

**Pulitzer Prize Comedy 1945**

"Doctor, I've wrestled with reality  
for 40 years and I'm happy to say  
that I've finally won out over it."

—Elwood P. Dowd

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# Harvey

by  
Mary Chase

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## Harvey Study Guide

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## Study Guide

A practical, hands-on resource for the classroom which contains background information for the play, suggested themes for discussion. Designed by educators and theatre professionals, the activities and themes for discussion are organized in modules that can be used independently or interdependently according to the class level and time availability.

*Harvey* is recommended for students in grade 6 and higher.

This guide was written and compiled by Amanda Tripp. Additional materials were provided by Joanna Falck, Leonard Conolly, Sue LePage, Joseph Ziegler and Bob Hetherington for the Shaw Theatre Festival, Ontario, Canada

## THE PLAYERS

Judge Gaffney	Warren Brooks
Betty Chumley	Kate Flynn
Dr Chumley	Charley Hankins
Duane Wilson	Preston Huitt
Mrs. Chauvenet	Nancy Rae Kinard
Veta Simmons	Elva Melillo
Elwood P. Dowd	Bill Meyer
Myrtle Mae Simmons	Mary Claire Parker
Dr Sanderson	Matthew Power
Ruth Kelly	Summer Shipp
Miss Johnson	Pandora Spocks



## THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Director	GARY HALL/RUTH GRIFFIN
Set Designer	GARY HALL
Costume Designer	RUTH GRIFFIN
Lighting Designer	BENJAMIN BROWN

## SYNOPSIS

Everyone wants to meet Elwood Dowd and his friend Harvey. When they enter a room, strangers soon become friends and people want to share a drink with them. But Harvey is a six-foot invisible rabbit and Elwood's sister wants him gone. The question is, does the world need another "normal" chap, or more Harveys?

**I wrestled  
with reality  
for forty  
years, and I  
am happy to  
state that I  
finally won  
out over it.**

**-Elwood P. Dowd  
Harvey**

## The Story

# HARVEY

Who is Harvey? Only one of the most engaging characters you'll 'never' see. Elwood P. Dowd, Harvey's best friend and the center of this play, calls Harvey a Pooka. In the play, a Pooka is described, "From old Celtic mythology. A fairy spirit in animal form. Always very large. The Pooka appears here and there, now and then, to this one and that one at his own caprice. A wise but mischievous creature. Very fond of rum-pots, crack-pots."

Yes, Harvey is a Pooka in the form of a white rabbit, six foot one and a half inches tall and Elwood's constant companion. And that's the problem. Elwood's social-climbing sister Veta is anxious for her daughter to make her way in society and Elwood's behavior is becoming more and more embarrassing.

They resolve to take care of the problem by committing Elwood to a sanatorium, and through a series of comic misunderstandings, Veta herself is almost committed while Elwood attempts to invite doctors and nurse out for drinks. Therein lies the magic and charm of Elwood, and of the play. He's simply unlike anyone you've likely met — he's calm and gentle and kind and everyone just immediately warms to his character. Perhaps he visits the local bars a little too often, but when he arrives with Harvey, people can't help but want to join them:

*"Harvey and I sit in the bars and we have a drink or two and play the jukebox. Soon the faces of the other people turn toward mine and smile. They are saying: 'We don't know your name, Mister, but you're a lovely fellow.' Harvey and I warm ourselves in all these golden moments. We have entered as strangers — soon we have friends."*

But Elwood cannot continue to escape the doctors and psychiatrists who wish to 'cure' him. His sister pleads with him to take an injection that will finally make him 'normal'. But is normal really what the world needs more of? Or are Elwood and Harvey fine just as they are?

FYI – We are so excited to announce that the role of Harvey is being played by Harvey who has appeared in multiple productions of the play as well as the Jimmy Stewart Film. Harvey has also received acclaim for his performances as Godot in *Waiting for Godot* and Protopopov in *Three Sisters* and Charlie in *Rumors*, as well as serving as Claude Rains' stunt double in *The Invisible Man*.

# Who's Who

## Harvey

**ELWOOD P. DOWD**  
Harvey's best friend.  
Veta's brother.  
Myrtle Mae's uncle.

**VETA SIMMONS**  
Elwood's sister.  
Myrtle's mother.  
She considers herself an upstanding member of society. She is embarrassed by her brother Elwood's friendship with Harvey.

**MYRTLE MAE SIMMONS**  
Veta's daughter.  
Elwood's niece.  
Myrtle is unmarried and very concerned that her Uncle Elwood's eccentric behaviour will prevent her from ever finding a suitable husband.

**JUDGE GAFFNEY**  
A lawyer representing the estate of Veta and Elwood's late mother. An old family friend concerned with protecting the family's interests.

**HARVEY**  
A Pooka. A large, white rabbit and Elwood Dowd's dearest friend.

**DR CHUMLEY**  
The head of *Chumley's Rest*, a sanitarium for mental patients.

**DR SANDERSON**  
A young doctor of psychiatry at *Chumley's Rest*.

**MISS RUTH KELLY**  
Head nurse at *Chumley's Rest*

**WILSON**  
Strong-armed attendant at *Chumley's Rest*.

“It's quite possible to leave your home for a walk in the early morning air and return a different person -beguiled, enchanted.”

- Mary Coyle Chase

## The Playwright



MARY COYLE CHASE

Mary Chase (1907 — 1981) was born in Denver, Colorado and began her writing career as a reporter for the *Rocky Mountain News*, Denver's oldest newspaper. She first wrote a society column, *Society Notes*, but eventually ended up covering almost everything, "In the course of a day, Harry [Rhoads, a photographer] and I might begin at the Police Court, go to a murder trial at the West Side Court, cover a party in the evening at Mrs Crawford Hill's mansion, and rush to a shooting at 11pm." She was also the publicity director for the National Youth Administration and the teamsters union in Denver.

Her first play, *Me Third* was written through the Federal Theatre Project, one of five arts-related projects established during the first term of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The play moved from the Federal Theatre in Denver to New York in 1937, after she sent the play to director, producer and fellow Denverite Antoinette Perry (the namesake of the Tony Awards). Perry, with her producing partner Brock Pemberton, had had several successful plays on Broadway. They produced Chase's play *Kiss the Boys Goodbye* under the title *Now You've Done It* and although it received mixed reviews, they encouraged Chase to continue writing.

*Harvey*, her next play, did not come for another seven years, and the play took at least two years to write. Seeing the devastating effects of World War II on her friends and neighbors, particularly a neighbor of Chase's who had lost her only son, is what is believed to be her inspiration to write the play. The character of Harvey came from the stories her Irish uncles would tell her about pookas, mythical invisible spirits in animal form that are described by some as malevolent and demonic and others as benevolent and helpful. When she finished the play, she also sent it to Perry and Pemberton who produced it in 1944, starring Frank Fay as Elwood P. Dowd and Josephine Hull as Veta with Perry directing. The show ran from 1944 — 1949 for 1,775 performances, and won the Pulitzer Prize in 1945. Many versions of the stage play followed, including the film version in 1950 starring James Stewart (with an Oscar going to Josephine Hull for Best Actress and a nomination for Stewart for Best Actor) and a 1972 "Hallmark Hall of Fame" television play. A musical version, *Say Hello to Harvey*, played in Toronto in 1981 with Donald O'Connor, but closed after six weeks.

Other plays by Chase include *The Next Half Hour* (1945), *Bernardine* (1952), *Mrs McThing* (1952) and *Midgie Purvis* with Tallulah Bankhead (1961). She also wrote children's books with fantastic characters, including *Loretta Mason Potts* (1958) and *The Wicked, Wicked Ladies in the Haunted House* (1968).

“Harvey is the most delightful, droll, endearing, funny and touching piece of stage whimsy I ever saw ...

-John Chapman  
*New York Daily News*  
(Harvey review from first Broadway run)

## Production History



*Harvey* opened at New York's 48<sup>th</sup> Street Theatre on November 1, 1944, and ran for over four years, not closing until January 15, 1949, for a total of 1,775 performances. Directed by Antoinette Perry, and starring Frank Fay as Elwood P. Dowd, the show won the 1945 Pulitzer Prize for Drama. A 1970 Broadway revival, directed by Stephen Porter, ran for only 79 performances at the ANTA Playhouse, but James Stewart won a Drama Desk Award for his role as Dowd, and Helen Hayes was nominated for a Tony Award for her role as Veta Louise Simmons.

*Harvey* had its British première at the Theatre Royal Birmingham on December 13, 1948, where it ran for a week before transferring to the Prince of Wales Theatre in London on January 5, 1949. The production was directed by Anthony Quayle, with the famous British comedian Sid Field as Dowd. From the Prince of Wales the production moved to the Piccadilly Theatre on March 14, 1950, where it closed on July 1, 1950 for a total London run of 610 performances. Field died during the Prince of Wales run, replaced by Leslie Henson. Joe E. Brown also played Dowd for several performances during the summer and fall of 1949.

James Stewart starred in a 1950 film of the play, directed by Henry Koster.

A made for TV movie was released in 1996 starring Harry Anderson, Swoosie Kurtz and Leslie Nielsen.

The 2011 Broadway revival featured Jim Parsons of *The Big Bang Theory*.

FYI - *Harvey* was given the Pulitzer Prize for 1945 over *The Glass Menagerie*.

“Harvey reminds us to look for the magic and the joy that make everyone special.”

-Gary Hall

From the Director...



## Director GARY HALL shares his thoughts on *Harvey*

I believe Elwood Dowd is just the sort of hero we need in 2024. He is born of a different time (even in the forties) and he just marches to the beat of his own drums.

Add to that a six-foot invisible rabbit that only Elwood sees and you have a perfectly charming man who seems to only be concerned with making the world brighter than the way he found it. What a novel concept. This is how this play speaks to me.

We all have quirky friends who have traits that set them apart from everyone else but also define who that person is. Take that trait away and you have a person who is just like everyone else. Why be boring, when you can be charming?

In Act Three Elwood says, 'In this world, Elwood...you must be oh, so smart or oh, so pleasant.' For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant. You may quote me." Oh, how many times I wish people would choose the latter. We seem so focused on the differences in people and using them to exploit and vilify them, that we fail to see the special aspects that make life interesting.

One of my favorite quotes is by C.S. Lewis when he says, "Some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again." *Harvey* is a comedy, but in many ways, it's more of a fairy tale. Harvey is a pucca (pooka), a Celtic spirit who is more of trickster than a troublemaker. What a novel friend to have...it's pure magic. This play reminds us that there is still magic in this world and we need guides like Elwood to help us see it. I hope I never get so old or jaded that I don't see the magic of Christmas or Disney or puppies because those things bring joy to the world. Failing to acknowledge or appreciate them makes for a very humdrum and dreary life.

I love that Mrs. Chase wrote this play thinking of ways to make people laugh and smile during dark and scary times. Our world needs more Mary Chases and more Elwood Dowds and yes... more Harveys.

“ This  
play is  
all  
about  
whimsy  
and  
living on  
the  
edge of  
reality

-Gary Hall



About the Design



## Thoughts on *Harvey* and it's unique design

Q: Can you describe your vision for this production of *Harvey*?

A: First of all, *Harvey* is somewhat farcical. Shakespeare might have called it *Much Ado About Bunnies*, so we wanted to take a “fun and funky approach to the set. I always think of set design as creating a playground for adults and this was a great chance to do just that. Rather than going realistic, we opted for a more pop-art approach very much in line with a Lichtenstein or comic book panel look with bold colors and patterns and line contrasting the realistic colors and tones of the period costumes to make the actors really stand out. So, it has a comic backdrop of sorts to play against with lots of detail in the dressing of the set and costumes for a child-like approach that is completely in keeping with Elwood.

Q: What do you find most striking about this story?

A: The mixture of whimsy and reality. Neither element stands out above another and so finding a world in which the two can cohabit was both fun and a challenge.

Q: What do you want audience members to know about your design?

A: To see it more as a backdrop than an element. It's a fun, playful, innocent world from a darker historical time. It's a bit frivolous that this little tale of light-hearted humour should be set in the midst of a world war. I think this points to the human proclivity to focus on what is at hand rather than the big picture...it's sometimes the best way to cope. Escapism can always be useful as we navigate the unthinkable.



## INSPIRATION

Mary Coyle Chase began writing *Harvey* in 1942. Inspiration for the play came from two life experiences:

- 1) A dream she had about a psychiatrist being chased by a giant white rabbit. This dream reminded her of stories her Irish uncles had told her about Pookas - mischievous creatures from Irish folklore.
- 2) A widowed neighbor of Chase's who had lost her only son in war just two months earlier. In reflection Chase asked herself: "Would I ever possibly write anything that might make this woman laugh again?" and she set to work trying.

### DISCUSS:

What inspires you to write? What might be other sources that would inspire people to write a play? A novel? A song? A poem?

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This is what was happening in America, while Mary Chase was writing *Harvey*:

### World War II

When Japanese air forces attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Americans joined the Allies in a global war, we now know as World War II. 16 million Americans donned uniforms. The millions who stayed home comprised a vast civilian army, mobilized by the government to support the war effort through conservation of natural resources and production of war materials.

U.S. troops arrived in Europe in 1942. Through March, the number of troops shipped overseas averaged about 50,000 per month - a number that soared upwards of 250,000 per month in 1944.

### Everyday life on the American home front

The war sent Americans back to work and helped the U.S. to recover from the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Privately owned factories were converted from civilian to military production (Kimberley-Clark, for example, converted from producing Kleenex to producing machine gun mounts!) and new manufacturing plants were constructed by the government. American citizens on the home front were back at work on assembly lines, in offices and on farms and, in a sense, all were recruited to assist with the war effort. As mobilization for World War II increased, Depression-era employment levels decreased dramatically. For many, this was a prosperous time.

Although the war effort eased the stresses of underemployment it brought a new set of stressors into everyday life. One out of every five American families had at least one family member serving in the military and these families waited and worried at home while their loved ones were fighting overseas.

### American Families

Servicemen's wives and women war workers frequently had difficulty finding appropriate care for their children, particularly those that moved to new communities in order to work.

“No, we don't know how long Daddy will be gone ... Yes, some men will be killed on our side too, but that is what war means... No, you will not be alone. If Daddy doesn't come back I will still take care of you.

- Child experts recommended that parents give their children frank answers to difficult questions.

## The World of the Play

Children endured the anxiety caused by school air raid drills, terrifying newsreels and photographs, and the trauma of their daddies departing for war.

Discouraging news from the front lines in 1942-43 caused anxiety about loved ones, concern about military operations, criticism of economic mobilization and management and even some effort to evade wartime duties and sacrifices.

### Original Recycling Program

Americans were asked to conserve and recycle rubber, tin, and other materials vital for the war effort. As part of the campaign to find or produce enough rubber, in June 1942 Roosevelt said Americans should collect “old tires, old rubber raincoats, old garden hoses, rubber shoes, bathing caps, gloves— whatever is made of rubber.” Within a month, people had contributed 450,000 tons of scrap rubber in a variety of forms. Scrap drives of all sorts involved civilians in the war effort. Commonplace materials and objects were turned into instruments of war - the glycerin in kitchen fats was used to make gunpowder; lipstick tubes containing brass were used in cartridges; the tin used in cans was employed in building ships; the steel in razor blades was recycled in producing machine guns; and old nylon stockings were used to make parachutes.

### Fashion

Even clothing manufacturing was subject to wartime restrictions. In menswear, vests, cuffs and double-breasted jackets were eliminated in order to save fabric. In women's wear ‘patriotic chic’ involved shorter skirts, two-piece bathing suits, and a lack of pleats and ruffles.

### Popular Culture

People worked very hard and worried about friends and loved ones during the war. Many sought escape in popular culture, particularly in films and radio. Popular entertainment steered away from the subject of war and toward light entertainment as a diversion from the horrors of war. *Harvey* was one such distraction.



Top: Women aircraft workers finish bomber noses at the Douglas Aircraft Co. (1942) ; Right: Good Work Sister: poster (1943)



“ Doctor -  
the function  
of a  
psychiatrist is  
to tell the  
difference  
between  
those who are  
reasonable,  
and those  
who merely  
talk and act  
reasonably ...

- Dr. Chumley  
Harvey

The World of the Play

## Psychiatric Care in the 1930s and 40s

Prior to the 20th century, people with mental illnesses were usually locked away in insane asylums, and without any effective therapeutic options. Psychiatric care is still relatively new and options for treatment in the 30s and 40s were limited. Some common therapies included:

**Hydrotherapy**—in the form of hot or cold baths. Patients would be immersed in water for hours at a time.

**Shock Therapies**—Insulin, Metrazol and Electroconvulsive therapies induced seizures in patients. Many psychiatrists claimed that these therapies worked by ‘shocking’ patients out of their illness.

## Psychiatric Theories in the 1930s and 40s

**Auto-suggestion** -Self-induced hypnosis. Hallucinations can also be caused by post-hypnotic suggestion. The theory is that the existence of Harvey has been so powerfully suggested that Veta herself, begins to see him.

### SIGMUND FREUD was...

...well known for his theories of the unconscious mind, repression, and for creating the clinical practice of psychoanalysis for treating psychopathology.

Although some of his ideas have fallen out of fashion and modern psychology has shown flaws in some of his theories, Freud’s work continues to influence the humanities and social sciences. He is one of the most influential thinkers of the first half of the 20th century.

### ON WHY WE BEHAVE THE WAY WE DO...

Freud’s Theory of Psychosexual Development maintains that current behavior is caused by childhood experience. Freud also believed that the contents of hallucination could be traced back to actual perceptions in early experience, especially traumatic perceptions that had been repressed. By tracing the roots of the hallucination to a memory or trauma, the need to hallucinate could be reduced or eliminated. This belief was exemplified in the play when Dr Sanderson asked Elwood whether there was someone, somewhere in his past that went by the name Harvey.

One of the fundamental questions to occupy Freud throughout his career was that of [how we know whether our perceptions are real or not](#).

### ON HALLUCINATION...

Freud defined two kinds of hallucinations:

**POSITIVE HALLUCINATION** - Occurs when something is perceived that is not in the environment. (i.e. a six-foot rabbit)

**NEGATIVE HALLUCINATION** - Occurs when there is something in the environment and it is not perceived. In such cases an object is perceived as ‘thin air’. (i.e. Harvey, who, as Elwood explains, some people just don’t see. To people who can’t see Harvey, he “sits there like an empty chair or an empty space on the floor”)

“Whenever people have mental breakdowns they at once think of Dr. Chumley.

- Nurse Kelly  
Harvey

## The World of the Play

### Psychiatry in *HARVEY*

Poking fun at psychiatry, and aiming a few shots directly at Sigmund Freud, Mary Chase keeps alive the idea that there is a proper place in society for certain kinds of eccentrics. Not only do the play's psychiatrists misdiagnose their patients - the highly respected Dr. Chumley, head psychiatrist at Chumley's Rest, begins seeing Harvey too.

Elwood's sister remarks: *Is that all those doctors do at places like that-think about sex?"*

Dr Sanderson remarks to Elwood: *...you show an unusually acute perception into psychiatric problems.*

Mrs. Chumley asks her husband: *Give a little quick diagnosis Willie—we don't want to be late to the party.*

Dr Sanderson diagnoses Nurse Kelly's date: *He looked to me like a schizophrenic all the way across the floor.*

Dr Sanderson comes to the conclusion that Elwood P Dowd is suffering from a third-degree hallucination and is a psychopathic case and Veta Louise is a victim of auto-suggestion.

#### DISCUSS

Do you believe Harvey to be a positive or a negative hallucination? Why?

What is the audience to think when Dr Chumley, the judge of sanity, also confesses to seeing a six-foot rabbit?

Elwood is the most content character in the play. Is he in need of psychiatric help more than anyone else?

Does believing in something unlikely necessarily qualify you for insanity?

Elwood describes his encounters with people:

*Soon the faces of other people turn toward mine and smile... We have entered as strangers - soon we have friends. They come over. They sit with us. They drink with us. They talk to us. They tell about the big terrible things they have done. The big wonderful things they will do. Their hopes, their regrets, their loves, their hates.*

Dr Chumley describes his deepest darkest desire:

*I would talk to her. I would tell her things I have never told anyone-things that are locked in here. (Beats his breast).*

Discuss how these descriptions of people revealing their innermost desires contrasts the methods used by psychiatrists during this time? What might the playwright be suggesting by including these descriptions?

Do you think society should tolerate eccentric behavior? To what point?



...a  
 photograph  
 shows only  
 the reality; a  
 painting  
 shows not  
 only the real-  
 ity but the  
 dream be-  
 hind it. It's  
 our dreams  
 that keep us  
 going.

- Veta Simmons  
*Harvey*

The World of the Play

## DREAMS AND IMAGINATION VS FACTS AND REALITY

“Interpreting *Harvey* is a risky activity since one could argue that one message in the play is that interpretation is a hang-up that people need to ignore. “Don’t be didactic,” admonishes Veta, “it’s not becoming.” Whimsy is what the play is all about - not about scientific knowledge but magic; not about success in Denver society but errant individualism; not about being smart but being pleasant, as Elwood so famously asserts.” - Bob Heatherington

Everyone is trying to get Elwood to see their version of ‘reality’ - which does not involve fully grown men consorting with overgrown talking rabbits! But, if Elwood is not seeing reality, what is he seeing? The play is about what we see and what we don’t, or refuse to see.

Elwood participates in an alternate version of reality. One in which every circumstance he finds himself in is okay. Events that would cause most people tremendous anxiety and upset, Elwood takes in stride. “Yes - he was always so calm about any sudden change in plans. I used to admire it. I should have been suspicious. Take your average man looking up and seeing a big white rabbit. He’d do something about it. But not Elwood. He took that calmly, too. And look where it got him!” says Judge Gaffney.

When the Judge tells Elwood that if he is given the injection, “you won’t see this rabbit anymore.” And Sanderson adds, “But you will see your responsibilities, your duties -” Elwood, replies that he “wouldn’t care for it.”

The truth is that thoughts are powerful! We are able to construct societies, and invent things purely based on an idea: the ability to envision something that does not already exist. We are capable of constructing our own reality. We all have the same power that Elwood has: to choose happiness over sorrow, contentment over dissatisfaction, and pleasure over pain. Elwood chooses Harvey.

Albert Einstein says:

*“Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.”*

Doctor Sanderson says:

*“We all have to face reality, Dowd—sooner or later”.*

Elwood says:

*“Doctor, I wrestled with reality for forty years, and I am happy to state that I finally won out over it”.*

### DISCUSS



What is reality? Do you think that facts and reality are more important than dreams and imagination? Does reality, like beauty, lie in the eye of the beholder?

Is there a place in society for eccentrics? Create a list of historical figures labelled as “insane” or “eccentric” who are now famous for their inventions or actions.

In the end, it is up to the audience to decide whether or not Harvey is real. We never actually see him with our own eyes - but does that mean he doesn’t exist?

“ A  
Pooka ...as I  
understand it.  
That’s  
something  
very old.

- Elwood P Dowd  
Harvey

The World of the Play

## WHAT IS A POOKA?

*“P-o-o-k-a. ‘Pooka from old Celtic mythology. A fairy spirit in animal form. Always very large. The pooka appears here and there, now and then, to this one and that one at his own caprice. A wise but mischievous creature. Very fond of rum-pots, crack-pots,” and how are you, Mr. Wilson (looks at the book startled—looks at c. doorway fearfully—then back to book.) How are you, Mr. Wilson? (Shakes book, looks at it in surprise.) Who in the encyclopedia wants to know? (Looks at book again, drops it on table.) - Wilson*

### DESCRIPTION

The Pooka is a mischievous faery creature from Irish folklore. Like most faery folk it is both feared and respected by those who believe in it. It can assume a variety of different animal forms and has the power of human speech.

### WHAT TO EXPECT FROM A POOKA ENCOUNTER

In some tales the Pooka is a frightening creature, in other stories it is considered more helpful than mischievous. The Pooka has been known to give prophecies and to advise and warn people away from harm. Conversely, they have also been known to enjoy confusing and terrifying humans, although never doing them any real harm. The Pooka is considered a benevolent creature.

### AGRICULTURAL TRADITIONS

In some traditions, the Pooka is associated with Samhain, a Pagan Harvest Festival, when the last of the crops are brought in. Any crops remaining in the fields are considered "pooka," or fairy-blasted, and inedible. In some places, reapers leave a small share of the crop, called the 'pooka's share', to pacify the hungry creature. November 1st is the Pooka's day, there are stories about the Pooka appearing on this day and providing prophecies and warnings to those who consult it. It is also the one day of the year when the Pooka can be expected to behave.

### FYI

Incidentally, Pooka Day, November 1, 1944 was the day that *Harvey* premiered on Broadway.

*Harvey* premieres at the Shaw Festival on April 1st, which also seems fitting for a creature that enjoys making mischief!

### DISCUSS

The Pooka is an Irish creature. Do Pooka-like creatures exist in other cultures? Research other cultures and share findings about similar Pooka-type creatures.

Harvey appears to Elwood as a rabbit. Pick some public figures and explain what form of Pookas might appear to them and why. For example, Johnny Depp's Pooka might be a 6' cat wearing a fedora.

In theatre, sometimes music is used to represent something that cannot be shown. Unseen characters, such as ghosts, might have specific music associated with them, so audiences know when they are present. Play an original or prerecorded song to your class that you think could represent Harvey and explain why. If you had a Pooka, what would it sound like? Why?

Draw your own version of Harvey.

Draw your own version of your personal Pooka.

## THEATRE DEVICES

Playwright Mary Coyle Chase has drawn upon many theatrical and comedic devices to create her timeless theatre production. The following list of terms and definitions are examples of various theatre devices and comedy-writing techniques that are used in *Harvey*.

Can you find examples of each of the following in the play?

### Well-Made Play:

a play constructed according to strict technical principles that produce neatness of plot and theatrical effectiveness. The form was developed in early 1800s' by Eugène Scribe and became dominant on 19th-century European and U.S. stages. It called for complex, artificial plotting, a buildup of suspense, a climactic scene in which all problems are resolved, and a happy ending

### High Comedy:

appeals to the intellect and arouses thoughtful laughter by exhibiting the inconsistencies and incongruities of human nature and by displaying the follies of social manners

### Foreshadowing:

hints of what is to come in the action of a play or story

### Unities:

the idea that a play should be limited to a specific time, place, and story line. The events of the plot should occur within a twenty-four hour period, should occur within a give geographic locale, and should tell a single story

### Dramatic Irony:

when the words and actions of the characters of a work of literature have a different meaning for the reader than they do for the characters. This is the result of the reader having a greater knowledge than the characters themselves

### Comedy of Errors:

a comedy of errors is dramatic work (often a play) that is light and often humorous or satirical in tone, in which the action usually features a series of comic instances of mistaken identity, and which typically culminates in a happy resolution of the thematic conflict

### Symbolism:

characters, usually ghosts, that are only seen by select characters almost always symbolize something in literature, such as suppressed guilt or fear, or longing

### Setting:

the scenery, properties, or background, used to create the location for a stage play

“...Myrtle Mae and I have to live in the house with that rabbit. Our friends never come to see us—we have no social life; we have no life at all.

- Veta Simmons  
*Harvey*

## The World of the Play

### KEEPING UP APPEARANCES

Although the American Dream maintained that ‘all men are born free and equal’ the fact remained that, during the 1930s’ and 1940s’ the day to day reality of American life was (and still is today) heavily influenced by a person’s social hierarchy.

“... studies of social class in regions of the United States demonstrate that it is a major determinant of individual decisions and social actions; that every major area of American life is directly and indirectly influenced by our class order; and that the major decisions of most individuals are partly controlled by it. Our most democratic institutions including our schools, churches, business organizations, government, and even our family life are molded by its all-pervading and exceedingly subtle but powerful Influence”.

Warner, Meeker, Eels

Many characters in *Harvey* are concerned with how they are perceived by other people and their social standing within their community.

#### DISCUSS

The play opens with Veta Simmons hosting a tea and reception for the members of the Wednesday Forum. What role did the Forum receptions play in the 1940s? What might be Veta’s motivation? Why is she so excited to speak with the Society Editor of the local paper? What details does she want the editor to note? Why?

In your opinion, does the character of Elwood believe social status to be important? Provide examples from the play to support your view.

Discuss how the play *Harvey* reflects the importance and impact of a person’s social standing in 1944 as represented in the following characters’ comments:

“...it’s a slap in the face to everything we’ve stood for in this community the way Elwood is acting now” Veta Simmons

“You have subjected me - a psychiatrist - to the humiliation of having to call - of all things - a lawyer to find out who came out here to be committed-and who came out here to commit!” Dr Chumley

“And anybody who thinks so is crazy. Well, don’t look at me like that. There’s nothing funny about me. I’m like my father’s family — they’re all dead.” Myrtle Mae

“How about you and me stepping out Saturday night, Myrtle Mae?” Wilson

“Certainly not. Myrtle Mae, come here.” Veta Simmons

“I’m sorry.” Myrtle Mae

“Don’t you call my brother a psychopathic case! There’s never been anything like that in our family.” Veta Simmons

“Why you could amount to something. You could be sitting on the Western Slope Water Board right now...” Veta Simmons



“ I plan to leave. You want me to stay. Well, an element of conflict in any discussion's a very good thing. It means everybody is taking part and nobody is left out.

- Elwood P Dowd  
*Harvey*

That is Debatable!

The following is a list of quotes from the play *Harvey* providing rich topics for discussion...

“My mother used to say to me, ‘In this world, Elwood...you must be oh, so smart or oh, so pleasant.’ For years I was smart. I recommend pleasant.” (Elwood)  
Which would you rather be? Why?

“We all have to face reality, Dowd—sooner or later”. (Sanderson to Elwood)  
What is reality? Is it possible for people to see reality differently and still see reality?  
Who chooses what is real?

“Doctor, I wrestled with reality for forty years, and I am happy to state that I finally won out over it.” (Elwood)  
What does Elwood mean by this statement he makes to Sanderson?

“Yes—he was always so calm about any sudden change in plans. I used to admire it. I should have been suspicious. Take your average man looking up and seeing a big white rabbit. He’d do something about it. But not Elwood. He took that calmly, too. And look where it got him!” (Judge Gaffney)  
Is calmness in the face of sudden change really a sign to be suspicious of or is it just a sign of contentment? Should we be suspicious of people who are content? Why or why not?

“...so far I’ve never been able to think of any place I’d rather be. I always have a wonderful time just where I am, whomever I’m with. I’m having a fine time right now with you, Doctor.” (Elwood to Chumley)  
Is Elwood’s attitude as explained above admirable? Of concern? Why?

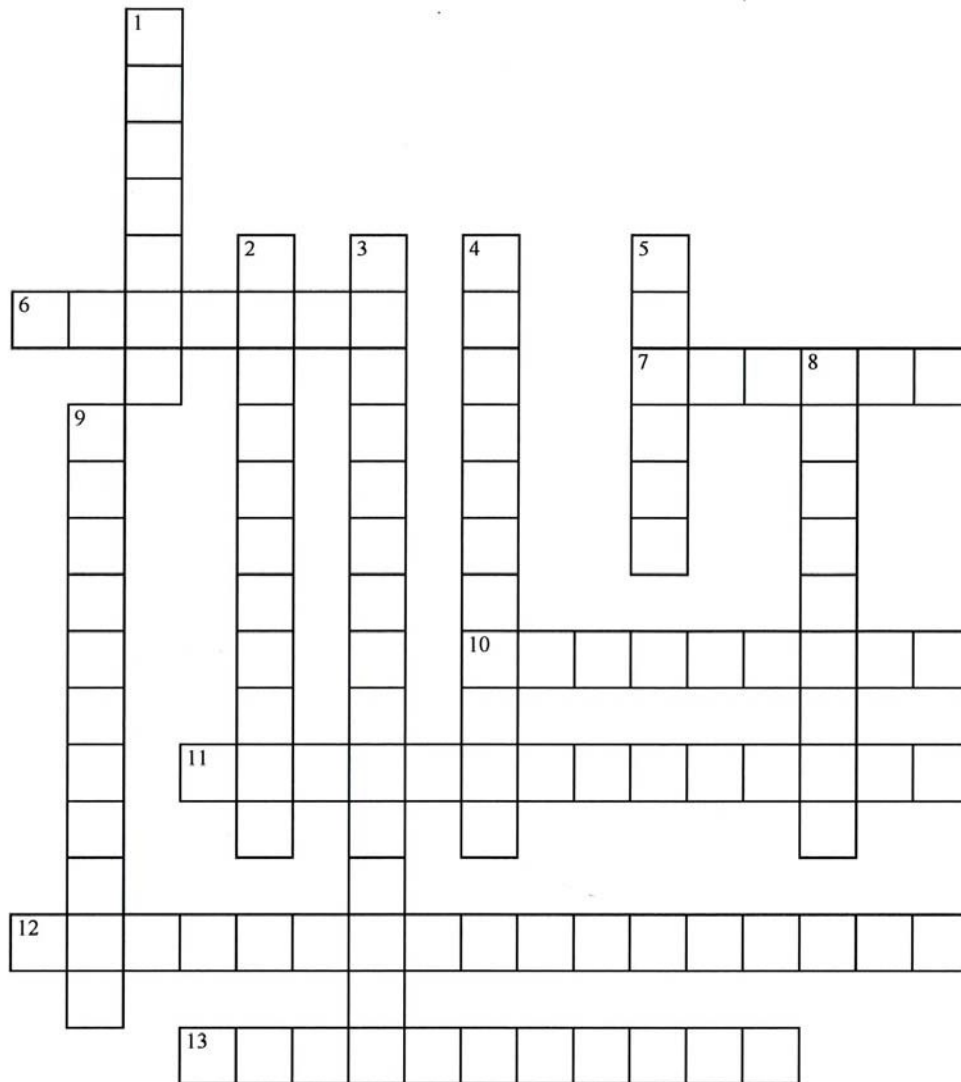
“It’s our dreams that keep us going. That separate us from the beasts. I wouldn’t even want to live if I thought it was all just eating and sleeping and taking off my clothes”. (Veta to Chumley)  
According to what Veta says she learned in her study of art, what does a painting reveal that a photograph cannot show?

“I never lie, Mr. Wilson” - (Elwood)  
What is a lie? If Harvey isn’t real is Elwood lying?

“Some people are blind. That is often brought to my attention” (Elwood)  
What does Elwood mean when he says this to Nurse Kelly? Apart from Elwood, which characters see Harvey? Why do you think that only certain people get to see Harvey?

Veta believes that Elwood’s visions of Harvey are not his fault. Why?  
How can Veta profit from having Elwood committed?  
Toward the end of the play Dr. Chumley says he’s been swatting at flies while miracles lean on lampposts at the corner. What does he mean?  
What is Dr. Chumley’s formula 977 supposed to do?  
Should they give Elwood formula 977. Why or Why not?

# FAMOUS RABBITS



## ACROSS

- 6 This fast-moving creature is famous for losing a race against a tortoise!
- 7 A good friend of Winnie-the-Pooh
- 10 A bunny with strange eating habits and vampire-like qualities
- 11 A drum-beating rabbit that just keeps going and going and going ...
- 12 This rabbit was lectured and punished by a Good Fairy when he was caught harassing a population of field mice
- 13 Alice follows him down the rabbit hole

## DOWN

- 1 Bambi's best friend
- 2 Leaves a trail of chocolate eggs behind him
- 3 A stuffed rabbit who becomes real after it is loved by its owner
- 4 Brought to life by Beatrix Potter in 1902
- 5 A six-foot, one-and-a-half-inch pooka
- 8 A 'wascally wabbit'
- 9 This Toontown resident gets framed for a murder



Say What?

## GLOSSARY

festooned - decorated with

smilax - fragile twining plant with bright green flattened stems and glossy foliage popular as a floral decoration

pinochle - a card game played with a pack of forty-eight cards (two of each suit for high cards)

didactic - inclined to teach or lecture others

Pooka - a fairy that appears in animal form (often large)

sanitarium - a hospital for recuperation or for the treatment of chronic illnesses

hydro tub - full body immersion tanks

cast-iron deer - a decorative lawn ornament

restraining jacket- a long sleeved jacket like garment used to bind the arms tightly against the body as a means of restraining a violent person

psychopath - a person with an antisocial personality disorder, manifested in aggressive, perverted, criminal or amoral behavior without empathy or remorse.

auto-suggestion - hypnotic or subconscious adoption of an idea originating within oneself

birth trauma - the psychological shock said to be experienced by an infant during birth.

dispensary - clinic where medicine and medical supplies are dispensed

atpray - Pig Latin for "prat"- the fleshy part of the body that you sit on. Pig Latin was created in WWII when soldiers wanted to communicate to each other without eavesdropping Germans or Japanese understanding them.

D.T.'s - Delirium tremens Latin for "trembling madness" - an acute episode of delirium that is usually caused by withdrawal from alcohol

spiffed - intoxicated to a level of severely impaired motor and cognitive function, usually from ingestion of alcohol

Corona-Corona - a long cigar with blunt ends

## BOOKS & ARTICLES

Eells K, Meeker, M., Warner, W. L. What Social Class is in America. In *Social Class and Stratification*, 2nd Edition. Rhonda F. Levine, ed. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc. MD, 2006.

## WEBSITES

### Inspiration

<http://www.bard.org/education/studyguides/harvey/harveyplaywright.html>

<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-harvey/comp.html>

[http://www.commonwealththeatre.org/pdfs/Harvey\\_studyguide.pdf](http://www.commonwealththeatre.org/pdfs/Harvey_studyguide.pdf)

### World War II

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/exhibition/flash.html>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/dday/timeline/index.html>

### American home front World War II

<http://www.nps.gov/nhl/themes/HomefrontStudy.pdf>

[http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126\\_rosi.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/list/126_rosi.html)

### Pookas

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/P%C3%80ca>

<http://www.irelandseye.com/paddy3/preview2.htm>

<http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/yeats/fip/fip27.htm>

[www.penlib.du.edu/specoll/Chase/Chasebio.html](http://www.penlib.du.edu/specoll/Chase/Chasebio.html)

### Pooka Activities

<http://www.answers.com/topic/harvey-play-5>

### Mental Health

History of Somatic Therapies

<http://www.desertpacific.mirecc.va.gov/mindview-archive/History-of-Somatic-Therapies-archive.shtml>

<http://health.howstuffworks.com/lobotomy3.htm>

### Comedy Genres

<http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/comedydi.htm>

***This study guide was created by the Shaw Theatre Festival and modified for the South Arkansas Arts Center's production. Much of the information and data here is the work of the Shaw Educational Staff. SAAC acknowledges this work and offers this only as a useful, educational tool, not an original document.***