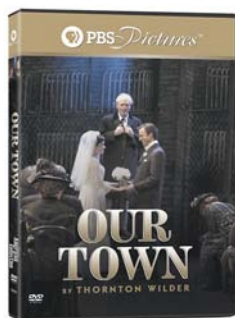


## Discussion Questions

- 1** In Act I, the Stage Manager refers to a time capsule that's being created for people a thousand years from now so they will know "this is the way we were...at the beginning of the twentieth century." It can be argued that the play itself serves as a time capsule. Do you agree or disagree?
- 2** How has life changed since the turn of the early 20th century? For instance, how have customs such as graduation, marriage, or funeral changed? What items would you put in a time capsule for others to find? What could people learn from finding them?
- 3** The play *Our Town* has been performed all over the world. How significant is the setting in *Our Town*? Could this play have taken place anywhere or at any time? Why do you think Wilder set *Our Town* in a small New Hampshire town? Could it be set in a big city or another country? What would the play gain or lose in those settings?
- 4** Joanne Woodward, in the *Our Town Teacher's Guide* (available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ourtown/tguide.html>) says, "I think what's kept the play fresh since 1938 is Wilder's gift for finding a sliver of eternity in the passing moment." Why do you think the play has appealed to such a wide variety of audiences?
- 5** In Act III, Emily decides to revisit one day in her life. She chooses a day that is somewhat happy and somewhat ordinary—the day of her twelfth birthday. If you could relive a time in your past, what would you choose and why? Knowing what you know now, would you want to relive a special occasion or return to an ordinary day?
- 6** What is your interpretation of Act III? The Stage Manager says the characters who have died "stay here while the earth part of 'em burns away, burns out... Aren't they waitin' for the eternal part in them to come out clear?" Do you think that is what they are waiting for? What other films, books, or plays include scenes that take place after a character has died?
- 7** Who do you think the Stage Manager is? Is he God? Is he a ghost? How does Paul Newman portray him? What information does the audience learn about the Stage Manager as the play progresses? Can you imagine the production without him? How would that change the play?

- 8 In accordance with the script, the play is generally performed with hardly any props or scenery. Do you think this adds or detracts from the play? Why do you think Wilder made this choice? The film was made over five days at the Booth Theatre on Broadway. Why do you think that director James Naughton chose to film *Our Town* as a stage production?

*Our Town*, written by Thornton Wilder, was first published in 1938. For more about the MASTERPIECE film *Our Town* and related features, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ourtown/>. For the *Our Town* Teacher's Guide go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/americancollection/ourtown/tguide.html>.



You can purchase the *Our Town* DVD from [shoppbs.org](http://shoppbs.org). Enter code BOOKANDFILM during checkout to receive a 15% discount.

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