

**ARTISTS  
REP 17/18**



# I AND YOU

by **Lauren Gunderson**

directed by

**JoAnn Johnson**

**STUDY GUIDE**

# ABOUT ARTISTS REP



**Artists Repertory Theatre's mission is to produce intimate, provocative theatre and provide a home for artists and audiences of varied backgrounds to take creative risks. Artists Rep is Portland's premiere mid-size regional theatre company and is led by Artistic Director Dámaso Rodríguez. Founded in 1982, Artists Repertory Theatre is the longest-running professional theatre company in Portland. Artist Rep became the 72nd member of the League of Resident Theatres (LORT) in 2016 and is an Associate Member of the National New Play Network (NNPN).**

# WHO'S WHO?

## CAST

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Anthony.....Blake Stone  
Caroline.....Emily Eisele

## CREATIVE TEAM

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Director.....JoAnn Johnson  
Scenic Designer.....Tim Stapleton  
Costume Designer.....Alex Pletcher  
Lighting Designer.....Kristeen Willis Crosser  
Sound Designer.....Sharath Patel  
Asst. Scenic Designer.....Samie Pfeifer  
Dramaturg.....Luan Schooler  
Stage Manager.....Michelle Jazuk  
Props Master.....Emily Wilken  
Production Assistant.....Megan Moll  
Production Assistant 2..Haley Hanson  
Board Op.....Alan Cline

# SYNOPSIS **\*SPOILER ALERT!**

It's seventeen-year old Caroline's senior year in high school, but unlike the rest of her classmates, she can't leave her house. As she waits in her room for an organ transplant, she attends school online and communicates with her friends on social media. Her life is largely her room, her stuffed animals, her music, her phone and social media.

When a classmate, Anthony, drops by and announces that he is her partner for a project involving a poem by Walt Whitman, Caroline is confused and annoyed. She doesn't know about any project. Moreover, she doesn't know Anthony, who is a popular basketball player from her school. Even worse, the project is about poetry, a subject Caroline hates.

Begrudgingly, Caroline begins working with Anthony. Anthony loves Walt Whitman's poetry and he loves music by John Coltrane, while Caroline hates poetry and likes rock and roll. But when Anthony dramatically recites Whitman, "I too am not a bit tamed. I too am untranslatable. I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." he gets Caroline's attention. As they get to know each other, working on the project becomes more fun. They share waffle fries and listen to music, while discussing the intricacies of Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself."

During their work, Anthony tells Caroline about a death at their school earlier in the day. A basketball player had suddenly dropped dead in the middle of the court, right in front of everyone. He discusses his anxiety about death, a subject Caroline is all too familiar with.

As Anthony records Caroline's part of the project, he is impressed with her heartfelt analysis of how the meanings of "I" and "You" in Walt Whitman's writings shift. The connection between Caroline and Anthony continues to grow, but everything changes when Caroline discovers the real reason Anthony is at her house.

# PLAYWRITE



**Lauren Gunderson** is the most produced living playwright in America, the winner of the Lanford Wilson Award and the Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award, a finalist for the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize and John Gassner Award for Playwriting, and a recipient of the Mellon Foundation's 3-Year Residency with Marin Theatre Company. She studied Southern Literature and Drama at Emory University, and Dramatic Writing at NYU's Tisch School where she was a Reynolds Fellow in Social Entrepreneurship. Her work has been commissioned, produced, and developed at companies across the US including South Coast Rep (Emilie, Silent Sky), The Kennedy Center (The Amazing Adventures of Dr. Wonderful and her Dog!), The O'Neill, The Denver Center, San Francisco Playhouse, Marin Theatre, Synchronicity, Olney Theatre, Berkeley Rep, Shotgun Players, TheatreWorks, Crowded Fire, and more. She co-authored Miss Bennet: Christmas at Pemberley with Margot Melcon. Her work is published at Playscripts, Inc. (I and You, Exit Pursued By A Bear, The Taming, and Toil and Trouble), Dramatists (Silent Sky, Bauer, Miss Bennet), and Samuel French (Emilie). Her picture book Dr Wonderful: Blast Off to the Moon was released from Two Lions / Amazon in May of 2017. [LaurenGunderson.com](http://LaurenGunderson.com) and [@LalaTellsAStory](https://www.instagram.com/LalaTellsAStory)

# DIRECTOR'S NOTE



"I and this mystery— here we stand." Anthony enters Caroline's world speaking these words, words that she is unprepared to hear, let alone understand. Their relationship begins in mystery. How do two strangers come together? How do they begin a conversation, and then come to hear, respect, and love one another despite their differences? How is such a thing possible? Those words that Anthony speaks are from Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*—his sprawling free verse poem that bursts with music, energy, and optimism, that calls upon the Civil War-ravaged American people to shout, sing, and embrace their oneness despite the brutality, division, and destruction they have suffered. He speaks with a voice that honors us all, the common people, and calls upon us to "keep encouraged." Anthony and Caroline are just kids—two high school students who have homework to do, basketball games to play, music and waffle fries to share, and parents to manage.

They also struggle under the weight of challenges that people so young should not have to bear. This is familiar territory to us, isn't it—the spectacle of young people ravaged by trauma, who find their unity and their voice and teach us that there is hope.

A wise friend taught me that a gift is not a gift until it is received, and that to receive is an act of courage and is itself a gift. Sometimes a gift may come to us when we are not aware of it. I believe that this play is a gift. Our playwright Lauren Gunderson has written that a play can be viewed as a benediction: "In the church I went to as a kid [...] I remember our pastor walking the same path up the center aisle at the close of every Sunday service. His arms reaching forward and out, his black robe becoming large in it's spread, his slow pace, his open eyes, and him saying: 'And now go into the world with open hearts and minds.' It was an encouragement to take what you felt and learned inside and go use it outside. I quickly switched my source of deepest connect from church to theatre as a young woman. But I still appreciate the theatricality of church, and the churchiness of theatre. At their best, they both gather people together, both tell important stories, both use the emotional lift of music and art, and both send us out into the world with more empathy, compassion, creativity and wonder. And they both contain benedictory power."

Whitman, too, wrote passionately of the benedictory power of art in his prologue to *Leaves of Grass*—words that are offered as a gift from Anthony to Caroline and to all of us: "This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem."

**-JoAnn Johnson**

# GET INTO THE WORLD

This collection of books, movies, and music are inspired by the world of *I and You*

## BOOKS

*The Fault in Our Stars* by John Green

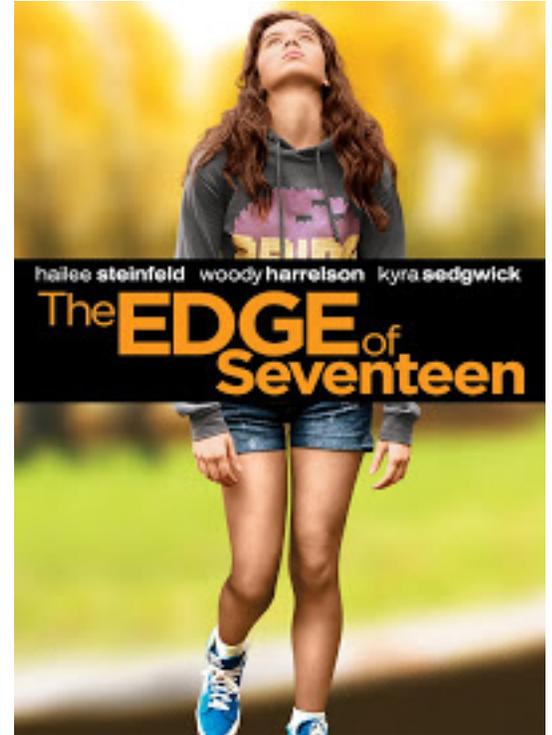
*Just Listen* by Sarah Dessen

*The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky

*Eleanor & Park* by Rainbow Rowell

*If I Stay* by Gayle Forman

*When We Collided* by Emery Lord



## MOVIES

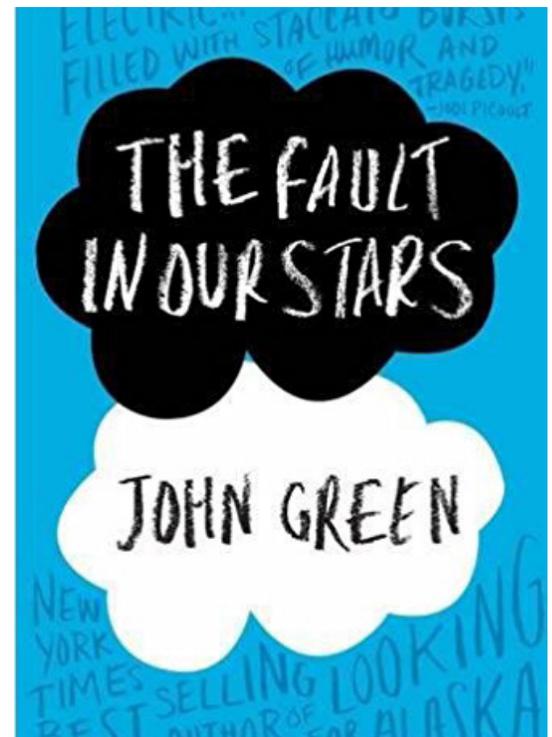
*10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)

*The Breakfast Club* (1985)

*The Edge of Seventeen* (2016)

## MUSIC

Jeff Buckley, Grace Vanderwaal, Cat Power, Death Cab for Cutie



# WALT WHITMAN



Walt Whitman was born in New York on May 31, 1819, only thirty years after George Washington was inaugurated as our first president. Whitman was part of the first generation of citizens born in the new United States of America, at a time when the country was fresh, idealistic, and energized by winning freedom in the Revolutionary War. One can imagine the heady exuberance of that time, when the newly minted country was bursting with confidence, gusto, and a fierce, if short-lived, sense of national unity. One of Whitman's early memories was being plucked out of a parade crowd when he was six years old and hoisted up on the shoulders of General Lafayette. Whitman later came to see this moment as a kind of anointment: the French hero of the American Revolution chose him, the child who would become the poet of this new democracy.

Whitman's formal education ended after only six years but he continued his education through libraries, museums, theatre, and diving into conversations with people from all over the city. When he was eleven, he began working in a printing shop, which led to his interest in journalism and newspapers. He was enthralled by the way ideas and events could be translated into words and quickly communicated to many people. At sixteen, he was an experienced

printer with a steady career ahead of him, when fire destroyed much of New York's printing and business centers, leaving Whitman and many others without work. In spite of his lack of formal education, he worked a few unhappy years as a teacher, before returning to journalism in the mid-1840s.

In his twenties he began writing fiction and poetry. Whereas other writers of the time almost always had extensive formal, classical education, Whitman's was derived entirely from his promiscuous curiosity and desire to know about history, geography, archeology, music – and the lives of the people he saw all over the city. Still, his early efforts at poetry exhibited a classical style, and tended toward didactic, stilted, and inert language. There is very little in his early work that hints at the poet he would become.

In the early 1850s, Whitman would burst forth with a distinctly American voice – one quite different from the European expression: free flowing rather than formal, vernacular rather than elite, untamed rather than hidebound. There is scant documentation of his transition from a dull, staid poet into the profoundly original, sensual, ecstatic writer of *Leaves of Grass*.

First published in 1855 (by Whitman, himself, who set the type, designed the cover, and oversaw every detail of publication), *Leaves of Grass* consisted of a preface and twelve untitled poems. His name was not included in the first edition, although his portrait – dressed in workman's clothes, shirt open, cocked hat, and a casual stance – was opposite the title page. Compared to the formal author portraits that usually graced published works, Whitman's choice was provocative. As no other contemporary writer had done, Whitman reveled in the physical body, delighted in the senses, and grappled with serious social issues of the day. He seemed to view the poet as the natural spokesperson for democracy, unbound by convention, reverberating the clamorous politics of the day, and embracing the multitudes that make up the union of America. His body is everyone's body, everyone's body is his, and to celebrate democracy is to celebrate all.

***I Celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as  
good belongs to you.***

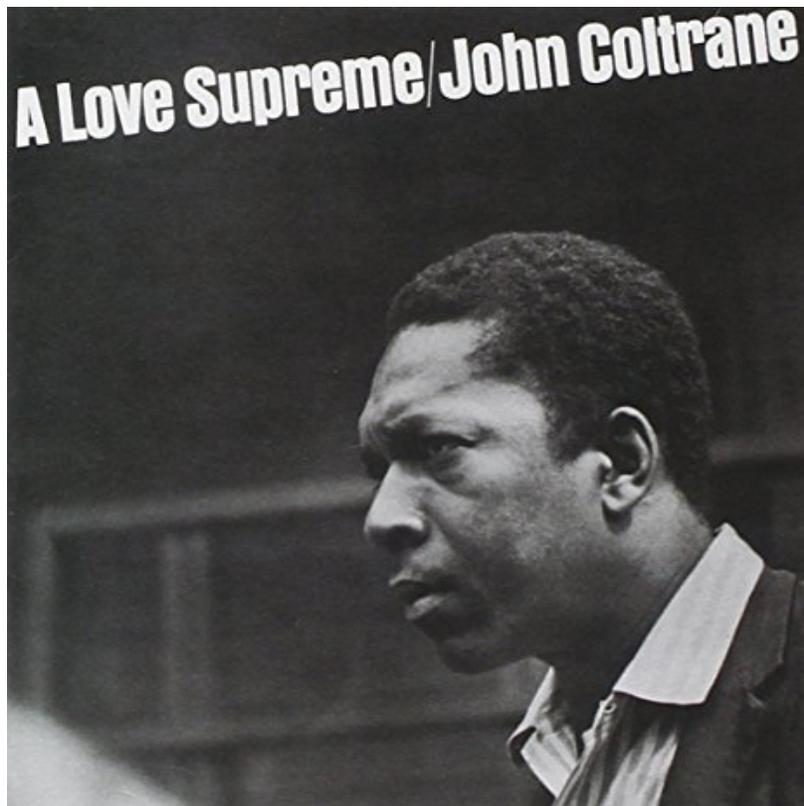
# JOHN COLTRANE



John William “Trane” Coltrane (September 23, 1926 – July 17, 1967) was an American jazz saxophonist and composer. Born in Hamlet, North Carolina, Coltrane grew up in a religious family. His affinity for meditative, gospel-like songs can be partially credited to his father preaching, and both of his grandfathers being community leaders and ministers. In December of 1938 his father and grandfather passed away in a short span of time, followed by his grandmother and aunt. At twelve, in a now financially and emotionally struggling family, Coltrane used music to help him through, starting with clarinet and alto saxophone. After some time in the U.S. Navy where he played with a quartet of other soldiers, he moved to Philadelphia in 1946 and immersed himself in the new wave of East Coast bebop musicians. Coltrane picked up the tenor saxophone and played in gigs around the city before he became more involved in recording music.

During the course of his career Coltrane helped to pioneer the use of modes, a harmonic framework in jazz and was at the front lines of free jazz. He led at least fifty recording sessions and appeared on many albums for other famous musicians of the time including trumpeter Miles Davis and pianist Thelonious Monk. As he navigated the music world Coltrane became

addicted to drugs and alcohol . After he was fired by Davis in 1957 he quit cold turkey after having a spiritual experience. In the line notes of *A Love Supreme*, Coltrane's best known work, he states that, "I experienced, by the grace of God, a spiritual awakening which was to lead me to a richer, fuller, more productive life. At that time, in gratitude, I humbly asked to be given the means and privilege to make others happy through music." A theme in Coltrane's music references God in a Universalist sense—not advocating one religion over another. His sobriety enhanced his already held conviction that his music was fundamentally spiritual. As his career continued his music took on an increasingly spiritual dimension. In San Francisco in 1971 the "Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church," was founded by Franco and Marina King after attending one of Coltrane's performances in which they felt a divine presence in his music. The position of importance that Coltrane holds is not just in the history of jazz, his performances and albums, but in the way that he used his art as the vessel to achieve a spiritual transcendence. Coltrane, like Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson, was a breaker of forms. He remade the traditional in order to craft completely new ways of embodying the human spirit and artistic expression. Coltrane studied Eastern religions as well as Christianity which led him to release more avant-garde devotional music. His search for spiritual freedom and to an extent, political freedom, was not just for himself but for all of black America. Coltrane used both an African American tradition stretching back to West African music and the American/Western tradition stretching back to the English Romantics to culminate in an Afro Modernist view. Coltrane's influence can still be felt today—through his explorations in jazz, the influence of his legacy in other types of music, his revolutions for African American identity.



# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What relationship do you see between Walt Whitman's writing and teenage intellectual energy? Can you describe that intellectual energy? How is it important? How has it moved the world forward (from Anne Frank to the Parkland survivors)? What, if anything, changes when we become adults?**
- 2. In what ways does Caroline's dependence on technology isolate her? In what ways does it make her more connected?**
- 3. Do you see any clues in the text or theatrical elements (i.e. sound effects) that foreshadow the ending of the play?**
- 4. What do you think Caroline's room tells us about Caroline? How does your living space reflect who you are?**
- 5. Whose perspective are we following? How would the story be different if we were looking at it from another perspective?**
- 6. What does Anthony want? Why is he there? Why does he take so long to tell the story about his basketball game?**
- 7. Do you know how a person who has donated an organ for an organ transplant?**