

THE GRADUATE



BAG &
BAGGAGE

STUDY GUIDE CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

II. THE AUTHOR: CHARLES WEBB

III. THE ADAPTOR: TERRY JOHNSON

IV. OUR PRODUCTION: NOTES FROM SCOTT PALMER

V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

VI. SOURCES & FURTHER READING

BAG&BAGGAGE STAFF

Scott Palmer
Artistic Director

Beth Lewis
Managing Director

Cassie Greer
Director of Advancement

Arianne Jacques
Patron Services Manager

Megan Wilkerson
Director of Design & Production

Melissa Heller
Resident Costume Designer

**BAG&
BAGGAGE**

Real. Provocative. Theatre.

Artistic Director Scott Palmer

THE GRADUATE

A Play Adapted by Terry Johnson

Based on the Novel by Charles Webb

And the Motion Picture Screenplay by Calder Willingham & Buck Henry

By Special Arrangement with StudioCanal

Directed by Scott Palmer

September 8 - October 2, 2016

CAST

Benjamin Braddock Eric St. Cyr**
Mrs. Robinson Kymberli Colbourne
Elaine Robinson Arianne Jacques*
Mr. Braddock Michael Rouches
Mr. Robinson/Man In Bar David Heath
Mrs. Braddock Kim Bogus
Hotel Receptionist/Stripper Cassie Greer*
Hotel Desk Clerk/Psychiatrist/Barman/Priest Andrew Beck*

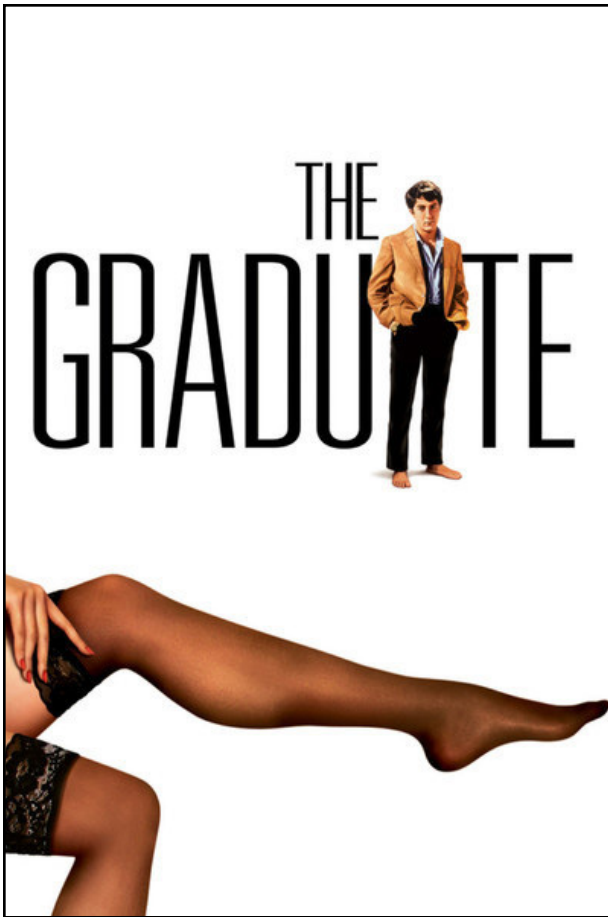
CREW/PRODUCTION TEAM

Director Scott Palmer
Stage Manager & Props Master Ephriam Harnsberger
Costumer Designer Melissa Heller
Scenic Designer Megan Wilkerson
Lighting Designer & Technical Director Jim Ricks-White
Soud Designer Scott Palmer
Assistant Stage Manager Mackenzie Joseph

*Member of the Bag&Baggage Resident Acting Company

**Bag&Baggage Associate Artist

I. INTRODUCTION



Coo Coo Ca Choo, Mrs. Robinson!

Benjamin has excellent grades, very proud parents and - since he helped Mrs. Robinson with her zipper - a fine future behind him.

Based on the 1963 cult novel by Charles Webb and the 1967 film starring Dustin Hoffman, Terry Johnson's 2000 stage adaptation of *The Graduate* tells the story of 21-year-old Benjamin Braddock, a recent college graduate with no well-defined aim in life, who is seduced by an older woman, Mrs. Robinson, and then proceeds to fall in love with her daughter Elaine. *The Graduate* is a bittersweet comedy that takes audiences back in time to the beginnings of the counter-culture and sexual revolutions of the 1960s.

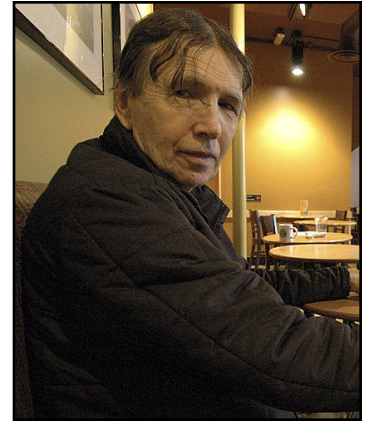
Note: This production includes adult themes and scenes of brief nudity. Not appropriate for all audiences.



Actors Eric St. Cyr and Kymberli Colbourne play Benjamin Braddock and Mrs. Robinson in Bag&Baggage's production of The Graduate

II. THE AUTHOR: CHARLES WEBB

Born in San Francisco in 1939, Charles Webb grew up in affluent Pasadena, CA, the son of a wealthy heart doctor. He attended Midland School in Los Olivos, California, and Williams College in Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1961 with majors in American history and literature. He wrote his first - and most successful - novel, *The Graduate*, as a college senior, and published it in 1963 when he was just 24 years old. The context of *The Graduate* largely reflects the monied environment of Webb's youth, and Webb, like his hero Benjamin Braddock, was greatly dissatisfied with the ease and opulence of his upbringing. He declined an inheritance from his father, and developed a habit of impulsive philanthropy, giving away everything from Southern California mini-mansions to original Warhol artwork.



Webb met his partner - then named Eve Rudd - when when he was a junior at Williams and she was a sophomore at Vermont's Bennington College. They married in 1962, and have two sons. Eve is a visual artist, who shaves her head and changed her name to "Fred" in solidarity with a Californian support group - called Fred - for men who have low self-esteem. Charles and Fred divorced in 1981 in protest against the inequality of women in marriage, yet they have remained together, living in partnership. That same year, the Webbs removed their children from school so that they could tutor them at home, which at that time was an illegal act in California. They fled the state to avoid authorities, and lived a largely transient life, managing a nudist camp in New Jersey at one point, living on the breadline, taking menial jobs as cleaners, cooks, and fruit-pickers, working at K-Mart, and living in a shack.



Webb never felt comfortable with the attention brought upon him by the film version of *The Graduate* because he felt it distracted from his status as a serious artist. He sold the film rights for a one-off payment reported to be \$20,000, and was rarely associated with the movie's publicity and largely disconnected from the growth of its reputation. Buck Henry and Calder Willingham, the scriptwriters, assumed much of the credit for the work, despite taking most of the dialogue directly from the book. During the movie's enormous success, the producer, Joseph E. Levine, offered Webb token recognition by an additional compensation of \$10,000.

Of his iconic story, Webb says, "people ask whether *The Graduate* was autobiographical. It was. There are parallels between Fred and me, and Ben and Elaine — the young lovers in the book are battling convention, and the parents in the book have a lot in common with our parents. But the details are changed." He also notes that these aspects of his novel were never a problem in his marriage. "To be honest, Fred's never worried about the Mrs. Robinson thing," he says. "The thing that bothered her most is that the character of Elaine is wimpy and conventional. That chafed. There's not been a lot that is conventional about our relationship." In another interview he notes, "*The Graduate* was about going to college. And then, well actually it was a lot of things — I got interested in the wife of a good friend of my parents and realizing it might be better to write about it than to do it..."

Charles and Fred currently live in Eastbourne, East Sussex, England, where he still works as a writer - having published eight additional novels to date - and cares for Fred, who suffered a nervous breakdown in 2001.

III. THE ADAPTOR: TERRY JOHNSON



Terry Johnson is a British dramatist and director born in Hillingdon, Middlesex, who has worked on a variety of stage, television, and film projects. Educated at Birmingham University, he worked as an actor from 1971 to 1975, and has been active as a playwright since the early 1980s. He has won nine British Theatre awards including the Olivier Award for Best Comedy 1994 and 1999; Playwright of the Year 1995; Critics' Circle Theatre Awards for Best New Play 1995; two Evening Standard Theatre Awards; the Writers Guild Award for Best Play 1995 and 1996; the Meyer-Whitworth Award 1993; and the John Whiting Award 1991. Johnson's work, usually comic but sometimes sombre in tone, is marked by a Stoppardian delight in ideas and unexpected imaginative connections.

Johnson specializes in writing plays about historical figures and characters that are already entrenched in Western pop culture. Of his work, he notes, "...it's just that I find it easier to write people who come pre-packaged. I find it relatively difficult to create characters. The same thing that attracts me to them attracts an audience to them, in that they know who they're coming to see. They arrive with pre-conceptions that you can play with."

Johnson adapted *The Graduate* for the stage in 2000, drawing on both the novel by Webb and the screenplay by Henry and Willingham. He directed his script in London, Australia, and New York, including the 2002-2003 Broadway production starring Jason Biggs as Benjamin Braddock, Alicia Silverstone as Elaine Robinson, and Kathleen Turner as Mrs. Robinson. He continues to work as a playwright, scriptwriter, and stage and film director.



◀ Actors Eric St. Cyr and Kymberli Colbourne as Benjamin Braddock and Mrs. Robinson



Actors Arianne Jacques and Eric St. Cyr as Elaine Robinson as Benjamin Braddock ▶

IV. OUR PRODUCTION: NOTES FROM SCOTT PALMER

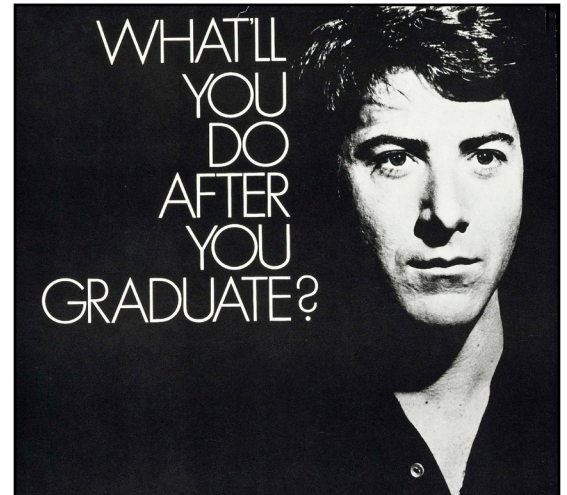


There are only a few films that can be said to truly represent a generation. *The Wizard of Oz*, from 1939, reflecting a world moving from gray to technicolor. *The Big Chill*, from 1983, calling up the angst and self-centered pain of the newly minted baby boomer generation. *Star Wars*, *It's A Wonderful Life*, and there are a few more. But few of them so completely and utterly embrace the nature of a generation, encapsulate a zeitgeist, as well or as with as much style as *The Graduate*. Nominated for seven academy awards, *The Graduate* was the breakthrough film for Mike Nichols, the director, and his young star, Dustin Hoffman, and has been mimicked, referenced, spoofed, satirized, homaged, and honored hundreds of times since it first shook American cinema in 1967.

The Graduate was hailed as “the freshest, funniest, and most touching film of the year...filled with delightful surprises, cheekiness, sex, satire, irreverence toward some of the most sacred of American cows...” And there were a number of sacred cows that Americans were reconsidering during the sixties.

But more than just presenting a counter-argument to the plasticized, me-first, conservative bedrock of the American middle class, *The Graduate* questions much more basic notions in a way that had never been seen before in popular, mainstream art: questions about sexuality and age, about intergenerational relationships, about the role of sex in marriage, about the difference between love and sex, and about empowering female sexuality.

Given that these issues are still with us today, and are still considered shocking even by contemporary standards, you can imagine just how much *The Graduate* rocked the boat in the late 1960s.



When we think of *The Graduate*, we think of the film. But *The Graduate* was a groundbreaking novel before it became a movie, and that is a fact that is often forgotten. In his book *Here's To You, Mrs. Robinson*, Hanif Kureishi (critic for *The Guardian* newspaper's “Book” section) writes, “Charles Webb's *The Graduate* has long been eclipsed by the film (and its soundtrack), but in its deadpan quiet stylishness it is easily its equal, being that most rare and valuable thing, a serious comic novel which both exemplifies its time and continues to speak to us.”

As part of our artistic mission, B&B is interested in exploring the original source materials that inspired great works of literature, and with this production of *The Graduate*, we have taken our cues from Webb's novel, primarily. The spare, limber dialogue (almost completely without narration or description) in Webb's novel is at times circular, frustrating, thin, and ultimately deeply funny and moving. What appears to be, at first glance, a series of shallow exchanges between even shallower characters grows, over time, into a powerful examination of what lies beneath the banter and inside the bedrooms of these carefully manicured California homes. The novel was never intended to be a slick Hollywood film; it was never intended to become an icon of American cinema. As the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* says, “And yet, for all that we associate *The Graduate* with the film from the 1960s, it's more a literary comment on the America of the 1950s, with its buttoned-down conformity, its suburban stifling of the soul.”

When we think of *The Graduate*, we think of Mrs. Robinson, the older, married, woman, and Benjamin Braddock, the unlikely protagonist, through whose experience we navigate the story. But although Benjamin is the main character, very few people really believe that the film is about him.

Benjamin is the surface off of which the world bounces, making indentations and damaging his shiny exterior with hundreds of thousands of pebbles. Like a man who finds himself inexplicably in the middle of a snowstorm in summer, Benjamin just doesn't understand why this is all happening to him. And if Benjamin is the impenetrable, confused victim of a sudden hailstorm, Mrs. Robinson is the deep, dark water into which those hailstones simply vanish, without a trace.



But the story, in my mind, isn't about Mrs. Robinson either. She is already finished, too empty to ever be filled again, a bottomlessness that no amount of booze or sex or reprisal can fill. No, ultimately, *The Graduate* is about Elaine. Or, really, *The Graduate* is the prequel to a story that eventually will be about Elaine - the set up.



There is a cultural tension between traditional versus revolutionary views on gender which is represented by Elaine, as she both seeks to appease the status quo as set forth by her parents and suburban society, while at the same time to break free and form her own understanding of herself as a woman. It is significant that she is attending college at Berkeley because during the 1960s this was the American center of many revolutionary movements that took place during the 1960s — in terms of class, gender, and race.

By placing this character within such a setting, the film is making the tension between these two understandings of traditional female roles clear. The problem with Elaine's character, however, is that she, unlike her mother, does not clearly embody the values of the 1950s nor those of the 1960s. Instead, she blends these two and is the perfect immersion of the new and the traditional.

In a story where both main characters are unable to find meaning in anything, Elaine represents hope; the ability to choose, to pursue, to act.

This play isn't shtick, it isn't a comedic walk down memory lane; it isn't a story about redemption, or bell bottoms and ditzzy flower-children; it wasn't ever a story about schmaltz and nostalgia for a "simpler time" or even a more "revolutionary time." It is about the chaos, terror, and fear underneath still water, and the joy that comes from seeing what we know in ourselves in others, and then chilled, as the smile fades from our lips and the laugh breathes out, in the moment that we realize what we thought we saw was really hiding something much darker underneath.

V. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & WRITING ACTIVITIES

Before you see the show:

1. What makes a platonic relationship appropriate or inappropriate? What makes a sexual relationship appropriate or inappropriate? How do you decide where the line is?
2. Is rebellion a necessary part of growing up? Why or why not?
3. What does it mean to be counter-cultural? Is this the same thing as rebellion, or something different? Explain your reasoning.

After you see the show:

4. What is Benjamin trying to get out of life? Is he supposed to be an idealist? If so, what are his ideals; if not why isn't he one?
5. Why does Mrs. Robinson want to seduce Benjamin? Why does Benjamin decide to take Mrs. Robinson up on her offer of a sexual affair?
6. Mrs. Braddock talks about "today's young people" being "disillusioned". What do you think this means? How is Benjamin disillusioned? How are the young people of 2016 disillusioned?
7. One of the most famous lines in the film is Mr. Robinson's one-word advice to Benjamin: "Plastics". What does Mr. Robinson mean? How would you translate his advice to something relevant to young people graduating from college in 2016?
8. Why does Benjamin initially treat Elaine the way he does? Why does he then decide that he's in love with her?
9. Imagine that you are writing the first chapter of the sequel to *The Graduate* (as Charles Webb himself did decades later). How would you pick up the story of Benjamin and Elaine? What kind of future do you think they might have together?
10. Pretend that you are the psychiatrist Benjamin's parents bring him to visit in Act 2. What would you say to the Braddocks in order to help them make sense of what has happened in their family?

VI. SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

On the film:

“Here’s To You, Mr. Nichols: The Making of The Graduate” from *Vanity Fair*, March 2008: <http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2008/03/graduate200803>

“‘The Graduate’ at 40: A defiant and astute film to be proud of” from *The SF Gate*, September 2007: <http://www.sfgate.com/entertainment/article/The-Graduate-at-40-A-defiant-and-astute-film-2504455.php>

“The Graduate” movie review from *LIFE Magazine*, November 1967: <https://books.google.com/books?id=eEkEAAAAMBAJ&lpg=PA71&pg=PA111&hl=en#v=onepage&q&f=true>

“Rethinking ‘The Graduate’s place as the defining film of ‘60s, and Ben Braddock’s accidental rebellion” from *Politico*, April 2012: <http://www.politico.com/states/new-york/city-hall/story/2012/04/rethinking-the-graduates-place-as-the-defining-film-of-60s-and-ben-braddocks-accidental-rebellion-067223>

“How Mike Nichols and ‘The Graduate’ Changed American Movies Forever” from *New Republic*, November 2014: <https://newrepublic.com/article/120348/stanley-kauffmann-reviews-mike-nichols-graduate>

On Charles Webb:

“The Man Behind Mrs. Robinson” from *The Telegraph*, April 2000: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/4720395/The-man-behind-Mrs-Robinson.html>

“Real Life Parallels of ‘The Graduate’” from *AMC*, 2008: <http://www.amc.com/talk/2008/04/real-life-parallels-graduate-charles-webb>

“Post-Graduate Life Proves Unkind to Author Charles Webb—Footloose, Fundless and Looking for Help” from *People*, October 1988: <http://www.people.com/people/archive/article/0,,20100276,00.html>

“Thoughtcat Exclusive - An interview with Charles Webb” from *Thoughtcat*, July 2006: <http://thoughtcat.blogspot.com/2006/07/thoughtcat-exclusive-interview-with.html>

On Terry Johnson:

“You Have To Begin Undressing” from *The Telegraph*, June 2003: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/drama/3597291/You-have-to-begin-undressing.html>

Terry Johnson biography on jrank.org: <http://www.jrank.org/literature/pages/4581/Terry-Johnson.html>

“Bald on blondes: what makes Terry Johnson tick?” from *The Arts Desk*, September 2013: <http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/bald-blondes-what-makes-terry-johnson-tick>