

INHERIT THE WIND

"I must say that "Right" has no meaning to me whatsoever! Truth has meaning."

– Henry Drummond, Inherit the Wind

ON THE FICHANDLER STAGE
FEBRUARY 27 – APRIL 5, 2026

CONTENTS

The Play • Meet the Playwrights • From the Director's Notebook • Arena Archives: *Inherit the Wind* in the Soviet Union • Evolution vs. Creationism • The 1925 Scopes Trial • Setting the Scene • Three Big Questions • Resources

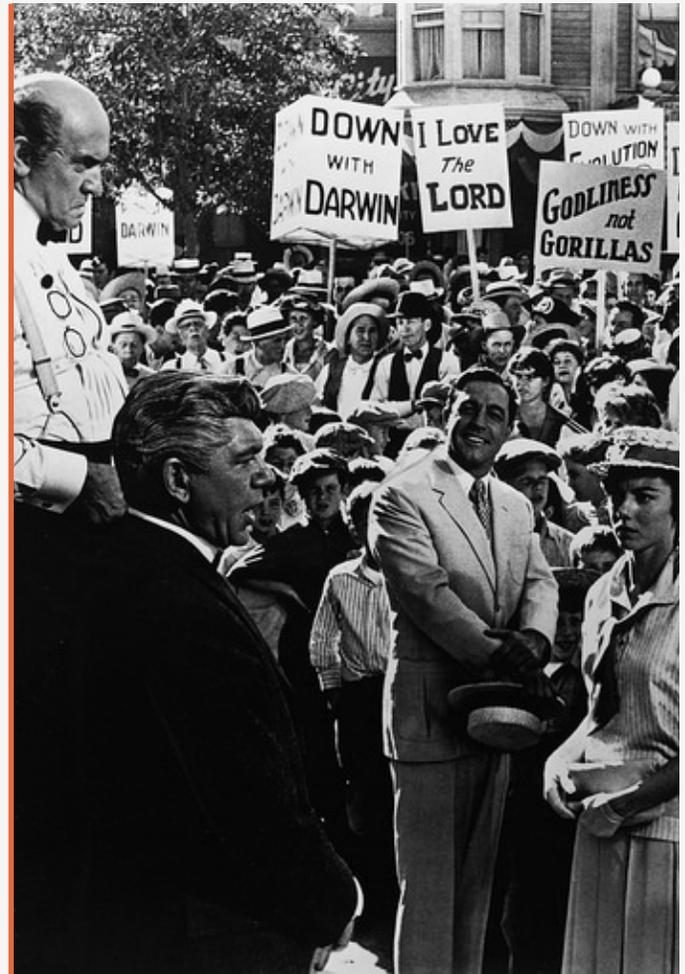
COURTROOM DEBATE SHAKES THE NATION!

THE PLAY

The small town of Hillsboro finds itself thrust into the national spotlight with a trial that shakes the nation. **Bertram T. Cates**, a schoolteacher, is charged with breaking a law that prohibits evolution from being taught in the classroom. The day before his trial begins, fellow teacher **Rachel Brown** visits Cates at the courthouse. She urges him to ask the judge for forgiveness, but he refuses and stands by his actions.

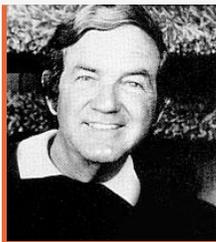
Meanwhile, the God-fearing townspeople of Hillsboro rejoice at the arrival of **Matthew Harrison Brady**, the famous Bible fundamentalist set to argue against Cates. The town's support of Brady is championed by **Reverend Jeremiah Brown**, Rachel's father. **E.K. Hornbeck**, a reporter for the *Baltimore Herald*, announces that **Henry Drummond**, an evolutionist and former colleague of Brady, will be Cates' attorney.

The trial transpires in the sweltering heat of Hillsboro as the two legal minds battle over science, religion, and the right to think freely. As the small town becomes the center of nationwide media attention, it exposes a deeply human portrait of a country wrestling between rightness and seeking the truth.

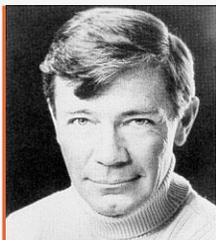


Inherit the Wind film (1960).

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHTS



**JEROME
LAWRENCE**



**ROBERT E.
LEE**

Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee first met while working for CBS Radio in New York City. Bonding over their shared childhoods in Cleveland, Ohio, the two began their collaboration with their first radio play, *Inside a Kid's Head*. Their partnership continued as the two men were deployed during World War II. While in the military, they founded the Armed Forces Radio Service. Their careers took off when they published *Inherit the Wind* in 1955. They also received widespread acclaim for their 1969 play, *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*. With a legacy of over thirty works spanning theater, television, film, radio, and books, Lawrence and Lee are remembered as one of the great American playwriting duos.

FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

Ryan Guzzo Purcell contemplates three questions when preparing to direct this production.

WHY THIS STORY?

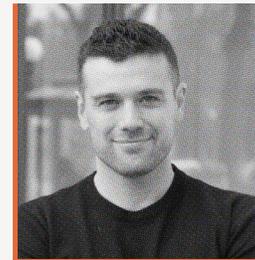
“What [Lawrence and Lee] hit on a deeper level—that makes this play universal and evergreen—is that they are interrogating two of the deepest myths that America tells about itself: the myth of the ‘real American’ and the myth of America as a democracy where the law always triumphs and prevails.”

WHY IN A THEATER?

“The audience has a chance to fall in love with something that they also know to be an illusion. And that, for me, is the power of this story—that we cannot deny the power of these narratives in our country. And there is a need to be reminded that these stories are performed. They’re performed out in the world, and they’re certainly performed on stage.”

WHY NOW?

“I think it is important to be reminded that America has never been a place of great freedom for all to speak their truth. To stand up and say, ‘This is true,’ even when it’s costly, is a heroic act.”



RYAN GUZZO
PURCELL

Ryan Guzzo Purcell, *The Feast*.

ARENA ARCHIVES



INHERIT THE WIND IN THE SOVIET UNION

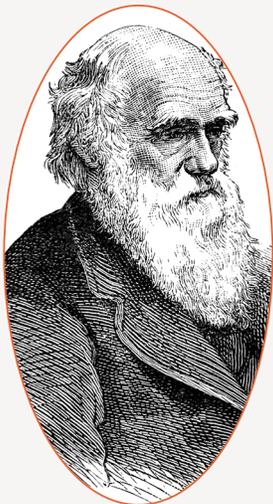
In 1973, Arena Stage made history as the first American theater selected by the U.S. State Department to tour the Soviet Union during the Cold War. Although the two nations were in a nuclear arms race, they shared an admiration for culture. In 1958, a cultural exchange agreement was made between the State Department and the Soviet Union to share new ideas and technologies. As part of this agreement, Arena Stage’s company of sixty-eight cast and crew members flew to the Soviet Union to present

Thornton Wilder’s *Our Town*, directed by Alan Schneider, and *Inherit the Wind*, directed by Zelda Fichandler, one of Arena’s founders. The company toured Moscow and Leningrad, where the performances were received positively by Soviet audiences. The fellowship between the two nations was a testament to the power of theater in bringing people together. Five decades after this landmark production, *Inherit the Wind* returns to the Fichandler Stage for Arena Stage’s 75th Anniversary Season.

EVOLUTION VS. CREATIONISM

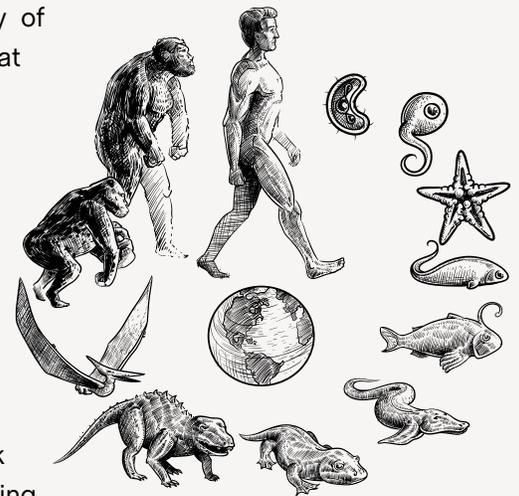
The idea that life changes over time can be traced back to Ancient Greece. Around 500 B.C.E., Greek philosopher Anaximander of Miletus, after observing the helplessness of human infants, deduced that humans must have evolved from fish, a species whose babies do not need parental help to survive. This theory was expanded upon by Charles Darwin through his book *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

In contrast, creationism is the belief that God created the world and all the life within it from nothing, as described in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. When Darwin introduced the concept of evolution, he challenged the biblical account of creation, a controversial move that shaped ongoing debates between science and religion.



Charles Darwin (February 12, 1809 – April 19, 1882)

was an English scientist who introduced the theory of evolution through natural selection, a concept that transformed how people understand the natural world. In his book, *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin explains that living organisms gradually change over generations, passing down traits more favorable for survival and reproduction in their environment. This means that as environments change, species adapt to them. His ideas grew out of observations he made while traveling the world aboard the HMS *Beagle*. Though his work sparked controversy when first published, Darwin's research laid the groundwork for modern biology and reshaped scientific thinking about the origins of life.



COURTROOM GLOSSARY

VERDICT

The decision of the jury that must be accepted by the judge

CROSS-EXAMINATION

The opportunity for an attorney to ask questions to a witness on the opposing side

DEFENSE

The attorney representing the person being accused of a crime, or the defendant

INDICTMENT

A charge of a serious crime or felony by a jury

PROSECUTION

The person or group accusing someone of a crime

BEFORE THE TRIAL: THE DAYTON PUBLICITY STUNT

In 1925, John W. Butler proposed a bill to the Tennessee House of Representatives to make teaching evolution a criminal act. This bill, known as the Butler Act, was passed within weeks with little opposition. Tennessee officially became the first state in the U.S. to prohibit evolution from being taught in public schools.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found the act to be unlawful and stirred up a plan to challenge it. The union put out advertisements in Tennessee, intending to find someone to be the face of their defense. The town of Dayton took up the ad offer in hopes that it could help put their town on the map and expand their economy. They settled on John Scopes, a public school teacher who taught math and physics, although it was never clear whether Scopes ever spoke on the subject of evolution.

William Jennings Bryan, a three-time presidential candidate and known anti-evolutionist, volunteered to help the prosecution for the state. His plans were clear: to defend the Butler Act and refute the concept of evolution entirely. Clarence Darrow, a leader of the ACLU and famous criminal defense attorney, agreed to defend Scopes after hearing that Bryan was on the case. The two were known for being powerful orators who had a long history of arguing over the topic of evolution versus the Bible.

The bold attempt to challenge a bill, combined with the popularity of the attorneys, caused this trial to attract national media attention, giving it the title of “trial of the century.”

THE TRIAL: STATE OF TENNESSEE V. JOHN THOMAS SCOPES (1925)

On July 10, the Scopes Trial, also widely referred to as the “Monkey Trial,” commenced in Dayton, Tennessee. The courthouse was filled with anxious spectators, spilling into the hallways. Outside the courthouse, Dayton’s streets were filled with food vendors, preachers, and carnival games. The rest of the nation listened along through the radio—the first live broadcast of a trial.

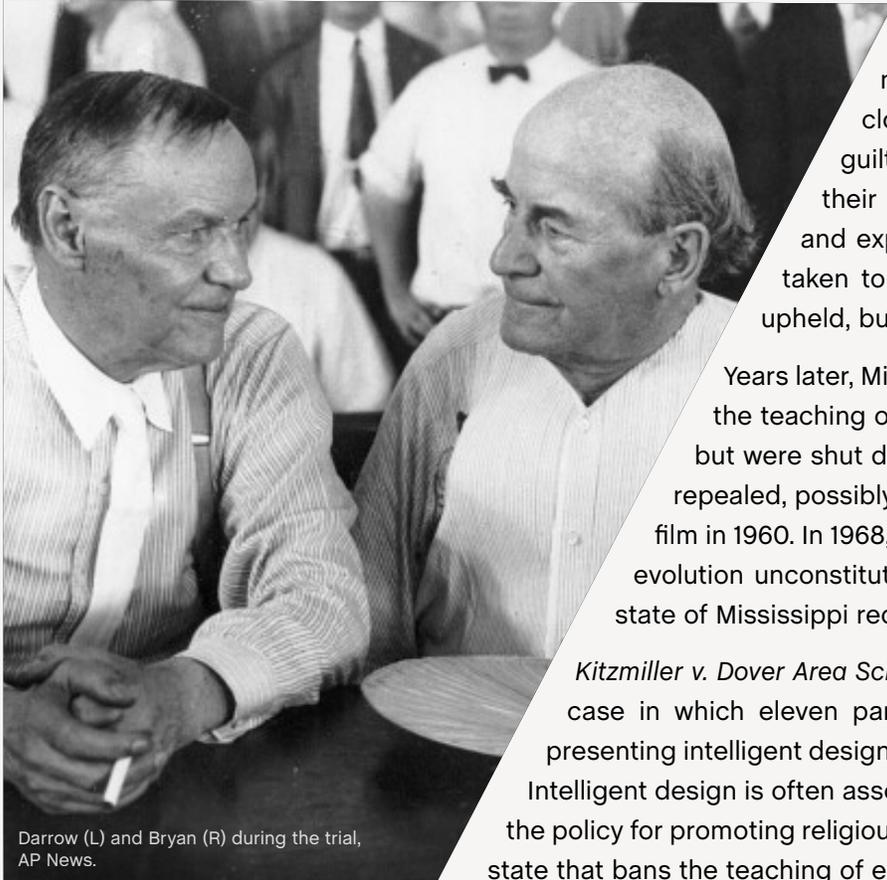
The trial began with a prayer and the reading of testimony from Scopes’ students, who were previously coached by Scopes’ defense team. During the trial, Darrow’s main argument was that the Butler Act supported one religious belief and therefore was not in accordance with the freedom of religion outlined in the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Judge John Raulston made it clear that John Scopes was on trial, rather than the Butler Act, and invalidated any testimony from scientists speaking on evolution. The prosecution focused on the importance of the Butler Act for the education of Tennesseans, bringing up similar past laws.

On July 20, Darrow, in an unexpected move, called Bryan to the stand as a biblical expert. Although his team warned against it, Bryan agreed to testify, willing to answer any questions about the Bible to defend his religion. Darrow interrogated Bryan on biblical stories like “Noah’s Ark” and “Jonah and the Whale,” questioning whether they should be literally interpreted. Ultimately, Bryan’s lack of biblical knowledge was revealed, and Darrow succeeded in destroying his credibility. The next day, Judge Raulston ruled to strike Bryan’s testimony from the record, declaring that the court should focus only on whether Scopes “taught that man descended from a lower order of animals.” Darrow responded to this ruling by asking the jury to find his client guilty, barring Bryan from ever making a closing statement.

On July 21, the jury found John Scopes guilty, taking only nine minutes to reach a verdict. Scopes was fined \$100.

THE 1925 SCOPES TRIAL

AFTER THE TRIAL



Darrow (L) and Bryan (R) during the trial, AP News.

Bryan died in his sleep five days later, never getting the chance to publicly deliver his closing speech. Although the trial ended with a guilty verdict, Darrow and the ACLU succeeded in their main goal: to publicly challenge the Butler Act and expose the validity of evolution. Scopes' case was taken to the Supreme Court, where the Butler Act was upheld, but Scopes was acquitted on a technicality.

Years later, Mississippi and Arkansas also passed laws banning the teaching of evolution. Other states attempted to follow suit but were shut down. It was not until 1967 that the Butler Act was repealed, possibly influenced by the release of the *Inherit the Wind* film in 1960. In 1968, the Supreme Court found Arkansas' law banning evolution unconstitutional in the case *Epperson v. Arkansas*, with the state of Mississippi receiving a similar ruling two years later.

Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District (2005) is the most recent headlining case in which eleven parents challenged the school district's policy of presenting intelligent design before any instruction on the theory of evolution. Intelligent design is often associated with creationism, so the court invalidated the policy for promoting religious beliefs in the classroom. As of today, there is no state that bans the teaching of evolution entirely, although the battle is ongoing.

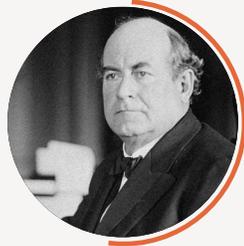
KEY PLAYERS



JOHN SCOPES

PORTRAYED AS
BERTRAM T. CATES

A teacher at Rhea County High School in Dayton, Tennessee that was at the center of the Scopes Trial. He was at the center of the Scopes Trial, accused of defying a Tennessee state law that prohibited teaching evolution in the classroom.



WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

PORTRAYED AS
MATTHEW HARRISON BRADY

An American politician and Bible fundamentalist who followed literal interpretations of the Bible. As a strong opponent of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, Bryan led the prosecution of John Scopes.



CLARENCE DARROW

PORTRAYED AS
HENRY DRUMMOND

A criminal defense attorney, often known as the "defender of underdogs" for taking on cases that many others considered lost causes. He led the defense team in the Scopes Trial.



HENRY L. MENCKEN

PORTRAYED AS
E.K. HORNBECK

An American journalist who covered the Scopes Trial for the *Baltimore Evening Sun*. His cynical and controversial language set him apart from other journalists and played a major role in making the trial a national sensation.

SETTING THE SCENE

Playwrights Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee begin *Inherit the Wind* with stage directions that set the scene of the play:

In and around the Hillsboro Courthouse

The play takes place in the small, fictional town of Hillsboro. This production is set in a “romanticized American past” somewhere between the 1920s and 1950s. In other words, the setting is the mid-twentieth century as modern audiences imagine it rather than the actual 1920s.

It is important to the concept of the play that the town is visible always, looming there, as much on trial as the individual defendant

The town of Hillsboro functions as its own character in the trial, creating a blurred line between the courtroom and the town.

A cock-pit, an arena, with the active spectators on all sides of it

Inherit the Wind will be staged in the Fichandler Stage, which is an arena theater with the audience seated on all sides.

It is an hour after dawn on a July day that promises to be a scorcher

In the 1925 trial, the courtroom experienced heat so unbearable that the trial had to be moved outside to the lawn. This scorching summer heat also serves as a motif in the play. The rising courtroom temperature reflects the escalating tensions between the prosecution and the defense.



Bryan (L) and Darrow (R) during the trial outside, The National Constitution Center.

WHEN HISTORY BECOMES THEATER

The characters and events in *Inherit the Wind* are inspired by real people and moments from the 1925 Scopes Trial, but the play is not a historical retelling. History aims to record what happened, while theater often aims to explore why it matters. As you prepare to see the play, consider the following question:

HOW CAN A PLAY ABOUT THE PAST BE A COMMENT ON THE PRESENT?

BEHIND THE TITLE

The title of *Inherit the Wind* is a reference to a Bible verse in the book of Proverbs:

**“He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind:
and the fool shall be servant to the wise in heart”**

– Proverbs 11:29

The Bible is the foundational text that the townspeople of Hillsboro and Matthew Harrison Brady stand behind when arguing against Bertram T. Cates.

AS YOU WATCH THE PLAY, THINK ABOUT HOW THE VERSE RELATES TO THE PLAY AND WHY THE AUTHORS MIGHT HAVE CHOSEN THIS TITLE.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What makes a strong argument?

2

How can the media shape public understanding?

3

What does it take to stand alone for what you believe in?

RESOURCES

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

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 early and visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket. Ushers are there to help you.
- Before the show begins, turn off all electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, pictures, or recording.
- Food is not allowed in the theater, but covered beverages are.
- Feel free to react—your responses are part of the live theater experience. Applause at the end is always appreciated, and if you especially enjoyed the performance, you can give a standing ovation!

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Inherit the Wind is made possible through generous funding from **Herb and Dianne Lerner**.

This production is sponsored by **Decker Anstrom and Sherry Hiemstra** and **Susan and Steven Bralove** with additional support from **Linda A. Baumann, Susan E. Carter**, and **Peggy and David Shiffrin**.



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Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

Photo Credit: Tony Powell for *Inherit the Wind*.