

# Play Guide

# THE GREAT MOMENT

BY ANNA ZIEGLER

DIRECTED BY  
BRADEN ABRAHAM

SEATTLE  
**REP**



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# A NOTE FROM OUR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

Dear Theatergoer,

In our exploration of *The Great Moment*, a lot of questions have come up – questions about life, death, about how we define family, and what “great moments” exist in our own lives within that definition. In this Play Guide, we examine those questions through a personal lens, and share our findings from the multitude of perspectives that go into creating the work that you see on stage: from the playwright, to the production team, to the administrative staff, and everywhere in between.

We hope that, above all else, this Play Guide will inspire conversation. We hope that the stories and ideas that we share here will allow you to enter the world that playwright Anna Ziegler has so beautifully crafted with an open heart, and that you will leave with the same generosity of spirit that we experience through the characters on stage. We wish for you to give yourself permission to revel in and reflect on the relationships in your life, the humans who you share your time, space, and heart with, and to go on to define your own great moments.

See you at the theater!

Alex Lee Reed  
Youth Engagement Manager  
Seattle Rep

*P.S. Teachers, look out for links between each section of this Play Guide with EALR and Common Core Standards!*

# MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT

## ANNA ZIEGLER



Anna Ziegler is an award-winning playwright whose widely produced play *Photograph 51* won London’s 2016 WhatsOnStage award for Best New Play. It was selected as a “Best of the Year” play by *The Washington Post* (twice) and *The Telegraph*.

In 2017, The Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Manhattan Theatre Club and The Geffen Playhouse premiered Anna’s play *Actually* (winner of the Ovation Award in Los Angeles for Playwriting of an Original Play), and The Roundabout Theatre Company produced *The Last Match*. Her play *The Wanderers* won the 2018 San Diego Critic’s Circle Award for Outstanding New Play and *Boy* was nominated for the 2016 John Gassner Award by the Outer Critics Circle.

Anna’s work has been produced on the West End (*Photograph 51*, starring Nicole Kidman, winner of the Evening Standard Award for Best Actress) and at The Old Globe, Seattle Rep, South Coast Rep, Cincinnati Playhouse, The Ensemble Studio Theatre, Theater J, The Magic Theatre, and many more, and developed at the Sundance Theatre Lab, The O’Neill Playwrights Conference, NY Stage & Film, Soho Rep, and the Cape Cod Theatre Project, amongst others.

She holds commissions from The Roundabout, Manhattan Theatre Club, The Geffen Playhouse, Second Stage Theater, and Grove/Whitman Productions.

Oberon Books has published a collection of her work entitled *Anna Ziegler: Plays One*.

Source: [annabziegler.net/about-anna/](http://annabziegler.net/about-anna/)

# CAPTURING *The Great Moment*

## AN INTERVIEW WITH PLAYWRIGHT ANNA ZIEGLER

### SEATTLE REP

**What was your initial inspiration behind *The Great Moment*?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

It was just the moment in time where I found myself. My children were little, my parents healthy, my grandfather 98 years old. I felt so keenly that the moment wouldn't last. That this was, perhaps (and not to be too dark about it), the end of a really great moment for our family – so I wanted to preserve it. Or to preserve the desire to preserve it, at least. Not to ward off loss so much as crystallize what we'd be losing. My way of raging against the dying of the light, I guess. And to send a love letter to a moment in time out into the universe.

### SEATTLE REP

**Can you talk about your collaborative process with director Braden Abraham working on *The Great Moment*?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

I was so lucky to get to work on this very delicate, reasonably odd, super personal play with someone as sensitive, supportive, and warm as Braden. He was one of the first people to read a piece of the initial draft and if he hadn't encouraged me to keep going (commissioned me to keep going, no less) I'm not sure I would have. He just gets this play, for which I am so grateful. I think we share the experience of sometimes feeling nostalgic for things as they occur, and he also has a strong connection to family. We've talked about those things we wish we could have said to relatives before it was too late and, in some small way, that's what this play is. A way of saying a few of those things while there's still time. So the collaborative process has been really easy and organic. Braden read a number of drafts of the play and gave me feedback; we did an intense workshop last summer in Seattle and this past summer got to workshop it again on Cape Cod. Braden always asks the right questions and projects an aura of calm, both of which benefit a (neurotic) playwright hugely.

### SEATTLE REP

**Can you speak to your experience creating new work at Seattle Rep?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

Both of my experiences at Seattle Rep have been great. The first time I was there, with *Photograph 51*, it was my first opportunity to work at a major regional theater and I was blown away by Seattle Rep and its incredible resources. I realized quickly that this is where one should always try to make theater!

### SEATTLE REP

**How did you get into playwriting?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

I wrote a lot of fiction and poetry growing up and started dabbling with playwriting in high school and then college. My senior year in college I took a course taught by the playwright Arthur Kopit. He also taught in the graduate program at NYU and encouraged me to apply. I thought that was an insane idea – I wasn't a playwright; I hadn't even written a whole play – but I did end up applying, and going. And here I am today. Which means I am both wildly grateful to and completely furious at Arthur for sending me down this crazy path!

### SEATTLE REP

**What's the first hook that gets a new play started for you?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

It really depends. Sometimes I hear lines of dialogue in my head and then start writing a character and that gets something going. Sometimes something external – something in the news, something I've read – strikes me and I want to explore further. In the case of this play, my grandfather's repeated "getting old sucks" got stuck in my head and I started imagining character affectionately narrating her grandfather's daily indignities.

### SEATTLE REP

**What playwrights have inspired your work?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

Jez Butterworth, Sarah Ruhl, Brian Friel (including one of my and my grandfather's favorite plays, *Molly Sweeney*), María Irene Fornés, Michael Frayn, Lynn Nottage, and so many more...

### SEATTLE REP

**Who are some current playwrights you follow and think should get more attention?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

Jessica Dickey, Matt Schatz, Mat Smart, Kimber Lee, Deborah Stein, Deborah Zoe Laufer, Charly Evon Simpson, and so many more...

### SEATTLE REP

**What do you hope audiences will take away from *The Great Moment*?**

### ANNA ZIEGLER

To appreciate the moment, of course.

## ACTIVITY

Time is a concept we learn early in life. Write about a moment in your life when you really felt the passage of time. What emotions were you going through? How did that change you or how you see things? Present to the class what you experienced. When everyone has shared their experience, discuss as a class what you found to be similar and different. Do we all experience time the same?

# INTERGENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS

BY YANCI HUEZO



A former National Thespian Honor Society member and President of her school's theater Honor Society, Yanci Huezo is Seattle Rep's Youth Engagement Intern for 2019/20. She has co-written two plays, *El Otro Lado*, that deals with immigration in the Hispanic community and *Who We Are*, that focuses on the struggles of teens' mental health. She is currently in the process of earning her degree in theater at Hudson County Community College. She aspires to be an arts educator and an advocate for diversity and equality in her community.

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In the play *The Great Moment*, we are witness to a beautiful portrayal of intergenerational communication. We meet Max the grandfather and Evan the son, both related to the main character, Sarah. Throughout the play, these characters exhibit mutual traits—they both ask questions and make statements that end up having deeper meaning—but one from the point of view of encroaching death and the other from the beginning of life. In the play, the family lives together under the same roof, allowing ample opportunity for the young to learn from the elderly, and vice versa. Age is a huge factor in this play. Regardless of age—or maybe because of it—both Max and Evan begin to explore the reality of death, what it means to pass on, what it means to be alive, and how human connections shape us.

Toward the end of the play, time begins to play its role, as it does with us all, and Max ages physically while also rewinding the clock on his life. He begins to almost sound childlike. This evolution, matched with the dialogue of Evan the growing child, makes it even clearer that they are meant to be similar in their growth, as if to say we are all the same, young or old.

This notion is often reflected in our community as well as on the stage. I reached out to Mount Saint Vincent Providence Seattle to talk about their Intergenerational Learning Center. This is one of only a few programs in Seattle that actively introduces children as young as six weeks old to senior citizens. Together, they read a book, color, or do other activities that both the young and the elderly might enjoy. This multi-generational introduction proves to be hugely beneficial to both sides of the equation. The elders get the company they need and the young get the attention they deserve.

To me, this program is a brilliant idea. Personally, I never really had grandparent figures in my life. My grandparents on my mom's side died before I was born, and my grandparents from my dad's side were far removed from my life. The idea that every child gets to have a grandparent figure warms my heart because that means they will have someone to tell them of the past and teach them things parents may not be able to teach, like the concept of death and time. These are valuable lessons in children's lives because they will be confronted with these truths more and more as they get older and grow up. They will also garner attention and care from these older folk, something they likely long to bestow on their own family. My mother worked in a nursing home and she often told me that the old folk would begin to feel abandoned and lonely because their families failed to visit them. They, much like children, need attention and affection, and the effects are apparent when they don't receive that care. They sometimes feel abandoned and give up hope in life, ultimately left feeling unwanted and unloved.

What I take away from this play and this program is that, regardless of age, people need human interaction and attention to thrive. When my grandmother from my dad's side passed away, my family dynamic changed. My dad became very depressed for a while and we didn't know how to console him. He missed his mom. We came together as a family and showed him that it's okay to be upset by her death, but life would go on with the support and love of his family. My siblings and I made sure to keep him busy so he had no time to wallow, and my mother made sure we all sat down at the dinner table and talked out our stresses and problems. We took care of him because, whether you were just born or you are close to the end of your life, **people need people**. *The Great Moment*, to me, is a show about human connection. It presents the idea that we are not going through life alone, but as we all must face our mortality, love the people around you while you still have time with them.

## ACTIVITY

For this activity you will be stepping out of your comfort zone. Talk to someone that is not from your generation. They could be only a little older than you or significantly older. Ask them about the way they grew up and how it is different from your youth. Ask how they feel connecting with other generations. Do they have a "great moment?" When in their life, if at all, did they experience their great moment? As a class, how did you do? Are there any experiences that are similar or unique to other generations? Are there experiences unique to your generation? Discuss!

# SHARING OUR GREAT MOMENTS

What is family? What is home? What does it mean to exist in a multi-generational household? Are those of us who have never experienced the idyllic family life so often seen in film, sitcoms, and daytime TV any less of a family? *The Great Moment* shows us in a stirring and heartfelt way that family isn't always neat, pretty, comfortable, or easy, but at its essence is what informs so much of who we are and how we move through the world.

For some perspective on these big questions, we've asked our Seattle Rep family, comprised of folk from all over the globe, to share some of their own experiences – memories, stories, photos, and more – that have informed their understanding of family. Here are just a few!

**SARAH WRIGHT**  
Development Assistant

Each year on the night before the first day of school, my family would gather around and share stories. When my sister was going into 5th grade, my mom and dad would share stories from their 5th grade experience – who their teachers were, what electives they took, if they played any instruments or sports, and generally what was going on in their life at that age. Similarly, in this example, I would have been going into kindergarten and my parents and my sister would all share their kindergarten stories with me. These conversations and shared time together reminiscing and learning about one another brought us closer together and helped build on my already sky-high anticipation and excitement for starting a new school year.

**CLAIRE KOLESKE**  
Patron Experience Director

I came across this photo from my 25th birthday in October of 2016 that I got to spend in New Mexico with my family. My youngest brother Milo (left) had just transitioned and my dad (right next to him) had just gotten over the first round of bronchitis that would eventually be diagnosed as cancer. Adam (center) had a haircut that he was proud of, and for a brief moment, my mom (center right) and I (right) were getting along. You can also see the maps in the background of all the states my family has lived in, the giant "K" on the wall for Koleske, and my mom's affinity for year-round Christmas trees.



One of my favorite family photos, taken in the summer of 2015.

**SPRITE AUTENREITH**  
Patron Services Specialist



**NABRA NELSON**  
Director of Arts Engagement

This is a photo of my family at my grandma's house in Egypt this past December. There are four generations of my family in this picture, and it is only a very small sampling of my very, very big Nubian family. Every Friday growing up in Cairo, much of the family gathered together in my grandma's apartment to spend the holy day together. There was always a huge feast and lots of hanging out, playing with the kids, cooking, tea, football (on the street and/or on the TV), and often some singing. Fridays helped me get very close to that side of my family (and I am also very close with my American family!), practice my Arabic, and learn some great recipes.



## ACTIVITY

Now's your chance! Do you or your family have a great moment? Write about a time in your life where you had a great moment. A moment you wished would last forever. What were the circumstances? How do you feel about it now? Time is hard to grasp and keep, what did you do to help keep that great moment? As a class is there a time in the year where you felt like that moment was going to be remembered fondly? What is your great moment?

**LINNEA INGALLS**  
Gift Processing Specialist

There was a set of 21 trees along the side of I-90. When my mother was a little girl and took the trip across eastern Washington, she would always count those trees as she zoomed by. Somewhere along the way I either heard or made up that she also planted those trees (I'll never know/remember). So, we would gaze out the window in anticipation for the 21 trees to come up and when they did, we always counted them to make sure they were all there, and to continue what my mom had always done when she was little and traveling I-90.

Every single time my mom saw a hawk, she would gasp like that hawk was a celebrity or a unicorn or something. And in eastern Washington...there are a lot of hawks. But each one was magical, and we would fawn over the incredible-ness of the hawk.

We would always make a stop at Wild Horse Monument. My mom was really happy there – she was always really happy in expansive desert-like environments. She is buried in Eastern Washington, in a “natural green” burial ground (no harmful chemicals, everything bio-degradable) so that she could become part of the environment she loved so much.



**BRIAN FAUSKA**  
Technical Director

**A family tradition:** Most of my family is fairly local but we've got a couple people who don't celebrate birthdays or holidays with religious roots, so in order to still try and see each other at least once a year, my grandparents started having annual gatherings which have been named the Fauska Family Fun Fest. When it started there were four generations of family, but we have since lost my grandparents and none of the youngest generation has had children yet, but I suspect soon we'll be back up to four generations. The event is really just a potluck and get-together where we can all see each other and catch up. When I was a kid, three generations of Fauska descendants all lived within about 1 block so we saw everyone very often, but as we all grew older and birthdays and Christmas lost a couple attendees, this tradition filled in as a way to keep our family connected.

**My favorite birthday memory:** At a family celebration of my 21st birthday I proposed to my now wife. Both her family and mine were there and her parents knew it was coming because they had given me a family ring for her. She was surprised and said yes, and that birthday was 20 years ago last month – we haven't managed to top that birthday memory yet.

**A favorite family photo:** I'm the youngest one in the photo and last one in my generation. My great grandmother is the one in glasses standing in the center.

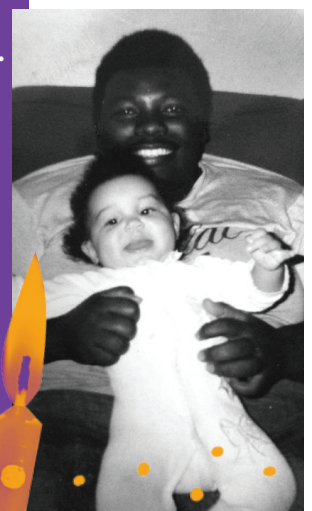


**ALEX LEE REED**  
Youth Engagement Manager

My family is anything but traditional. My brother and I share the same mother, and both have different biological fathers, whom we've never met. My dad (Hank) has been in my life from the beginning. He's the one who raised me, who I lean on, and who most certainly gave me my affinity for terrible jokes. Over the last few years I've grown apart (some intentionally, some by unfortunate circumstance) from most of my bio-fam. Through all of the nonsense in my life, there's one person who has been unwaveringly by my side.

I have this silly memory of my dad trying to teach me to dance as a little baby – maybe two years old. I don't know how I could remember that, but any time I get the chance to dance (cue “The Humpty Dance”) with my pops, I get all warm and fuzzy.

It's funny, because now the people who I consider my family are my dad and step-mom, my sister-in-law, my best friend Joe, and a gaggle of womxn who have stepped in to fill the role of “mom” over the years.







# DEATH, THE UNKNOWN, AND TRYING TO TALK ABOUT IT

Linnea Ingalls was born and raised in the Pacific Northwest. She is a master's student at Seattle University in the M.F.A. Arts Leadership program, and will graduate in June 2020. Linnea is the Artistic Producer and co-founder of she is FIERCE: stories from the female and genderqueer perspective.

*How big is the universe?* I asked my father. I was six. When he replied *infinity big*, and explained the meaning of infinity, I listened and attempted to conceptualize what he was saying. I couldn't help but imagine that instead of infinity, our universe actually sat inside an aquarium where two scientists in a lab watched us. But then, it would dawn on me, what's outside the lab?

My childhood was filled with these questions, and I would get into such existential spirals that I ended up in tears, resolving to pretend I was a unicorn until I felt better. No question captured my imagination more than death. The closest thing to religion my family had were lectures by Joseph Campbell, which my father would watch often, and I would absorb but not necessarily understand. Campbell's big topics continued to prompt big questions, and when I asked my father how it would feel when I was dead, he replied, *how did it feel before you were born?* And I tried to imagine what nothing felt like, and how long eternity was. If it's possible to feel panic, curiosity, and excitement all at the same time, that would most accurately describe my relationship with these questions. And I wanted to talk about it constantly.

Developmental psychologists have found that typically between the ages of 4 and 11, children come to understand that death is universal, inevitable, and irreversible. And, as they grow older and grasp the biological fact about death, they typically develop a "dualist" view that combines biological and spiritual beliefs. Even though this is a natural development process, norms of dominant American culture discourage honest, open discussion about death. So eventually, I let the questions fade into the back of my thoughts—I found that asking those questions didn't make me popular at school and my teachers certainly weren't going to breach the topic.

In my teen years, death took on a new shape, one that was more painful than straightforward curiosity. Several of my friends died during high school, some to sickness, and some to suicide. The morning after one of our friends was gone, I was in gym class. I remember looking at my fellow classmates, jogging around the track at 8 a.m. I couldn't stop thinking how *fragile* our bodies were! It suddenly seemed as if each one of us was constantly on the brink of death. After each passing, questions and feelings formed that remained unvoiced, either because I quite literally didn't know the words, or because there was nowhere to express them.

Those feelings and questions wrapped in my chest and settled there, I carried them with me, not knowing what to do with them. I am still learning what to do with them.

In college, I took classes on philosophy and religion, pursuing my big questions academically – a method that keeps contemplation in the head and away from the heart. It was right before a midterm in one of these classes that my father called me to tell me that my mother was sick. Shortly after that, my parents separated (according to a *New York Times* article, about 21% of married women separate or divorce after diagnosed with cancer). Several years later, my mother, my sister, and I were at my mother's new condo a few days before Christmas. My mother sat on the floor wrapping presents, when she suddenly stopped and said *girls; I need to talk to you about something*. She looked down and ran her fingers through the rug (a nervous habit that I still have) as she told us she had about six months to live. I can remember the sensation of an iron door coming down over my heart. I swiftly became numb, I felt nothing, I became like a deer in the headlights.

I remained a deer in the headlights for many years after her death. My family did not have a method of discussing things like death beyond philosophical conjecture. Near the end of her life, I asked my mother if I could drop out of undergrad to stay home with her and my sister. My mother asked me to finish school – after all, I would be her first child to graduate college, and it meant so much to her. She died a week before I graduated. I was asked to tell my youngest sibling, who was 12 at the time, when our mom had a few days left. I stumbled and faltered over my words when I tried to explain what was happening. I didn't have the words for him, as I didn't have any words for myself.

According to historical research, dominant American society was much more comfortable with death before the Civil War. House funerals, a process in which the dead are cleaned and cared for by the family, were the norm. However, during the Civil War, death became so common that the creation of the role of the “undertaker”, or funeral director, was necessary. The role continued on past the end of Civil War, and according to Joanna Ebenstein (founder of the Morbid Anatomy Museum), “Death became distant to us, and we continued to push it further away, until it became an even more terrifying mystery.” The rapid advance of medicine, while incredible in so many ways, has also bolstered fear of death. I can't count the number of time my friends and I have spoken about the future, jokingly (or not so jokingly) assuming we would live to be 150 because medical technology will surely be able to get us to that age by then.

I desperately put off any kind of grief therapy for a long, long time. Just recently, I founded “The Dinner Party,” a national group with local city chapters meant for young people who have lost someone close to them. I felt like I was sheepishly crawling into the party, having waited five years

to talk to anyone about it. But when I got there, there were people who waited 8 years, 10 years, 16 years before feeling ready to talk with others. What I have heard over and over again there is, I just needed someone to talk to about this. To not feel alone.

I still don't know how to talk about death, because there is no one way. I still don't have words. Not everyone is going to be able to talk about it, but I'm finding that maybe, by beginning to try to allow the words to come and the connections to form, I'm starting to feel more than aching numbness. The risk is there. Not being numb risks feeling expansively sad, but it allows in moments of beauty as well. I went from never engaging in these conversations and never consuming any media even remotely related to sadness or death, to joining “The Dinner Party,” curating a She is Fierce Stories event about grief and loss, and writing this article. I don't recommend this track to everyone, but the risk has been great and the reward even greater.

So, will those questions I incessantly asked when I was six years old ever be answered? Probably not – and I am becoming comfortable with the mystery. There is something lovely about not knowing the answers. Curiosity and the unknown make being alive all the more beautiful. What I do know, however, is that those who have died never really disappear. I love the part of the speech by Aaron Freeman that says the conservation of energy means that the energy of someone who has died is never truly gone – “all your energy, every vibration, every BTU of heat, every wave of every particle of (you) remains in this world [...] All the photons that ever bounced off your face, all the particles whose paths were interrupted by your smile, by the touch of your hair, hundreds of trillions of particles, have raced off you like children, their ways forever changed by you.”

The energy my mother put into this world is still here. I had a dream once that I was in a zombie apocalypse, surrounded by monsters, and all of a sudden my mother emerged, fully decked out in warrior gear. She started epically battling the monsters and when she had annihilated them, we came together and I gushed, so THIS is where you've been all this time! And she replied yes, I've been training to fight your monsters. I held her hands in mine and I asked her to stay, but she said she had no choice but to go back into the earth. Since then, I've thought of the anniversary of her death as the beginning of her official warrior training. And I thank her for helping me fight my monsters.

If you are looking for ways to start your own conversations about death, or are looking for people to talk to, check out these resources:

- 1 Death Over Dinner:** A website that can guide you through curating your own discussion about death with friends and loved ones, based on why you want to talk about it. They have an entire “death library” which I highly recommend.
- 2 The Healing Center:** Located in the University District, they provide group grief counseling for all ages.
- 3 The Dinner Party:** This is a national organization with a local Seattle chapter that just opened. It is designed for 20 and 30-somethings to get together for informal dinner parties, so that they can connect with people with similar experiences.
- 4 Death Cafes:** There are several located around Seattle where people can gather to eat cake, drink tea, and discuss death. Learn more at [deathcafe.com](http://deathcafe.com)
- 5** If you know someone going through a difficult time, I highly recommend the book *There's No Card for This* by Kelsey Crowe and Emily McDowell.

