

SEATTLE REP

THE PLAY THAT

GOES WRONG

BY HENRY LEWIS,
HENRY SHIELDS
& JONATHAN SAYER

Youth Guide

Welcome to *The Play That Goes Wrong!*

We're so glad you're diving into this chaotic, joyful mess of a show with us.

This play is a celebration of live theater, where everything that *could* go wrong *does*, and yet... the show goes on. Behind every missed cue and collapsing set piece is a celebration of resilience, creativity, and the courage it takes to keep performing, even when nothing goes according to plan.

As you explore this Youth Guide, we invite you to think about the deeper layers underneath the laughter. What does it mean to persist through failure? How do performers work as a team when things fall apart? And what can we learn when we let go of perfection?

We also hope this Guide inspires you to get involved. Check out our Seattle Rep Studio classes! They're designed for young artists like you who are curious, bold, and ready to grow. And don't miss our upcoming youth production of *The Outsiders*—a powerful story brought to life by teen performers from across the region. We'd love to see you in the audience or even on stage someday.

Here's to falling down, cracking up, and getting back on our feet again.



Deanna Martinez
Education &
Community
Programs Director

The World of the Play

The Play That Goes Wrong was created by three friends from drama school in London: Henry Lewis, Henry Shields, and Jonathan Sayer. They started a comedy group called **Mischief Theatre** in 2008 and first performed this play in a tiny pub theater. It was such a hit that it eventually made its way to London's West End and Broadway in New York. The play even won a big theater award, London's Olivier Award for Best New Comedy in 2015. Since then, the group has gone on to write other "Goes Wrong" shows, all built around the idea of theater that hilariously falls apart on stage.

Inside the world of the play, a made-up student group called the **Cornley Drama Society** is performing a serious murder mystery called *The Murder at Haversham Manor*. But despite their best efforts, everything goes disastrously wrong—sets collapse, actors forget lines, props misfire, and chaos takes over. The characters—like Chris the bossy director, Sandra the diva, and Annie the unlucky stage manager—all try to keep the show going while things spiral into slapstick comedy.

Seattle Rep is bringing this comedy to life for local audiences with their own team of theater artists. Directed by Dámaso Rodríguez, the production features set design by Tom Buderwitz, costumes by Melanie Taylor Burgess, and lighting by Connie Yun. Even though the play looks like a total disaster, the designers and technicians have to be extremely precise so every falling wall and broken prop happens at exactly the right moment. It takes a lot of real skill to make everything go so hilariously wrong!

Check out photos of our local artisans bringing the magic of *The Play That Goes Wrong* to life on Inside Seattle Rep.



All About Metatheatre

Metatheatre is when a play shows the audience that it knows it's a play. It's like a play looking into a mirror and saying, "Hey, I'm a play!"

Sometimes this happens when characters put on another play inside the story. Other times, a character might talk directly to the audience, or actors might step out of character and remind you it's just theater.

Metatheatre can be funny, surprising, or even a little confusing—but it makes the audience think about what is real and what is pretend. It's like a story within a story, or when you watch a movie about people making a movie.

More Meta Plays & Musicals

Hamlet (Shakespeare) – "The Mousetrap" is staged to catch the conscience of the king.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare) – The rude mechanicals perform "Pyramus and Thisbe."

Noises Off (Michael Frayn) – A farce where the audience watches actors behind the scenes as they put on a play within the play.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead (Tom Stoppard) – Features a troupe of tragedians staging plays.

Kiss Me, Kate (Cole Porter) – A musical about staging *The Taming of the Shrew*.

The Producers (Mel Brooks) – Characters stage the (intentionally bad) musical *Springtime for Hitler*.

A Chorus Line (Michael Bennett) – Structured around an audition, blurring performance and reality.

Something Rotten! – Includes Shakespearean characters trying to create the first musical.

Moulin Rouge! (stage musical & film adaptation) – Characters rehearse and perform a play mirroring their love story.

A Note from the Director



Welcome to *The Play That Goes Wrong*, the first show of Seattle Rep's 2025/26 Season. *The Play That Goes Wrong* is a part of London-based Mischief Theatre's renowned and highly successful slate of *Goes Wrong* plays (and a television show on

Amazon Prime), which continue to delight audiences of all ages in London, New York, and around the world. This co-production with Portland Center Stage features a cast and creative team made up of theater-makers from both cities. We're glad you're here to experience the first-ever local professional production of this comedic juggernaut before it moves on to Portland in the new year.

Mischief's plays are love letters to the unpredictable and eternally hopeful spirit of live theater. We're not here to make fun of the well-meaning, theater-loving, ever-intrepid Cornley Drama Society as they strive to make you forget the nearly 200 stage mishaps you're about to see today.

Still, as things go wrong during their "opening night" performance of *The Murder at Haversham Manor*, we can't help but laugh out loud in shared recognition. The troupe's unwavering determination to carry on—and their unshakable belief that their luck will somehow turn around—is a hallmark of the human condition. **What else can we do but our best when chaos reigns and things don't go our way?**

The theatrical magic of this play lies not just in its humor, but in the intricate craft required to make the on-stage mayhem seem effortless. It takes precision, timing, trust, and collaboration behind the scenes for everything to go wrong in all the right ways. In that sense, *The Play That Goes Wrong* is also about our theater community working in harmony. This blend of laughter and optimism (no matter how naïve!) made it an easy choice to kick off our season.

— **Dámaso Rodríguez**

Director of *The Play That Goes Wrong*
and Artistic Director at Seattle Rep



Go Beyond
the Show

Scan here for other resources to enhance your experience of *The Play That Goes Wrong*, including a show-inspired media list curated by librarians at Seattle Public Library!

WARM-UP: What Is Going Wrong?

Jot down a quick list of the top 5 things that go “wrong” in the play—from missed cues to collapsing sets. Which moment made you laugh the most? Why?

Why do we laugh when things go wrong in a play, but not in real life? What does that say about how performance works?

PART 1: What They Say vs. What They Mean

Choose two scenes where the characters say one thing but clearly mean something else—or where the comedy comes from the difference between what's happening and what's being said.

1. What is explicitly stated in this moment (the dialogue or direction)?
2. What is actually going on beneath the surface (emotionally, physically, or contextually)?
3. How do you know? Cite two pieces of evidence (lines, physical action, or tone).
4. Is the humor based on:
 - Sarcasm? • Understatement?
 - Irony? • Satire (making fun of something larger like bad acting or overly serious theater)?

Write a short paragraph (5–7 sentences) for each scene, explaining how comedy is created through meaning and misunderstanding.

PART 2: Uncertain Moments

Find a moment in the play where the line between “character” and “actor” feels *uncertain*. For example, when an actor “breaks character” or improvises after a mistake—how do we know what's part of the script and what's “accidental”?

Choose one moment of uncertainty, and:

- Describe it in detail.
- What clues help you know what's intentional vs. unintentional?
- What might the playwright be saying about the nature of theater and performance?

Use one quote and one stage direction to support your interpretation.

WRAP-UP REFLECTION

If *The Play That Goes Wrong* is a comedy of errors, what do those “errors” teach us about live theater, performers, or even ourselves?

Choose one of the following reflection prompts:

- Write a journal entry from the perspective of a Cornley Drama Society cast member, explaining how they really feel about the chaos.
- OR write a personal reflection: Have you ever had a moment where something went hilariously wrong in a performance or presentation? What did you learn?