

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS

ENRICHMENT GUIDE



Book and Lyrics by Howard Ashman Music by Alan Menken Directed by Ashlie Corcoran

Based on the film by Roger Corman, Screenplay by Charles Griffith
Originally produced by the WPA Theatre (Kyle Renick, Producing Director)
Originally produced at the Orpheum Theatre, New York City by the WPA Theatre, David Geffen,
Cameron Mackintosh and the Shubert Organization

Produced in Association with the Arts Club Theatre Company in Vancouver.

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THEATRE ETIQUETTE

Going to the theatre is an engaging and interactive experience. We want you to be an active participant when you see our shows; laugh when it's funny, cry when it's sad, gasp when it's shocking and enjoy the experience as much as possible. To ensure the most positive experience, please review the following information prior to arriving:

- •Please turn OFF and put away all electronic devices such as cell phones, iPods, video game systems, etc. prior to entering the theatre. Ringing, beeping, vibrations and screen lights are extremely distracting to other audience members and performers. If you turn your device back on at intermission, please remember to power it down again before the second act begins.
- •The taking of photographs, videos and audio recordings in the theatre is strictly prohibited by law and our professional labour agreements.
- •The only food or beverages permitted in the theatre are bottled water, beverages in Citadel Sippies and unwrapped ice cream bars purchased in the lobby. Please enjoy all other snacks in the lobby. No outside food or drink is permitted in the theatre.
- •Please respect the space by keeping your feet off the seats.
- •Just as you can see and hear the performers, they can hear and see you. We kindly ask that audience members do not talk or move around during the performance, as it distracts the actors and your fellow audience members.
- •There is no dress code at the Citadel Theatre, but we respectfully request that patrons refrain from wearing hats. For the safety of those with allergies, please refrain from using perfumes or scented products before coming to the theatre.
- •Please keep backpacks and other bags underneath your seat. Placing them in front of you may impair the ability of people exiting the row in an emergency. Please also keep the aisles clear, as they are sometimes used as entrances and exits for our actors.
- •Inappropriate behaviour including the use of laser pointers, interfering with an actor or the performances (tripping, throwing items on or near the stage, etc.) is strictly prohibited. Audience members identified as engaging in this type of behaviour will be removed from the theatre.
- •Most importantly, we want to ensure that all audience members have a positive time at the Citadel. If you have any accessibility needs, or if there is anything we can do to improve your overall comfort at the theatre, please speak to any Citadel representative at the show!

CHARACTERS

Credit to the Arts Club's Little Shop of Horrors Study Guide put together by Avrel Festinger

Seymour: Meek, but well-meaning Seymour has always lived on Skid Row. Working for the failing, Mr. Mushnik's flower shop and hopelessly in love with his coworker Audrey, Seymour does not have much experience with success.

Audrey: Kind and sweet, Audrey works alongside Seymour at Mr. Mushnik's. She struggles with low self-esteem and self-doubt.

Mr. Mushnik: Audrey and Seymour's boss. He is concerned with his failing business and getting it to succeed.

Orin: Audrey's abusive and narcissistic boyfriend. Orin is a dentist and obsessed with inflicting pain onto others.

The Plant/Audrey 2: Smooth-talking/singing carnivorous plant, that has big plans for world-domination.

Chiffon, Crystal, Ronnette: Three women who form a Greek Chorus of sorts, hanging around in the background as Seymour and Audrey's story unfolds.

SYNOPSIS

A sci-fi comedy musical about the meek and bumbling assistant of a struggling floral shop who happens upon a strange new plant that causes business to boom. But when the plant starts to speak, promising fame and fortune, he finds the plant also develops an unquenchable thirst for human blood. One of the longest running Off-Broadway shows, *Little Shop of Horrors* has an electrifying, 60s inspired, pop/rock score by Alan Menken and Howard Ashman.

MUSICAL NUMBERS.

ACT 1

Prologue ("Little Shop of Horrors") —Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronette

- "Skid Row (Downtown)" —Company "Da-Doo" —Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronette (with Seymour speaking)
- "Grow for Me" —Sevmour
- "Ya Never Know" Mushnik, Chiffon, Crystal, Ronette, and Seymour
- "Somewhere That's Green" —Audrey
- "Closed for Renovation" —Seymour, Audrey, and Mushnik
- "Dentist!" —Orin, Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronette
- "Mushnik and Son" —Mushnik and Seymour
- "Sudden Changes" —Seymour
- "Feed Me (Git It)" —Audrey II and Seymour
- "Now (It's Just the Gas)" —Orin and Seymour
- "Coda (Act I Finale)" —Chiffon, Crystal, Ronette, and Audrey II

ACT 2

- "Call Back in the Morning" —Seymour and Audrey
- "Suddenly, Seymour" —Seymour, Audrey, Chiffon, Crystal, and Ronette
- "Suppertime" —Audrey II (with Seymour and Mushnik speaking)
- "The Meek Shall Inherit" —Company
- "Sominex/Suppertime II" —Audrey and Audrey II
- "Somewhere That's Green" (reprise) —Audrey (with Seymour speaking)
- "Finale Ultimo (Don't Feed the Plants)" —Company

TERMS AT A GLANCE

This section defines and offers context for some of the key terms used throughout this Enrichment Guide. The first time these terms appear in the guide, they have been bolded.

Ancient Greek Theatre: Greek theatre began in the 6th century BCE in Athens with the performance of tragedy plays at religious festivals. These, in turn, inspired the genre of Greek comedy plays. The two types of Greek drama would be hugely popular and performances spread around the Mediterranean and influenced Hellenistic and Roman theatre.

Aeschylus: Aeschylus was one of many Greeks who were initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries, an ancient cult of Demeter based in his home town of Eleusis.

Euripides: an ancient writer of Greek tragedy—the third of the famous trio (with Sophocles and Aeschylus).

Sophocles: a playwright and the second of the 3 greatest Greek writers of tragedy (with Aeschylus and Euripides).

Greek Chorus: The chorus in Classical Greek drama was a group of actors who described and commented upon the main action of a play with song, dance, and recitation.

60s Girl Groups: primarily American female vocal groups popular from the early to the mid-1960s. The girl group era produced a clearly identifiable hybrid of gospel, rhythm and blues, doo-wop, and quirky pop.

Greek Tragedy: a form of theatre from Ancient Greece and Greek inhabited Anatolia.

Houseless: lacking or in need of a house or home.

Urban: designating a city or town.

Vagrancy: the state of being or living like a vagrant (= a poor person without a home or a job, who moves from place to place).

Tent City: a collection of many tents set up in an area to provide usually temporary shelter (as for displaced or houseless people).

Housing Insecurity: the state of not having stable or adequate living arrangements.

Proscenium Arch: an arch framing the opening between the stage and the auditorium in some theatres.

Animated Musicals: an animated film genre in which songs by the characters are interwoven into the narrative.

Disney: The Walt Disney Company, commonly known as Disney is an American multinational mass media and entertainment conglomerate.

AIDS virus: AIDS is the late stage of HIV infection that occurs when the body's immune system is badly damaged because of the virus.

Lyricist: a person who writes the words to a song or musical.



Oscar: The Academy Awards, mainly known as the Oscars, are awards for artistic and technical merit for the film industry.

Adaptation: a movie, television drama, or stage play that has been adapted from a written work, typically a novel.

Jeffrey Katzenber: an American film producer and media proprietor.

Hans Christian Andersen: a Danish author best known for writing children's stories including *The Little Mermaid* and *The Ugly Duckling*.

St. Vincent's: a former charity hospital in New York City that admitted patients regardless of religion or ability to pay. It was the epicenter of New York City's AIDS epidemic.

H.G. Wells: Herbert George Wells (21 September 1866 – 13 August 1946) was an English writer.

John Collier: (3 May 1901 – 6 April 1980) a British painter and writer.

Cult Classic: typically a movie or book, that is popular or fashionable among a particular group or section of society.

Off-Broadway: denoting or taking place in a class of theaters in New York City that are smaller than those in the Broadway theatre district and typically stage less expensive or commercial productions.

Orpheum Theatre: an Off-Broadway theatre venue in New York City located in the East Village.

Rick Moranis: a Canadian actor, comedian, musician, songwriter, writer and producer.

Revival: a new production of an old play or similar work.

Westside Theatre: an Off-Broadway performance space located in the Hell's Kitchen.

Jeremy Jordan: an American actor and singer.



THEMES

RONNETTE, CRYSTAL, AND CHIFFON: THE GREEK CHORUS OF *LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS*

"They say the meek shall inherit. You know the book doesn't lie." –Ronnette, Crystal, and Chiffon, Little Shop of Horrors



Ali Watson, Ivy, Charles, and Rochelle Laplante in *Little Shop of Horrors* Photo by Moonrider Productions

In Ancient Greek Theatre, there is an interesting similarity among the plays written during that time: there is always a chorus included. Nowadays most people would associate a chorus with musicals, but playwrights like Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles included a chorus in their regular plays. The chorus consisted of a group of 12 to 50 players who spoke or sang their lines in unison, wore masks, and functioned as one actor rather than a large group of many performers.

The purpose of the **Greek chorus** was to provide background and summary information to the audience to help them understand what was going on in the

performance. They commented on themes, expressed what the main characters couldn't say (like secrets, thoughts, and fears) and provided other characters with information and insights. In *Little Shop of Horrors*, a trio of women named Ronnette, Crystal, and Chiffon replaces the Greek Chorus, and they sing in the style of the **60s girl groups** for which they're named. Just like the Chorus in **Greek tragedies**, the trio serves as narrator and moves the action along through musical interludes meant to help the audience keep up with the story. In the beginning, they offer the audience a musical warning to avoid the dangers they are about to see, in the title song "Little Shop of Horrors." And at the end, when everything has gone terribly wrong, the Chorus and the characters offer the audience a moral to the story, in the song, "Don't Feed the Plants."

At its heart, *Little Shop of Horrors* is a Greek moral tragedy in which a young and fallible hero (Seymour) seeks to improve his life by exploiting a higher power. In typical, Greek fashion, the angry Gods don't just punish the hero, but extend their wrath to everyone the hero touches, including those he loves.

Like the Gods in Greek tragedy, Audrey II (Seymour's plant that comes to life) views humanity as a pathetic race made powerless by their passions. Meanwhile, the humans innocently pursue their dreams but are unable to see the dangers of their actions before it's too late. Ultimately, the hero is unable to handle the evil he unleashes, and, at the end, everyone is doomed to misery and death because of the hero's **folly**. As the play ends, the Chorus in *Little Shop of Horrors* sings "Don't Feed the Plants," and the message to the human audience is to be careful what you wish for. As Seymour learns, there is a terrible price to pay when you get what you want, instead of what you earn.

LIVING ON "SKID ROW"

"Downtown That's your home address, ya live Downtown When your life's a mess, ya live Downtown Where depression's just status quo Down on Skid Row."—Seymour and Company, Little Shop of Horrors

A skid row, also called skid road, is an impoverished area, typically urban, in English-speaking North America whose inhabitants are mostly poor people "on the skids". This specifically refers to people who are poor or **houseless**, considered disreputable, downtrodden or forgotten by society. A skid



Rochelle Laplante, Ivy Charles, Ali Watson, Tenaj Williams, and Synthia Yusuf in *Little Shop of Horrors Photo by Moonrider Productions*

row may be anything from an impoverished **urban** district to a red-light district to a gathering area for people experiencing houselessness or drug addiction. The term "skid row" may often be interchangeable with the term "tent city". A tent city (or encampment) may exist on the premises of a skid row, but many tent cities are in areas not known as skid rows. Urban areas considered skid rows are marked by high **vagrancy**, dilapidated buildings, and drug dens. The term *skid road* originally referred to the path along which timber workers skidded logs. Its current sense appears to have originated in the Pacific Northwest. Areas in the United States and Canada identified by this nickname include Pioneer Square in Seattle; Old Town Chinatown in Portland, Oregon; Downtown Eastside in Vancouver; Skid Row in Los Angeles; the Tenderloin District of San Francisco; and the Bowery of Lower Manhattan. The term Poverty Flats is used for some Western US towns.

In the musical version of *Little Shop of Horrors*, the skid row they live in is located in New York City. The first song in which we meet Seymour and Audrey is entitled "Skid Row (Downtown)". The song is about their struggles of living in a poor and rundown area they refer to as Skid Row. Seymour and Audrey work for bosses who mistreat and exploit them, and they express a longing to escape their (what they perceive to be) depressing lives. They sing about the harsh realities of their lives on Skid Row, where they believe everything is bleak and relationships are doomed to fail. Despite their constant prayers and pleas for a way out, they remain stuck in their situation, feeling hopeless yet determined to find a way out of their situations.

Did you know?

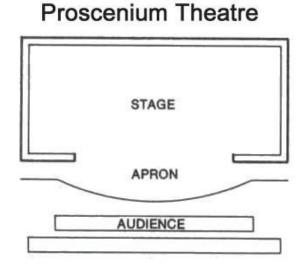
Since the Coronavirus pandemic, more and more Edmontonians are facing **housing insecurity** and there has been a significant growth in the unhoused population. Three thousand people are living on the streets of Edmonton, Edmonton city officials say. That number has doubled since before the pandemic.

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

PROSCENIUM STAGE

A proscenium theatre is a specific style of theatre. Several features define a proscenium theatre, and this particular theatre layout is extremely common; if you have ever been to see a live performance, especially in a high school auditorium, chances are high that you have seen a proscenium theatre. In addition to proscenium style theatres, it is also possible to find black box theatres, theatres with thrust stages, theatres in the round, and numerous other configurations of stage and audience.

The classically defining feature of a proscenium theatre is the **proscenium arch**, which frames the stage for the audience. In addition, the audience faces the stage directly, with no audience on the sides of the stage, and the stage in a proscenium theatre is typically raised, allowing the audience to see more clearly. Modern proscenium theatres sometimes lack the proscenium arch, but they are still called "proscenium theatres" because they retain the other characteristics of this style of theatre.



Proscenium theatres originated in the 1600s, and became immensely popular by the 1700s. There are certain advantages of a proscenium theatre, such as the fact that the stage doesn't have to be as open, allowing people to conceal props, sets, and orchestras in the wings or near the stage without having these things visible to the audience. A proscenium theatre also creates a sense of staged grandeur, with the proscenium arch acting almost like a picture frame, giving the audience the sense that they are looking into a scene.

INTERVIEW WITH BRAYDON DOWLER-COLTMAN: AUDREY II PUPETTEER

We sat down with Edmonton Actor and Puppeteer, Braydon Dowler-Coltman to ask him a few questions about working with Audrey II in the Citadel Theatre/Arts Club's production of Little Shop of Horrors

1. Did you have any experience working with puppets before this production of *Little Shop of Horrors*?

I am trained in physical theatre, mask and clown, which are all extensions of the physical form, much like a puppet. The only puppet experience I had previously was operating the Ghost of Christmas Future in *A Christmas Carol*. Although Audrey II and the Ghost of Future are different in functions, the scale of these puppets are similar. The best challenge of this role was the collaboration with Maddy (Madeleine Suddaby plays the Voice of Audrey II) exploring the best ways to merge her voice with my movements, leading to the creation of Audrey II in this production.

- 2. Do you have any advice for first time puppeteers about how to animate puppets? Anything can become a puppet, from the smallest thimble to the largest cardboard box, all you need to animate it is a spark of imagination. For me, the best place to start is with the breath; keeping the puppet alive and moving. Even the smallest movement can bring a wealth of expression.
- 3. What kind of physical warm-up do you do as a puppeteer before a performance to help keep your work physically sustainable throughout a run of a show?

It's imperative for me to stretch before and after every show. I do a lot of work with exercise bands to stretch out my arms and shoulders. I also juggle before every show to help me focus.



Braydon Dowler-Coltman inside Audrey II

The crew of Little Shop of Horrors sees inside the puppet



AUDREY II: DESIGNED BY BEYATA HACKBORN AND CONSTRUCTED BY AMY HARRIS



Amy Harris works on Audrey II in the shop



Designer Beyata Hackborn's drawings for Audrey II

HISTORY & CONTEXT

LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS' CREATORS: HOWARD ASHMAN AND ALAN MENKEN



HOWARD ASHMAN (BOOK AND LYRICS)

May 17, 1950 - March 14, 1991

Howard Ashman was one of the most notable lyricists for the Disney Renaissance era of **animated musicals**. In addition to his work

with Alan Menken on *Little Shop of Horrors*, the pair also worked together to produce the music and lyrics for **Disney** hits like *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*. In addition to writing the book and lyrics to *Little Shop of Horrors*, he also directed the 1982 Off-Broadway premiere. In 1991, Ashman passed away tragically from complications of the **AIDS virus**. The dedication to his memory in the 1991 film *Beauty and the Beast* reads: "To our friend Howard, who gave a mermaid her voice and a beast his soul. He will be forever missed."

ALAN MENKEN (MUSIC)

July 22, 1949 -

Little Shop of Horrors was a breakthrough hit for Alan Menken. Its premiere proved to be the highest grossing Off-Broadway show of all time and remains one of the most-produced musicals for high schools in the United States. His work with Disney musicals spans the stage and screen with hits like The Little Mermaid (1989 film and 2008 musical), Beauty and the Beast (1991 film and 2017 live action film), Aladdin (1992 film, 2014 musical, and 2019 live action film). Pocahontas. Hunchback of Notre Dame, Enchanted, and Tangled. Menken is also known for other Broadway hits like Sister Act the musical and Newsies.



HOWARD ASHMAN: QUEER ICON

Howard Ashman was a Broadway lyricist best known for his work in *Little Shop of Horrors* and for his work on the Disney Renaissance films of the late 80s and early 90s. Ashman was also considered by many to be one of the most significant figures of the American theatre. He died of complications related to his AIDS diagnosis before he was able to see a cut of his final work for *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*. A year previous, he'd won an **Oscar** for his work on *The Little Mermaid*.



Howard Ashman
Image Credit Unknown

Some of Ashman's earliest stage works were loving yet tongue-in-cheek **adaptations** of irreverent novels and fairy tales, notably his college production of *The Snow Queen* and a musical version of Kurt Vonnegut's *God Bless You Mr. Rosewater*. The latter was a **flop**, but Ashman continued to hone his talent for giving famously unserious texts the musical treatment. *Little Shop of Horrors* was viewed by Ashman's colleagues as a big mistake: who wants to see a musical based on some low-budget 60s movie? Turns out, it is the biggest theatrical success of his career.

At some point along his Broadway journey, Ashman was introduced to his future songwriting partner Alan Menken. The team was lured to L.A. by a persistent **Jeffrey Katzenberg**. Katzenberg wanted Ashman to come and write songs for some new animated musical ideas. Ashman and Menken departed for Hollywood and found themselves shipped off to a backlot in Glendale, where the Disney animation department currently resided.

The team was excited to work on their first project: an animated adaptation of **Hans Christian Andersen**'s *The Little Mermaid*. It was an alluring prospect, especially for Ashman, who had grown up with Disney classics like *Peter Pan* and *Cinderella*. Ashman quickly realized that while live-action films had left the old-fashioned pacing and plotting of the studio system behind, animation had aways to catch up. Disenchanted with the stage, he felt that animation might just be the last place where the traditional Broadway musical could still exist.

He gave Disney animation its first Oscar in decades, and Disney rewarded him by keeping him on for as long as they could, even after Ashman became too sick to work. It didn't take long: during production for *The Little Mermaid*, Ashman began to notice white spots on his tongue. Ashman waited until the last possible moment to tell anyone about his diagnosis. He worked until he couldn't anymore. By the end, according to collaborators, they were "writing Prince Ali on his hospital bed" at **St. Vincent's** in New York City. When Ashman received a posthumous award for *Beauty and the Beast*, his partner, the architect Bill Lauch, accepted it for him. "This is the first Academy Award," he included in the acceptance speech, "given to someone we've lost to AIDS."

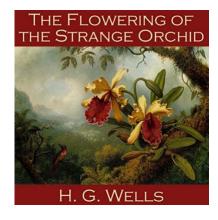
<u>Howard</u>, a documentary about Ashman, is an encapsulation of what Ashman brought not just to the stage, the film world, and the world of music: It tells the entire story of the 1980s and 1990s in New York, unwittingly weaving together the personal tragedy of Howard Ashman's story with the grander political tragedy of what the AIDS epidemic did to Broadway.

ORIGINS AND ADAPTATIONS OF THE STORY

1894: "The Flowering of the Strange Orchid"
This science-fiction short story was written by **H.G. Wells**. It's a cautionary tale about humans vs. nature. He believed that despite its immense beauty, nature can be dangerous and deadly.

1932: "Green Thoughts"

"Green Thoughts" was a short story written by **John Collier**. The plot focuses on a man-eating plant and is believed to have inspired *Little Shop of Horrors*.





1956: "The Reluctant Orchid"

"The Reluctant Orchid" was a science fiction short story about a man who happens upon a carnivorous man-eating orchid that nearly kills him after a failed attempt to feeds his estranged aunt to the plant.

1960: *Little Shop of Horrors*: The Original Non-Musical **Cult Classic** Film

The original film was directed by Roger Corman and starred Jonathan Hayes as Seymour. Corman is said to have shot the film in only two days. He was well-known for producing hundreds of low budget films.

1982: Little Shop of Horrors: Off-Broadway Musical

The show opened at the **Orpheum Theatre** to rave reviews. *Little Shop of Horrors* never transferred to Broadway because the creative team believed it belonged in a smaller venue. It played Off-Broadway for more than 2000 performances.

1986: Little Shop of Horrors: Movie Musical

The live action musical adaptation was directed by Frank Oz. The film remains one of the most notable roles for actor **Rick Moranis**. There's a large fandom and controversy surrounding the film's vastly different alternate ending.

2019: Little Shop of Horrors: Off-Broadway Revival
The revival opened at the Westside Theater in October 2019.
After closing abruptly due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the show made its Off-Broadway return starring Jeremy Jordan as Seymour.



CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

Participation as an audience member at the Citadel Theatre aligns with the Alberta Education Curriculum.

Drama (Junior High)

GOAL I- To acquire knowledge of self and others through participation in and reflection on dramatic experience.

Objectives- The Student will:

- Strengthen their powers of concentration.
- Extend the ability to think imaginatively and creatively.
- Extend the ability to explore, control and express emotions.
- Extend the ability to explore meaning through abstract concepts.
- Develop the ability to offer and accept constructive criticism.

GOAL II- To develop an appreciation for drama and theatre as a process and art form.

Objectives- The Student will:

- Develop awareness of various conventions of theatre.
- Develop awareness of drama and theatre by viewing as great a variety of theatrical presentations as possible.
- Develop the ability to analyze and assess the process and the art.
- Develop recognition of and respect for excellence in drama and theatre.

Drama (10-20-30)

GOAL I- To acquire knowledge of self and others through participation in and reflection on dramatic experience.

Objectives- The Student will:

- · Extend their ability to concentrate.
- Extend understanding of, acceptance of, and empathy for others.
- Demonstrate respect for others their rights, ideas, abilities and differences.
- Demonstrate the ability to offer, accept, and reflect upon constructive criticism.

GOAL II- To develop competency in communication skills through participation in and exploration of various dramatic disciplines.

Objectives- The Student will:

• Demonstrate understanding of integration of disciplines to enrich a theatrical presentation.

GOAL III- To develop an appreciation of drama and theatre as a process and art form.

Objectives- The Student will:

- Explore various conventions and traditions of theatre.
- Broaden knowledge of theatre by viewing as great a variety of theatrical presentations as possible.
- Demonstrate the ability to critically assess the process of art.
- Demonstrate recognition of and respect for excellence in drama and theatre.
- Develop an awareness of aesthetics in visual and performing arts.



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FURTHER READING & RESOURCES

Attack of the Monster Musical: A Cultural History of Little Shop of Horrors by Adam Abraham (Book)

Little Shop of Horrors Arts Club Study Guide

How Howard Ashman and Alan Menken Created the Iconic Little Shop of Horrors

How Has Little Shop of Horrors Changed Over the Years

Howard Trailer

The remarkable story of Howard Ashman, who changed Disney forever while battling AIDS

GOVERNMENT AND FOUNDATION FUNDERS













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Foundation