

SEATTLE
REP



THE
SKIN OF
OUR
TEETH

BY THORNTON
WILDER

Youth Guide

Welcome to Seattle Rep!

No one understands persistent global catastrophes quite like Gen Z. As my own teenager says, "I'm sick of living through unprecedented times." Environmental disasters? Check. Political unease? It's an election year! Global pandemic? You were there. That's why I think you will really get *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

The play follows the Antrobus family through a series of unprecedented times: the Ice Age, a global flood, and a war. They are one family, but they are standing in as an **allegory** for all of humankind. As they deal with a world always teetering on the brink of calamity, interacting with **archetypes** from myth and history, they show that life is cyclical—and there's hope in that.

Theater is cyclical, too! Welcome to the first show of a brand-new season here at Seattle Rep. As this new season begins, keep checking out seattlerep.org for upcoming teen programming like Teen Nights and the Next Narrative Monologue Competition (NNMC). At Teen Nights you can join other theater-going teens at a pre-show reception and enjoy \$5 tickets via our partners at TeenTix. Through NNMC you can compete to win an all-expense paid trip to perform in NYC—have your own unprecedented time!

Whether this is your first time here, or if you consider Seattle Rep your "home theater," we are excited you are joining us for *The Skin of Our Teeth*.



Deanna Martinez
Education & Community
Programs Director

The World of the Play

The Skin of Our Teeth is an epic play that tells the story of George Antrobus, his wife Maggie, their two children Henry and Gladys, and their maid Sabina. But this is no ordinary family; the Antrobuses have been married for five thousand years, have a pet Dinosaur and Mammoth, and have endured one threat to civilization after another.

Act One is set in Excelsior, New Jersey in 1963, the year Seattle Rep was founded. Act Two is set at a political convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey in summer 2024, and Act Three is set in a not-too-distant future (amid circumstances we won't spoil here). However, throughout the play, we are also at Seattle Rep, in a world made up of actors telling us this story.

The characters will break away from the dialogue to speak directly to you, the audience.

Glossary

Review this list of terms to help you along as you watch *The Skin of Our Teeth*.

Allegory (n.): A story, poem, or picture that can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

Archetype (n.): A typical example of something, or the original model of something from which others are copied.

"Auld Lang Syne" (n.): A traditional Scottish folk song commonly sung on New Year's Eve. In the play, it is sung by the Refugees to connect with their shared experiences and find comfort in their shared history.

Boardwalk (n.): A long wooden walkway, often found along the oceanfront, used for walking and recreation.

Cain (n.): In the Bible, the son of Adam and Eve who murders his brother Abel, a reference that connects Henry Antrobus to the destructive tendencies of humanity.

Convention (n.): A large gathering of people for a specific purpose, often involving presentations, discussions, and networking.

Ensemble Members (n.): Actors who are part of a larger group, often used in plays where several characters share a stage or appear collectively.

Inconsolable (adj.): Unable to be comforted.

Mammoth (n.): An extinct elephant-like mammal known for its enormous size.

Muses (n.): Figures in Greek mythology, inspiring the arts, literature, and science.

Refugees (n.): People who have been forced to leave their homes, often due to war or disaster.

The Ten Commandments (n.): A Biblical set of religious laws given by God to Moses, often presented in Christian faith as moral guidelines for humanity.

Tramp (n.): A homeless person, often seen as a vagrant or beggar.

Viviparous (adj.): Giving birth to live young rather than laying eggs.



Beginning Again (and Again) (and Again)

An excerpt from our interview with *The Skin of Our Teeth* director Dámaso Rodríguez



Written in 1942, *The Skin of Our Teeth* was playwright Thornton Wilder's response to World War II. How do you see this play speaking to audiences today? Why this play, now?

Dámaso Rodríguez: Like all enduring art, it contains varied layers of meaning and continues to resonate with universal truths about humanity's complicated contradictions. Yet, the play's primary purpose is to help us see the best in ourselves as a community. It celebrates our infinite capacity to learn, to love, and to begin again after adversity. It's a play for times of collective anxiety and when the world is on the brink of change (like now!).

Can you speak to the role of the Community Ensemble in this production?

DR: The plot of the play is at once about the Antrobus family facing ever-impending catastrophes through the millennia, but it's also about a theater company struggling to perform through a series of succeeding mishaps. Today's performance will feature a professional cast of 14 actors, supported by a rotating Community Ensemble of 12, and as many as 14 additional one-time-only walk-on performers. That's up to 40 people on stage together each show in a one-of-a-kind

performance that can never be duplicated. We hope this community-engaged participatory approach makes each performance vividly live up to the play's title and reminds us of the always ephemeral nature of theater.

What do you hope audiences take away from this show?

DR: My favorite line is spoken by Mr. Antrobus late in the play. He says, "I know that every good and excellent thing in the world stands moment by moment on the razor-edge of danger and must be fought for—whether it's a field, or a home, or a country." When I hear this line, I always follow it in my mind with the added words, "or a THEATER!" I hope audiences will be inspired to think about the good and excellent things in our world and then work together to preserve them.

Is there anything else you want audiences to know?

DR: Antrobus means "Human." The Antrobus family is therefore meant to be the "Human Family" as we've evolved (or haven't!) through the ages. The characters of George, Maggie, Henry, Gladys, Sabina, and others each at different moments personify facets of human nature, from our civil, brave, generous, and loving virtues to our selfish, petty, barbaric, and shameful vices. As the Fortune Teller will say in Act Two, "They are your hope. Your despair. Your *selves*."



Scan here to read the full interview and explore more content about the show, including a media list curated by librarians at The Seattle Public Library!

What Do You Know After the Show?

WARM UP In which moments of the show did you feel yourself having some sort of emotional reaction (laughter, sadness, surprise)? What was the reaction and how did the play help create that reaction within you?

ACTIVITY 1

<p>Summarize the literal action in the play:</p>	<p>Identify characters, settings, and objects and their symbolic meanings:</p>	<p>Analyze the play and interpret its overall allegorical meaning:</p>
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ACTIVITY 2 Choose one of the well-known stories below (or another allegorical story of your choosing) and answer the same prompts as above.

- *The Sneetches* by Dr. Suess
- *The Lorax* by Dr. Suess
- *Animal Farm* by George Orwell
- *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan
- *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel
- *Disney's Zootopia*
- *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C.S. Lewis

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APPLICATION: Create an allegorical artwork of your own. Choose a message and a format. Identify your characters, settings, and objects that will be symbols leading to the allegorical meaning of your piece.

<p>MESSAGE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good will ultimately conquer Evil• Truth will always come out• Never judge based on appearances• Absolute power corrupts absolutely• _____• _____	<p>FORMAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Play• Short story• Short film• Animation• Comic/Graphic novel• Painting	<p>CHARACTERS, SETTINGS, OBJECTS</p>	<p>SYMBOLIC MEANINGS</p>
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REFLECTION: Would the story of *The Skin of Our Teeth* be an effective allegory if it were written as a book? Made into a movie? How does its format as a play help its function as an allegory?