

## STUDY GUIDE

### CONTENTS

The Play

Meet the Playwright

So What is Southie?

Cycle of Poverty

Three Big Questions

Additional Resources

### THE PLAY

Like many Americans, **Margie** Walsh's life is hanging by a thread. Then she loses her job at the dollar store because of her chronic lateness, and she is closer to disaster. She can't pay her rent and has an adult, disabled daughter to care for.

Her landlady, unreliable babysitter and "friend," **Dottie**, is ready to kick her out. Margie's other friend, **Jean**, is convinced that Margie's issue is that she is just too nice. Jean tells Margie that their old high school friend, **Mike**, is now in town. She pressures Margie to go ask Mike if he knows about a job – especially since he "did good," got out of their neighborhood ("Southie") and became a doctor.

Times are desperate. So Margie takes a gamble to see if Mike still has that "Southie-pride" and is willing to help out an old friend. When Margie barges into Mike's office, worlds collide. Though they both grew up in the projects of Boston, their lives have become very different. What determines our fate? Regardless of where you start or end up, what does it mean to be "good people"?

## GOOD PEOPLE

Now playing in the Kreeger  
February 1-March 10, 2013  
written by David Lindsay-Abaire  
directed by Jackie Maxwell

*"You can't blame me for your life, you know."*  
–Mike

*"You got lucky. One hiccup, and it could've been you looking for work instead of me."* –Margaret



Major support for this program is provided by the Paul M. Angell Family Foundation.

Funded in part by the D.C. Commission on the Arts & Humanities, an agency supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:



David Lindsay-Abaire

David Lindsay-Abaire was born in South Boston, Mass., better known as “Southie,” the setting of *Good People*. His father worked at the fruit market and his mother worked in a factory. As a kid, he sometimes accompanied his mother to her weekly bingo game or his father to the racetrack.

When he was 11, he received a full scholarship to Milton Academy, a wealthy, private school, where he felt he didn't fit in. However, Lindsay-Abaire became a popular, funny guy, who dropped wrestling to be in a play in ninth grade. He attended Sarah Lawrence College for theater. Later, he was accepted into the competitive playwriting program at the Juilliard School.

In the late 1990s, he began to make his name as a playwright with plays such as *A Devil Inside*, *The Li'l Plays*, and *Snow Angel*. He is known for funny and off-beat dark comedies. He has also written for film, including *Robots*, *Inkheart* and a new movie for DreamWorks, *Rise of the Guardians*. He also worked on the Broadway musical adaptations of *Shrek* and *High Fidelity*. He won the Pulitzer Prize for his play *Rabbit Hole*, which was adapted for film.

Despite the dark material, he's still the funny guy he was in high school – just check out his Twitter (@lindsayabaire) for some laughs!

# SO WHAT IS “SOUTHIE”?



A Southie sign written in English and Gaelic, celebrating Southie's Irish roots

South Boston is a neighborhood separated from downtown Boston by the Fort Point Channel. It's well known for its Irish-American population and is the setting for many movies, including *Good Will Hunting* and *The Departed*.

The Gillette factory (think razors) is located in South Boston, along with the harbor and many local businesses. The neighborhood is known for being fiercely loyal and extremely family- and community-centered. Though mostly working class, it has some of the oldest low-income housing projects in the country. ●



## WRITING ABOUT HOME

*Good People* is the first play David Lindsay-Abaire wrote about the neighborhood where he grew up. In an interview with *Boston Theatre Scene*, the playwright discussed tackling this challenge.

“If I was going to write about Southie, I wanted to do it responsibly and respectfully. These are my friends and relatives after all... I grew up in the Lower End, which was mostly regular, working class people who were trying to make good lives for themselves and for their families. They were salt of the earth people, and lots of us were struggling, but no one I knew really fit the Southie

stereotypes. Part of writing the play was my responding to those stereotypes —most of which are 30 years old and weren't even accurate 30 years ago.”

These stereotypes include the racist, the low-life, the Irish drunk, the drug addict, the welfare mom, the mobster. Some of those stereotypes come from the movies and books about Southie, some of them come from the front page of *The [Boston] Globe*.”

He said, “Mostly what's onstage is the version of South Boston that I remember, and that I know still exists in at least pockets of the neighborhood.” ●



**ACTIVITY:** Write a speech or essay describing your neighborhood. Consider its stereotypes. How accurate are they? What don't people understand about your neighborhood? What would surprise them?

What is the risk of writing about where you are from?



# UNEMPLOYMENT IN AMERICA TODAY

In the last presidential election, the “99 percent” and the “1 percent” were buzz words. News stations are regularly reporting the national unemployment figures. *Good People* is set

in the midst of these issues.

Here are some of the employment statistics from the United States Department of Labor for Dec. 2012:

## TYPES OF UNEMPLOYMENT

	Percentage	Number of Persons	Description
National Unemployment Rate	7.8% of eligible workers	12.2 million	Unemployment has been at or near this rate since Sept.
Long-Term Unemployment	39.1% of unemployed persons	4.8 million	Those jobless for 27 weeks or more
Involuntary Part-Time Workers	5% of eligible workers	7.9 million	Those working part time b/c hours have been cut or they cannot find full-time jobs
Marginally Attached	1.6% of eligible workers	2.6 million	Those able and willing to work but had not searched for a job in the last 4 weeks b/c of family or education circumstances
Discouraged Workers	42% of marginally attached persons	1.1 million	Those who have not looked for work b/s they believe no jobs are available

*Good People* shows us our current economy as a person (Margie) and a story, not just a statistic. ●

*“Last time I got fired it took me seven months to find something, and that was when things weren’t so bad. Now? Forget it. I won’t be able to find anything.” –Margaret*

**a! ACTIVITY:** Imagine you were to lose your job today. Look through the job listings in the newspaper and online. What positions are available? Which fields have the most job openings? How many positions are full time versus part time? For what jobs would you apply? What would you do if you didn’t get the job?



# THE CYCLE OF POVERTY

***"If I write about the old neighborhood, the subject of class will inevitably bubble to the surface because it's so present to the community."***

**–David Lindsay-Abaire, playwright**

Margie believes she never had a chance to get out of South Boston. Why does she feel trapped? Mike suggests her choices sealed her fate. She bristles at this idea, claiming that he was just "lucky." Who is right? Was Margie's life predestined or does Mike's success debunk this notion of the "cycle of poverty"? Consider the idea that there may also be a "cycle of wealth." If your parents are rich, does that make it more likely that you will be too? How much does your parents' or grandparents' wealth or poverty impact your social mobility? What role do choices play in determining socio-economic status? ●



**What starts the cycle of poverty in the first place? How can the cycle be broken?**

## Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

Arrive at least 30 minutes early.

Visit the restroom before the show starts.

Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.

Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.

Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!

Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.

Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.

Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.

Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.

Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.

Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.

**Enjoy the show!**

**THREE BIG QUESTIONS** **ONE** What happens when you leave where you are from and then return?  
**TWO** What does it mean to be "good people"?  
**THREE** How much do you believe in The American Dream?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### BOOKS

*Fuddy Meers* by David Lindsay-Abaire

*Rabbit Hole* by David Lindsay-Abaire

### ON THE WEB

Bureau of Labor Statistics: [www.bls.gov/cps/](http://www.bls.gov/cps/)

CNN Money Jobs: [money.cnn.com/news/specials/jobs/](http://money.cnn.com/news/specials/jobs/)

American Theatre Wing Interview with David Lindsay-Abaire:

[americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/david\\_lindsay\\_abaire](http://americantheatrewing.org/downstagecenter/detail/david_lindsay_abaire)

Huntington Theater Company Study Guide:

[www.huntingtontheatre.org/PageFiles/1238/GoodPeople-CurriculumGuide.pdf](http://www.huntingtontheatre.org/PageFiles/1238/GoodPeople-CurriculumGuide.pdf)

### FILMS

*Good Will Hunting*: Lionsgate, 1997

*Gone Baby Gone*: Lionsgate, 2007

*Southie*: Lionsgate, 1999



the mead center  
for american theater

1101 Sixth Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20024  
Phone: (202) 554-9066  
Fax: (202) 488-4056

Written by Noelle Viñas  
Edited by Rebecca Campana

Special thanks to the Huntington Theatre Education department for generously sharing their curriculum materials, text and research.

Visit [www.arenastage.org](http://www.arenastage.org) for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.