

the Burrow

resource packet for teachers



artwork by Katy Su

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WHAT IS THE SHOW ABOUT?

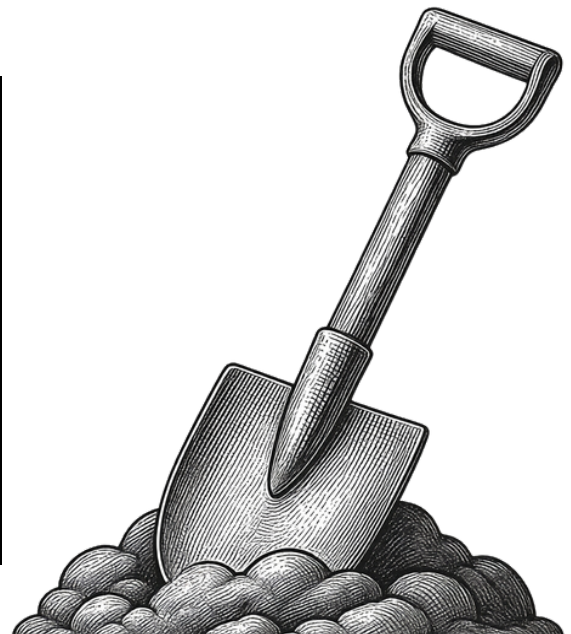
SYNOPSIS

A group of young people make their home in the Burrow, a deep underground cave system, living by a set of Rules left to them by the Guardians, their former caretakers whose return after a long absence is overdue. The leader of the Burrow, Older, does her best to maintain order, watch over her sister Younger, and keep everyone safe from the dangerous Hunters who lurk above in the Fray. As Older approaches the age when she will join the Guardians in the Fray, a transgression by Younger threatens the safety of the Burrow. Older takes the blame, giving up her authority and allowing new leadership to take over. As a new order emerges, an unexpected arrival forces Older to question everything she believed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How do you make decisions about what's right and what's wrong?
2. Do you tend to be a rule follower in general? If so, are there any rules that you often bend? If not, are there any rules that you always follow?
3. If you could make one rule that everyone in the world had to follow, what would it be?
4. How do you decide what sources to trust about what's really happening in the world?
5. What are the qualities of a good leader? What are some qualities that might be easily mistaken for good leadership?
6. Think of the different communities that you are a member of. What makes each one distinctive? How do members of each community recognize each other? What does the community do to make each member feel like they belong? How does the community interact with others outside of the community?

After reading the synopsis above, make a prediction about what you think might happen in the show:



THE BUILDING OF THE BURROW

An interview with Melanie Guerin, writer of book, music, and lyrics for The Burrow. Ms. Guerin is also a music teacher at the Greater Hartford Academy of the Arts High School, which premiered The Burrow in May 2025.

Q: What was your initial inspiration for the story?

A: This show was a combination of many ideas I'd had over the course of several years. A long time ago, I wanted to try and write a musical based on the life of Sophie Scholl, the German student who spoke out against the Nazis in 1940s Germany. I thought a lot about the moment when Sophie, who had been a member of the Hitler Youth, began to question the things she had been taught. The idea of a strong female leader grappling with questions of right vs. wrong came directly from this. The underground setting of The Burrow came from a period of time when I thought I might try to write a steampunk musical (an idea I quickly rejected after learning enough about the genre to know that I should leave it for a true steampunk fan). The scenario of a group of kids living on their own with no adults comes from my personal preference for high school actors getting to play characters their own age. Once I had the protagonist, the setting, and that scenario, I just started writing and tried to listen to the characters to see what they would do next.



Q: How did making this show specifically for your students affect how you approached writing it?

A: I think that in any creative project, it's helpful to have limitations, because it frees you up from the paralysis of having too many choices. When writing this show for my students, I wanted to make sure that I wrote characters they could relate to and vocal parts that would highlight their strengths. I also wanted to make sure that there were lots of opportunities for ensemble features, and that most of the roles could be played by any gender actor.

Q: What does your writing process look like?

A: The process of writing both the script and the songs involves a combination of planning and being open to whatever pops into my mind. For the plot, I might have a general idea of what I want to happen in a scene, but once I start writing, I let my imagination dictate what the characters might say next. Sometimes, that means doing a lot of background work before I start writing. (For example, to prepare to write the song "I Remember," I had to go back and write a long journal entry from the point of view of Older about everything that had happened in her life leading up to her arrival in the Burrow. The audience won't ever know most of that, but once I knew it, I could more easily come up with the lyrics of that song describing her memories.) When I write songs, sometimes I start with lists and lists of rhymes and phrases that I might want to use. About half of my songwriting is this kind of "grunt work" of just generating lots of ideas. The other half of my songwriting involves, again, sitting quietly and pretending that the song is already written, and I'm just trying to remember how it goes.

Q: What do you hope audiences take away from the show?

A: What I hope both audiences and performers take away is that the big dilemmas the Burrow kids are grappling with--right vs. wrong, following rules vs. trusting your gut, being true to your community vs. being open to outsiders--don't usually have simple answers. There are no villains in *The Burrow*, just a bunch of people making the best decisions they can with the information they have and based on the values they hold. I'd like for people to walk away from this show with a little more empathy for others with whom they disagree, but who are--just like them--doing the best they can every day to make the right decisions for themselves and the people they care about.

Q: What music or musicians influenced the sound of *The Burrow*?

A: I have a playlist on my phone called "Underground Inspo" (the original title of the show was "The Underground") that I would pull up whenever I got stuck. It included:

Musical Theater:

All I've Ever Known from *Hadestown* Original Broadway Cast Album
Nothing Changes from *Hadestown* Original Broadway Cast Album
Answer Me from *The Band's Visit*

Indie Rock:

Work Song by Hozier
Would That I by Hozier
River by Bishop Briggs
State Lines by Novo Amor
Zombie by The Cranberries
Holocene by Bon Iver

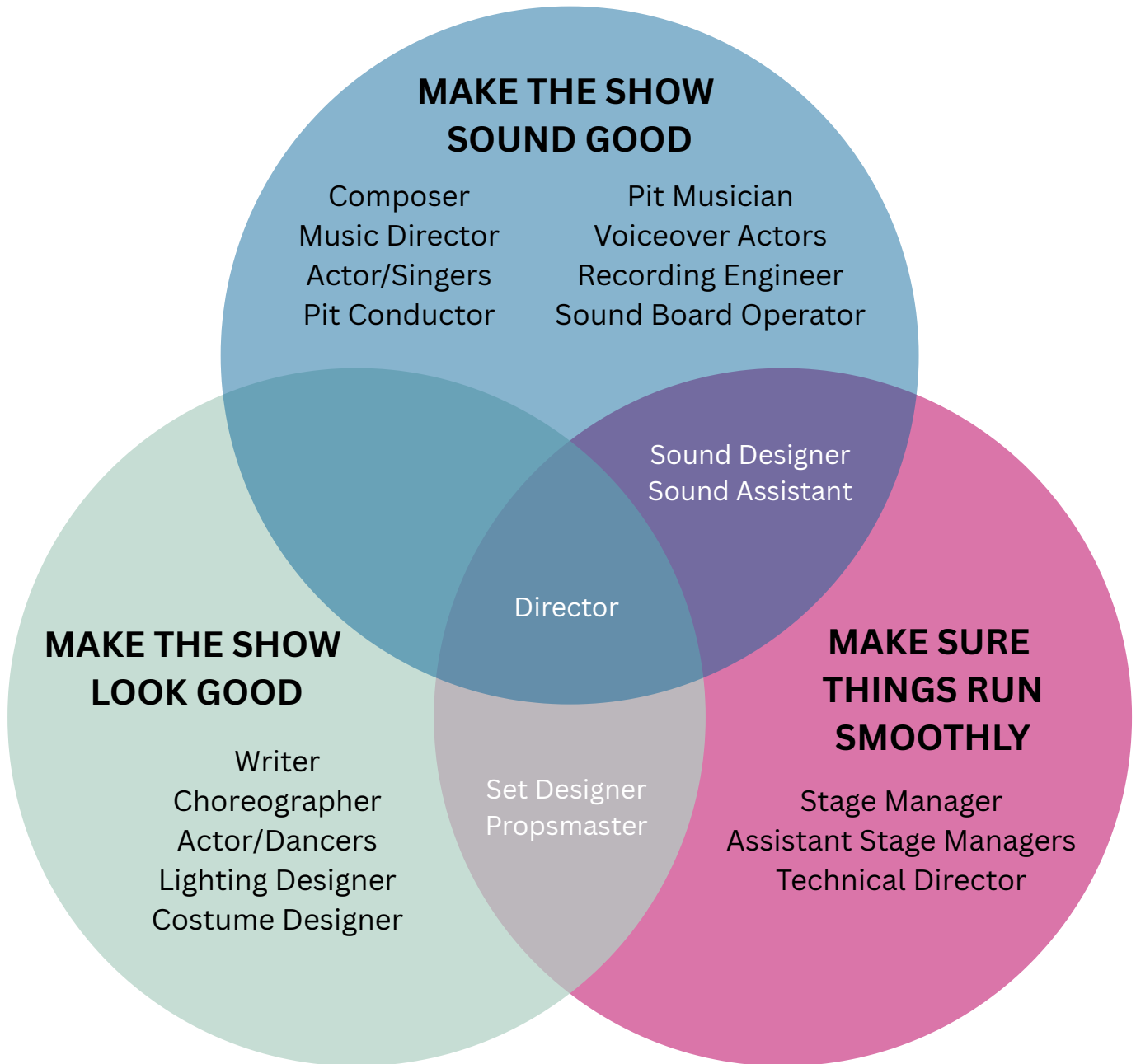
*Americana/Folk/Bluegrass*

Make It Holy by The Staves
Clementine by Paper Wings
Millstatt by The Arcadian Wild
Astronaut by Gregory Alan Isakov
All Things Things That I Did and All the Things I Didn't Do by The Milk Carton Kids
More Than We Know by Aoife O'Donovan

Other:

Rufford Park Poaches by Percy Grainger (wind ensemble)
Bright Forms by Council (folk/classical/pop)
The Light Shines Brightest in the Dark by Jon Batiste (jazz/soul)
Kaval Svir by Le Mystère Des Voix Bulgares (Bulgarian folk)
Russians by Sting (pop)

WHO MAKES A PRODUCTION HAPPEN?



OTHER IMPORTANT TEAM MEMBERS:

Marketing: Poster Designer, Marketing & Communications Team

Front of House: Box Office Staff, House Managers, Ushers

Backstage: Deck Crew, Costume Run Crew, Fly Operators

Administrative Staff: Department Chair, Department Secretary

Building Staff: Custodial Staff, Security

Of course, no production is complete without an audience to share it with!

YOU'RE THE DIRECTOR

Read this excerpt from the show, and decide how you, as the director, might approach the scene. What instructions would you give the actors? What requests would you have for the design team? Use the space to the right for notes.

SCENE 5: BATH

(Some kids are gathered in a narrow grotto illuminated by sunlight streaming in from above. The kids have stripped down to tank tops and shorts to absorb the warmth and light.)

MUSIC CUE #6: LIGHT

ENSEMBLE

*LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT
LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT*

(Music continues as OLDER & YOUNGER enter. YOUNGER strips down and steps into the bath, squinting in the light.)

YOUNGER
Are you coming in?

OLDER
I'm not the one that needs a bath....Maybe just my arms.

(OLDER strips down to her tank top and sits beside YOUNGER in the light, raising her face to be warmed by the sun.)

YOUNGER
It doesn't hurt your eyes?

OLDER
I think I'm used to it from the greenhouse.

(YOUNGER tries to turn her face up to the sun, but it is too bright.)

OLDER (cont'd)
We got a good crop of carrots. The pottage will be nice and sweet for supper.

YOUNGER
Older, what would happen if a plant started growing outside the greenhouse?

OLDER
Whoever saw it would rip it out. You know the Rule.

YOUNGER
I know, but, what if no one saw it?

OLDER
That wouldn't happen. We take extra precautions so no seeds leave the greenhouse.

YOUNGER
Couldn't a plant come from somewhere else? Like from the surface?

OLDER
Very unlikely. The surface is so far above and there's not enough light except here and the greenhouse. Plus a plant would need water—

YOUNGER
But if it did happen, could it endanger the Burrow?

OLDER

Younger—

(turns to YOUNGER annoyed but sees her face and softens)

You're really concerned about this.

(YOUNGER nods.)

OLDER (cont'd)

Well, you shouldn't be. It would take an awfully big plant to be a danger to our Burrow. The walls around us are old and strong, and nothing is going to happen to them. Okay?

(YOUNGER nods, satisfied with this answer. The light has moved onto the grotto wall.)

OLDER (cont'd)

The sun is almost past. We should go.

(They both step out of the bath and put their clothes on.)

YOUNGER

Older, now that I'm bigger, I was thinking...maybe I could have my own bunk.

OLDER

(surprised that this stings a bit)

Oh.

YOUNGER

I know you want me to be braver, to be on my own more.

OLDER

(quickly recovering)

Of course. Yes. It's okay. It's good. You can stay where you are, and I'll move my bedding.

YOUNGER

Okay.

OLDER

Let's go do your lessons before supper.

(They exit.)

ENSEMBLE

LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT

LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT, LIGHT

(Lights fade.)

YOU'RE THE MUSIC DIRECTOR/CHOREOGRAPHER

Learn the ensemble parts to the chorus of "Light." During this song, several characters are bathing themselves in a pool of sunlight that shines down from an opening in the cave ceiling.

As music director, what guidance would you give the singers about how to sing this music?

As choreographer, what kind of movement would you give the actors?

Vocals

6- Light

by MELANIE B. GUERIN

With a steady groove ♩ = 84

5 HIGH:

The first system of the musical score for 'Light' consists of three staves. The top staff is for the HIGH voice, starting with a 4-measure rest followed by a melodic line with notes numbered 5, 6, 7, and 8. The middle and bottom staves are for MIDDLE and LOW voices respectively, both starting with a 4-measure rest followed by a melodic line. The key signature is two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'With a steady groove ♩ = 84'. The dynamics are marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano) for all parts. The lyrics 'Light,' are written below the middle and low staves.

The second system of the musical score for 'Light' continues the melody from the first system. It consists of three staves for HIGH, MIDDLE, and LOW voices. The notes are numbered 9, 10, 11, and 12. The key signature remains two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked 'mp' (mezzo-piano). The lyrics 'Light,' are written below the middle and low staves.

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YOU'RE THE SET DESIGNER

Read the description of the Bath on page 7, and draw a design, including both a top view and a view from the audience's perspective. In the audience view, include the a person for scale.

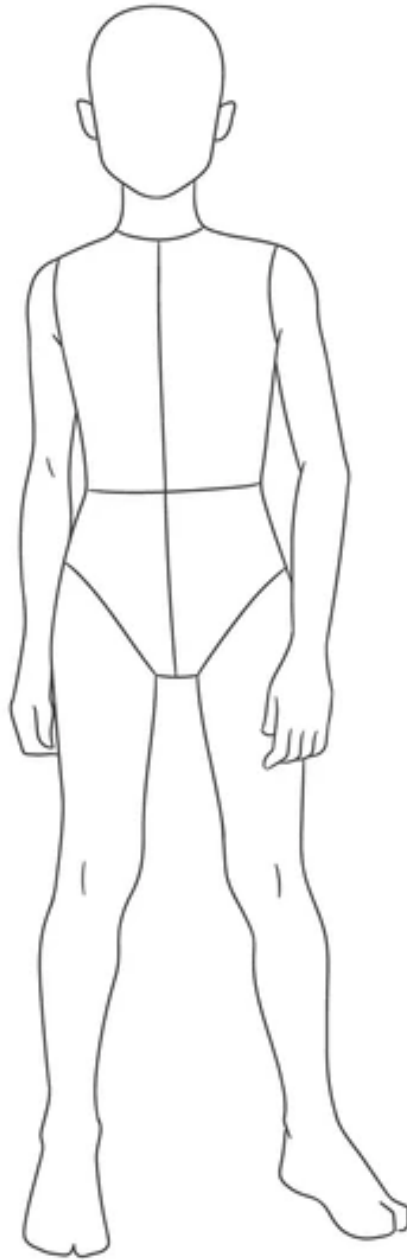
TOP VIEW BATH SET

AUDIENCE VIEW BATH SET

YOU'RE THE COSTUME DESIGNER

10

Design a costume for one of the characters in the Burrow that has a specific job. Below your drawing, explain what decisions you made to help tell the story.



WHAT WOULD YOUR JOB BE IN THE BURROW?

To keep The Burrow running smoothly, each member of the community is assigned a job, according to their talents and interests. Read the job descriptions for each job, and identify some personal attributes that might be helpful for that job. Which job would you be most suited for?

WATCHER-

guard the entrance to the Burrow,
watching and listening for danger

FARMER-

plant, tend, and harvest crops in
the greenhouse for food supply

PLUMBER-

tend to the water supply of the
Burrow, including drinking water
and pipes for geothermal heat

GEAR-

maintain and complete any
necessary repairs on electrical
systems, including lights

OLDER-

maintain order in the Burrow,
serve as lead decision-maker

COOK-

use crops harvested in
greenhouse and ration stores of
non-perishables to feed everyone