



# THE WOLVES

by **Sarah DeLappe**

directed by **Pirronne Yousefzadeh**

**Jan. 8–Feb. 1, 2020**

**PLAY GUIDE**

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## ABOUT THIS PLAY GUIDE

This play guide is a resource designed to enhance your theatre experience. Its goal is twofold: to nurture the teaching and learning of theatre arts and to encourage essential questions that lead to an enduring understanding of the play's meaning and relevance. Inside you will find information about the plot and characters within the play, as well as articles that contextualize the play and its production at Actors Theatre of Louisville. Oral discussion and writing prompts encourage your students to reflect upon their impressions, analyze key ideas, and relate them to their personal experiences and the world around them. These prompts can easily be adapted to fit most writing objectives. We encourage you to adapt and extend the material in any way that best fits the needs of your community of learners. Please feel free to make copies of this guide, or you may download it from our website at [actorstheatre.org](http://actorstheatre.org). We hope this material, combined with our pre-show workshops, will give you the tools to make your time at Actors Theatre a valuable learning experience.

### ***THE WOLVES* STUDENT MATINEES AND THIS PLAY GUIDE ADDRESS SPECIFIC EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES:**

#### **COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1  
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2  
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3  
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.5  
Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.6  
Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7  
Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2  
Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

#### **NATIONAL CORE ARTS STANDARDS**

TH.Re7.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work.

TH.Re8.1 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.

TH.Re9.1 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

TH.Cn10.1 Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art.

TH.Cn11.1 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

If you have any questions or suggestions regarding our play guides, please contact Abigail Miskowicz, Learning & Creative Engagement Associate, at 502.584.1265 x3065.

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BROWN-FORMAN



## THE WOLVES PLOT SUMMARY

Get up close to the action as a girls' indoor soccer team prepares for battle. Amid warmups and passing drills, the undefeated Wolves psych each other up—and dive into rapid-fire, unfiltered conversations about the world and their places in it. What happens when life both on and off the field tests the team's endurance? A finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, *The Wolves* boldly celebrates the grit and grace of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American girls.

## SETTING

*The Wolves* takes place on an indoor soccer field during the cold months of winter. Artificial turf on the field sets the stage as the players warm up for their next game and discuss various aspects of their lives and current events that pique their interest.

# THE CHARACTERS

**#11 (MIDFIELD)** BRAINY. MORBID.  
BUDDING ELITIST. THOUGHTFUL.

**#25 (DEFENSE)** CAPTAIN.  
CLASSIC (EX)COACH'S DAUGHTER.  
PROBABLY A BETTER LEADER  
THAN A PLAYER.

**#13 (MIDFIELD)** STONER. OLDER  
POT DEALER BROTHER. ENJOYS  
BEING A LITTLE WACKY.

**#46 (BENCH/STRIKER)** NEW GIRL.  
AWKWARD. DIFFERENT. JUST  
WANTS TO FIT IN.

**#2 (DEFENSE)** INNOCENT.  
UNLUCKY. CARES A LOT ABOUT  
OTHER PEOPLE, BUT DOESN'T  
ALWAYS KNOW HOW TO HELP.



Here we see the positions of the various characters laid out on the field.

In general, strikers need to be fast and handle the ball well. It is primarily the striker's job to score on the other team's goal.

The midfield position needs to be able to play both sides of the field, blocking the opponents attacks while setting the strikers up to score. Sometimes midfield players will also be called upon to score goals on the opposing team.

Defensive players are positioned to stop the other team from scoring and guard the goalie. They don't need to dribble as well as strikers or midfield players, but they do need to hold their ground and kick the ball away from the opposing team.

The goalie guards the goal.



**#7 (STRIKER)** TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL. SARCASTIC. PRONE TO SWEARING. PUSHES AGAINST SOCIETY'S EXPECTATIONS.

**#14 (MIDFIELD)** #7'S INSECURE SIDEKICK. JUST SWITCHED TO CONTACTS. WANTS TO FORGE HER OWN PATH, BUT DOESN'T KNOW WHERE TO START.

**#8 (DEFENSE)** CHILDLIKE AND DETERMINED TO STAY THAT WAY. A LITTLE IGNORANT OF SOCIAL ISSUES.

**#00 (GOALIE)** INTENSE PERFORMANCE ANXIETY, PERFECTIONIST, HIGH ACHIEVER. QUIET, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN SHE DOESN'T HAVE OPINIONS.

**SOCCER MOM** A MOTHER.

## GROWTH OF WOMEN'S SOCCER

Thanks in part to the U.S. women's national team's back-to-back World Cup championships, soccer's popularity in America is growing. Participation among all youth has increased by nine percent since 2012. In 2019, women's club teams set attendance records in Italy, Spain, Brazil, France and America.



*Megan Rapinoe and the U.S. women's national team celebrate after winning the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup.*

## ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT: SARAH DELAPPE

Sarah DeLappe's play *The Wolves* (Pulitzer Prize finalist; Lucille Lortel and Outer Critics Circle nominations for Best Play/Emerging Playwright; Relentless Award; Sky Cooper New American Play Prize; Susan Smith Blackburn and Yale Drama Series Prize finalist) premiered at The Playwrights Realm, following an engagement with New York Stage and Film and development with Clubbed Thumb. Fellowships and developmental support include The MacDowell Colony, The Ground Floor, LCT3 Playwright in Residence, Ars Nova Play Group, Page One Fellowship at The Playwrights Realm, SPACE on Ryder Farm, and Sitka Fellows Program. DeLappe received her M.F.A. from Brooklyn College.



Sarah DeLappe

## REPRESENTATION AND *THE WOLVES*: HOW GIRLHOOD IS TREATED IN MEDIA TODAY



*The youngest person to win the Nobel Peace Prize, Malala Yousafzai is a campaigner for girls' education in Pakistan and around the world. She was shot by the Taliban in 2014 due to her outspoken activism, but she continued her fight for women's rights in education and eventually went to the University of Oxford to study philosophy, politics and economics.*

"WE. ARE. THE WOLVES. WE ARE THE WOLVES." Sarah DeLappe ends her play about a girls' indoor soccer team with this chant. The girls have dealt with success, defeat and grief, all while discussing tampons, hobbits, genocide, sex and oranges. DeLappe uses overlapping dialogue to present complex girls in a space where these kinds of characters are often one-dimensional or absent.

We have come a long way since Jane Austen, Louisa May Alcott and the Brontë sisters laid the groundwork for women writing about women's experiences. In the 200-plus years since, representation of women in media has made comparatively small strides. In 2018, none of the top 100 grossing films were directed by women, and only 39% of leading characters were female (Goulds 7). Stories about women in leadership roles are lacking in film, except when it comes to stories marketed towards families. In most films, men are portrayed as more effective leaders in global politics and industry (Giacardi 5).

Stereotype is still widely utilized. Many narratives focus on male protagonists while sexualizing or suppressing female characters. This is seen particularly in advertising, where women are typically portrayed as passive in relationship to their active male counterparts (Eisend 431). This lack of positive, strong representation is concerning to many because young people, especially young girls, will see the stereotype and believe they have to live their lives this way (Goulds 32). These narratives present what is considered appropriate behavior for girls and influence them to take a narrow-minded view of what is possible for them in the world.

Pressure to perform “appropriate femininity” assails girls from all sides in their social media lives. Girls are expected to avoid being perceived in the “wrong way.” Anything outside of “respectable behavior,” defined as “having perfect hair and makeup,” and “being pretty and just a little bit sexy,” results in unwanted attention from peers and adults. Girls and young women who do not fit within the norm of feminine behavior are also harshly judged (Bailey 161). Standards around what is acceptable or unacceptable are ambiguous, but typically boys are rewarded for participating in activities for which girls are judged. “Girls are expected to conform to a narrow performance of a sexualized—but not too sexualized—female body” (167). Policing acceptable behavior and narrative is rampant, but does that mean that everything is bleak for girls’ dreams of positive representation?

There are also real-world examples of girls who defy gender



*Greta Thunberg, TIME’s 2019 Person of the Year, is an environmental activist known for cutting to the heart of global climate issues. She urges world leaders to take immediate action to fight climate change, and she attended the summit in September 2019. At the UN Climate Action Summit, Thunberg stated, “This is all wrong. I shouldn’t be up here. I should be back in school on the other side of the ocean. Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you!”*



*Eli Erlick is a transgender woman and LGBTQ+ activist who began her activism by advocating for California’s School Success and Opportunity Act, which protects transgender students in their schools and classrooms. She writes about feminist, trans and queer issues for a wide variety of scholarly journals, and co-founded Trans Student Educational Resources, the only organization on the national level led by trans youth.*

stereotypes. Young activists like Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg and Eli Erlick are remarkable role models. While their behavior may not be traditionally viewed as acceptable from a male-centric lens, their voices and actions are working hard to change the world so future generations have a more equitable way of living.

*The Wolves* joins the fight against the marginalization of girls. DeLappe does not police or censor but instead shows the complex struggles of girls in a way that normalizes their experiences outside of stereotype. These girls aren’t sexualized or presented as passive and meek; they are multi-dimensional characters that are allowed to struggle, fail and lead. This representation, while rare, is shifting the way society views and treats girls and young women one story at a time.

–Matthew Dryburgh

[See references on page 13](#)



# READY FOR KICKOFF

On winter Saturdays, under the bright lights of massive sports domes, indoor soccer players across the United States prepare for battle. Sarah DeLappe's *The Wolves* richly imagines an elite girls' team, zooming in on nine high school juniors in the minutes before their weekly matches. Identified only by their jersey numbers, they psych each other up, run drills, and stretch "in perfect unison and with military precision." They're both fighting to maintain their undefeated streak and vying for the attention of college soccer scouts—their futures are on the line. But something else is happening too. In the midst of warmups and pregame banter, the Wolves are starting to define themselves by more than their roles on the team or what their parents and coaches expect of them—and they're starting to pull away from the safety of suburbia to reckon with the wider world and their places in it.

*(Continued on next page)*





Director Pirronne Yusefzadeh

According to DeLappe, the tension that the Wolves feel—the tension between the world at large and the bubbles that they, like most of us, tend to dwell in—is where the play began. In a 2018 interview, DeLappe describes drafting the first scene of *The Wolves* right after visiting an exhibition of contemporary Middle Eastern and North African art, much of which depicted war and upheaval. “It was an incredible show,” she recalls, “but I kept thinking about the distance between the people taking in the art—New Yorkers on their iPhones drinking cold brew in the middle of summer—and the artists, who made these political works in response to the current or historical situations of their countries.” Instinctively, DeLappe pushed the gap she observed to an extreme:

“What could be further away from those humanitarian disasters than a bunch of American suburbanites on an indoor soccer field warming up for a game?”

And so in that first scene, as the Wolves get ready to face their next opponent, half the team is debating what should happen to one of the last surviving members of the Khmer Rouge, whom they’ve just learned about in school. Some of the players are flippant—“we don’t do genocides ’til senior year,” shrugs star striker #7—but others are genuinely sorting out what justice might look like for a 90-year-old convicted of crimes against humanity. Meanwhile, their teammates are trying to convince shy #2 to switch from pads to tampons, and #46, the bewildered newcomer, can barely keep up with the swirling cross-talk. In the script, the team’s many voices—unapologetic, goofy, earnest—cascade down the page in multiple columns, as carefully arranged as notes in a piece of music. In performance, part of the pleasure of *The Wolves* comes from tuning into different overlapping conversations; we in the audience gradually discover who the players are on their terms, as individuals who are coming to own their identities and perspectives.

At the same time, we get to witness their extraordinary soccer prowess. For director Pirronne Yusefzadeh, working on *The Wolves* begins with the understanding that what the characters say only tells half the story; how they move is equally revealing. “It’s about finding the rigor,” says Yusefzadeh, “and finding the parts of the play that the language doesn’t explain, but the body does.” *The Wolves* will be performed in the Bingham Theatre, and given the intimacy of the space and the specificity with which DeLappe combines dialogue with action, a unique brand of virtuosity and focus is required from everyone onstage. The actors have to be athletes too—and bond not just as a cast, but as a team. The production’s movement director, Rocío Mendez, notes that many of the characters have been playing together for years. “They’re a second family for each other. That means they all have to be on the same page physically,” explains Mendez, who will collaborate with Yusefzadeh to create and refine the show’s soccer choreography. “They’re all really good at what they do, and we have to show that.”

**\\ It's a political act,  
not only to do a play  
about women, but also  
to give humanity and a  
kind of credence to the  
stories of teenagers. //**

—Director Pirronne Yousefzadeh

As the Wolves' season unfolds week by week, life on and off the field tests the team's endurance. The ritual of warming up transforms into an event unto itself, while the anticipation of the game to come brings out the players' best and worst—their ambition, strength, and wit, and their capacity for cruelty as well as kindness. The skill and imagination with which DeLappe crafts nuanced characters has earned her considerable accolades since *The Wolves* premiered in 2016. In addition to being a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize, it won The American Playwriting Foundation's inaugural Relentless Award and was recently featured on *American Theatre* magazine's annual list of most-produced plays. "We're interested in teenage voices in a way that we haven't always been," says Yousefzadeh, reflecting on the play's popularity. "It's a political act, not only to do a play about women, but also to give humanity and a kind of credence to the stories of teenagers." For 90 gripping minutes, the Wolves take the stage. "We're on their turf," DeLappe wrote in 2018. "They're not on ours."

—Jessica Reese

## WELCOMING BACK ALUMNI

Actors Theatre's production of *The Wolves* features the work of several Professional Training Company alumni:

**Avery Deutsch, playing #2**

**Ashley N. Hildreth, playing #13**

**Regan Moro, playing #25**

**Jessica Reese, dramaturg**

**Margaret Rial, production assistant**

**Angelica Santiago, playing #7**

**Jessica Wortham, playing Soccer Mom**

**Pirronne Yousefzadeh, director**

**In addition to alumni, members of this season's Professional Training Company are also engaged with this production as they continue honing their skills in 16 different areas of the theatre—onstage, backstage, in the classroom, and beyond!**

# WRITING PORTFOLIO

## NARRATIVE: CCRA.W.3

*The Wolves* brings together a group of characters from vastly different backgrounds to play soccer. Write a short story in which unique characters try to accomplish a specific goal. Remember, the goal itself is not nearly as important or exciting as the characters and their relationships to one another. How do they come together to achieve their goals? Do they succeed? If not, how do they react to failure?

## INFORMATIVE: CCRA.W.2

Write a review of the performance of *The Wolves* that you saw at Actors Theatre of Louisville. What parts of the play (the actors' performances, the set, props, costumes, lighting and sound design, etc.) were your favorites and why? How effective were these elements in telling the story? Back up your claims with evidence and details from your experience of watching the performance. After you have written your review, make a copy and send it to the Learning and Creative Engagement department at:

Actors Theatre of Louisville  
c/o Abigail Miskowiec  
316 West Main Street  
Louisville, Kentucky 40202  
amiskowiec@actorstheatre.org

We will share your thoughts with the creative team.

## ARGUMENTATIVE: CCRA.W.1

At various points in *The Wolves*, the teammates share strong opinions and argue about sensitive issues. Sometimes their disagreements seem trivial, and sometimes they escalate into full-blown fights. The detention of undocumented children at the U.S.-Mexico border, eating disorders and the benefits of stretching before exercise are all brought up during the course of the play. Write a short essay arguing your position on one of these issues. Use evidence from articles, books and essays to support your claims.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. Teamwork is a huge factor in the relationships between the characters of *The Wolves*. Do you have a group of people who are your “team”? Why do you think you work so well together? How do you overcome differences when you disagree? Why do you think the playwright chose a soccer team to explore interpersonal dynamics between girls?
2. The girls in *The Wolves* are eager to get scholarships to play soccer in college. Do you have big dreams for the future? How might those dreams affect the people around you? What steps are you taking to accomplish those dreams?

## POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. *The Wolves* is one of the most produced plays in the country. Why do you think this play has become so popular over the past few years? Contemporary theatre and new plays often deal with the world as it is today. What aspects of the story did you find relevant to your everyday life? What universal themes are explored throughout the play?
2. **Spoiler Alert!** After the death of one of the players on the team, the girls come together for one last game. Their warmups are interrupted by the mother of the girl who died. The mother and the team process grief in the wake of the tragedy. How did you see the different grieving processes portrayed onstage? How did this make you feel? Did you find yourself feeling more empathy for the mother or the players? Why do you think you felt this way?





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