you think of other ways these effects could have been portrayed?

Thank you to Prime Stage Theatre/New Hazlett Theatre for contributing ideas for this study guide!

Drama Games relating to *A Wrinkle in Time*

*In our Lifeline residencies in schools, we use theatre games to teach not only the basics of performance, but also to explore themes in our student matinees. Below are some games you can play with your class that touch upon some of the concepts conveyed in our production of **A Wrinkle in Time**.*

Mirror (explore the power dynamic and uniform movement of the residents of Camazotz)

Students are put into pairs and instructed to find their own space in the room. They should face each other and determine which player will be Player A and which will be Player B. Then, Player A begins slowly, silently, moving his body, and Player B must be the mirror, following his actions exactly, creating the illusion of the mirror. At the teacher's prompting, Player B then leads, and Player A follows. Urge students to move slowly, in ways that their partners can follow, working together to create the illusion of the mirror. Eventually, designate "no leader," so that both players are leading and following simultaneously, or switching back and forth on their own.

Flocking (explore the group movements of the residents of Camazotz)

Organize students (4 to 12 per group) in a diamond pattern, evenly spaced with enough room to move arms freely (see below). All students should face one direction, toward a person at one of the four points of the diamond. Using slow music, ask students to follow the movements of the student at the leading point. The leader should keep the movement even and slow (similar to *tai chi*) as it is not a race, nor is this exercise to trick others. Encourage leaders to use different levels. When instructed, or at some point, the leader may turn a quarter turn so that the whole group is facing a new direction. For example, if #1 (below) is leading, and then turns a quarter turn to the right, #6 is now the leader, and the entire group follows #6, until she turns and all face the next leader. The movement should be fluid and seamless, even when leadership is changing.

```
      1
     2 3
    4 5 6
     7 8
      9
```

Character Interview (Explore the characters)

Focusing on a specific character from a *A Wrinkle in Time*, ask a volunteer to come up and "be" that character for a Q&A with the class. The student is asked to consider not only the physicality of their character, but also the words and feelings he or she might use in such a setting. The class speaks to this actor as the character and asks them questions about how they felt at certain points in the play. For instance, different characters will have different answers to the question: "When were you most afraid during the fight to get Mr. Murry back to earth?" Or, "What did you learn on this adventure?" Or, "After this adventure in time travel, what advice would you give to others when they are afraid?"

Making A Storm (Explore "a dark and stormy night...")

Students should sit silently in a circle. Standing in the center of the circle, explain that you are going to start an action and move it around the circle. When you look at each student (or when you are standing in front of them) they can join in the particular action, and continue doing it until you come around and give them a different action. The students in the circle mimic the action only after the leader passes in front of them with the action. To make storm, first there is the sound of wind in the trees – rub your hands together and move this action all the way around the circle. Then the rain starts – snapping fingers. This action is moved all the way around the circle, each student still rubbing hands as the wind until you pass in front of them. The rain gets heavier – snap fingers, then pat legs with hands, or drum fingers on desks. The wind becomes very strong – add in vocal wind sounds. Rain becomes stronger – stomp feet on ground. Then the storm will subside. Stomping on the floor becomes patting legs or fingers on desks, then snapping. The just soft winds – rubbing hands – and silence.

Student Review of *A Wrinkle in Time*

By: _____

I give this play a (circle the number of stars): ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

What surprised you most about Lifeline's production or adaptation of *A Wrinkle in Time*?

Who do you think would enjoy this play, and why?

What design element did you appreciate most: the set, costumes, lights, special effects, or sound?

If you were the director of this play, what would you do differently in your production?

Please tell us about any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt:

Lifeline Theatre Teacher Comment Form

We'd love to hear from you! Please fill out this comment form, and get it back to us one of two ways: Either mail it to Julie Ganey, Education Director, Lifeline Theatre, 6912 North Glenwood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60626, or email it back to us at julie@lifelinetheatre.com. If your students have completed review sheets, we'd love to see those too!

School: _____ Grade Level: ____ Number of Students: _____

Show your class saw: _____

Have you attended a Lifeline production before? ___ Yes ___ No

If yes, which one(s) have you seen?

Did you read your class the book before coming to see the show? ___ Yes ___ No

What was the strongest part of the show for you, or what did you like best?

What was the weakest part of the show for you, or what did you like least?

Would you bring your students to another performance at Lifeline? ___Yes ___No

Which activities in the study guide were most beneficial to your students?

Please tell us about any other books you would like to see Lifeline adapt:

(optional) Name _____ Email _____