

# SOONER/LATER

A COMEDY ABOUT LIFE AND LOVE AND LOSS



By **ALLYSON CURRIN**  
Directed by **GREGG HENRY**

**STUDY GUIDE**  
SEASON FOUR



# Introduction

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“Theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it.”—Augusto Boal

The purpose and goal of Mosaic’s education department is simple. Our program aims to further and cultivate students’ knowledge and passion for theatre and theatre education. We strive for complete and exciting arts engagement for educators, artists, our community, and all learners in the classroom. Mosaic’s education program yearns to be a conduit for open discussion and connection to help students understand how theatre can make a profound impact in their lives, in society, and in their communities.

Mosaic Theater Company of DC is thrilled to have your interest and support!

**Catherine Chmura**

Arts Education Apprentice—Mosaic Theater Company of DC

Written by Catherine Chmura & Caleen Sinnette Jennings

# MOSAIC THEATER COMPANY of DC

PRESENTS

## SOONER/LATER

By Allyson Currin

Directed by Gregg Henry

Set Designer: **Deb Booth**

Lighting Designer: **Kyle Grant**

Costume Designer: **Danielle Preston**

Sound Designer: **Evan Cook**

Properties Designer: **Willow Watson**

Production Stage Manager : **Laurel VanLandingham**

& Light Board Op

Dramaturg: **Caleen Sinnette Jennings**

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# Curriculum Connections: DC Public School

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Taken from the DCPS Scope and Sequence Matrix for the 2018-2019 School Year

## **Grade 9 - Unit 2: Tension in Literature**

*In this unit, students will examine the ways in which mystery, tension, and surprise engage and intrigue readers, identify and describe ways authors 'hook and hold' readers through specific literary choices, and analyze the role of stories-within-the-story to create tension and advance the plot.*

## **Grade 10 - Unit 1: The Life I Choose**

*Students begin the year by thinking about stories that authors have found worth telling, both through memoirs and in poetry. They will also continue their engagement with the high school theme, I am a Leader, by considering the roles of resilience and decision-making in leadership. Specifically, through close reading and study, students will consider the ways in which authors create and structure various forms of narrative writing. Students will craft their own narrative poems that both utilize the genre's stylistic techniques and encompass the theme of "The Life I Choose." They will also engage with multiple informational texts that help build context about the anchor texts. They will read paired excerpts from the anchor texts, *The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore and *The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande, identifying text structure and stylistic elements used by the authors to create their own memoirs.*

## **Grade 12 - Unit 1: (Wo)man**

*Students investigate the topic of gender and identity by reading, discussing, and writing in response to various texts, including short stories, poems, novels, articles, and images.*

# Synopsis

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When teenage daughter Lexie helps her reluctant single mother Nora re-enter the dating scene, an unlikely suitor emerges in Griff – the guy at the coffee shop who inadvertently witnesses Nora’s string of unsuccessful dates. As choices collide with coincidences and longing mixes with reality, each character must face the complications that always arise in the search for intimacy and the closeness of family. This captivating performance with a metaphysical twist navigates the paths of romance, marriage and parenting while exploring the pains and pleasures of all three.

# About the Artists

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**Allyson Currin (Playwright)** Allyson is delighted to have *Sooner/Later* enjoying its DC premiere at Mosaic, following its world premiere at Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park last season. Other world premieres include *The Silver Belles* (Tony Award-winning Signature Theatre), *High School Alien* (Cincinnati Playhouse), *Unleashed!* (The John F. Kennedy Center), *The Carolina Layaway Grail* (The Welders), *Caesar and Dada* (WSC Avant Bard), *Hercules in Russia* (Doorway Arts Ensemble), *The Dancing Princesses* (Imagination Stage), *Treadwell: Bright and Dark* (American Century Theatre), *Benched* (Pinky Swear Productions), *Church of the Open Mind\** and *The Subject* (Charter Theatre), *Learning Curves* (Washington Shakespeare Company) and *Amstel in Tel Aviv\** and *Dancing With Ourselves* (Source Theatre Company). Currin is a Founding Member of The Welders, a DC-based playwrights' collective, which received the Helen Hayes Awards' John Aniello Award for Outstanding Emerging Theatre Company. She is also an actor with numerous film, television and stage appearances. She teaches theatre at The George Washington University. [www.allysoncurrin.com](http://www.allysoncurrin.com). @allysoncurrin (\*Nomination, Helen Hayes Awards Outstanding New Play)

**Gregg Henry (Director)** Gregg Henry Recent productions as a director include for Theater J: *The Christians* by Lucas Hnath and *Sons of the Prophet* by Stephen Karam, for The Welders: *happiness (and other reasons to die)* by Bob Bartlett, Theater Alliance and Hub Theatre: *Wonderful Life* by Helen Pafumi and Jason Lott, Hub Theatre: *Redder Blood* by Helen Pafumi, Theater Alliance: *You Are Here* by Daniel MacIvor, Round House Theatre: *A Sleeping Country* by Melanie Marnich, WSC Avant Bard: *Two-Headed* by Julie Jensen and *Scaramouche* by Barbara Field, Metro Stage: *Girl in the Goldfish Bowl* by Morris Panych. He is artistic director of the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival. He is artistic associate for New Works and Commissions for Kennedy Center Theatre for Young Audiences. He produces the annual MFA Playwrights' Workshop at the Kennedy Center in association with the National New Play Network. Upcoming: Sarah Ruhl's *The Clean House* for Bellingham TheatreWorks in Washington.

# Characters

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ERICA CHAMBLEE\* *as*

**Nora** A 40-something year old woman



TONY K. NAM\* *as*

**Griff** A 40-something year old man



CRISTINA M. IBARRA *as*

**Lexie** A teenage girl

*\*Denotes member of Actors Equity Association*

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A COMEDY ABOUT LIFE AND LOVE AND LOSS



THE ESSENTIALS PLAYLIST

SIDE A

01. Antidote  
Orion Sun

02. Tadow  
Masego, FKJ

03. Since I Seen't You  
Anthony Hamilton

04. Gonna Love Me  
Teyana Taylor

05. After the Storm (feat. Tyler, The Creator  
& Bootsy Collins)  
Muddy Waters

06. Make It Better (feat. Smokey Robinson)  
Kali Uchis, Tyler, The Creator, Bootsy  
Collins

07. Waitin  
Kelela

08. What You Don't Do - Tom Misch Remix  
Lianne La Havas, Tom Misch

09. Tears Dry On Their Own - Acoustic  
Dua Lipa, Gallant

10. Hadron Collider  
Blood Orange



# SOONER/LATER

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## THE ESSENTIALS PLAYLIST SIDE B

11. Every Kind of Way  
H.E.R.

12. Borderline (An Ode to Self-Care)  
Solange, Q-Tip

13. Hoyt And Schermerhorn  
Leikeli47

14. Pink + White  
Frank Ocean

15. Dang! (feat. Anderson .Paak)  
Mac Miller, Anderson .Paak

16. Them Changes  
Thundercat

17. Sassy  
Rapsody

18. Keep On  
Kehlani

19. Grown Up  
Danny Brown



# Interview With Allyson Currin

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## Author of *Sooner/Later*

By *Caleen Sinnette Jennings*

In the spirit of full disclosure, I have known Ally for twenty-five years. She and I are two of the co-founders of The Welders D.C. Playwright's Collective. I deeply admire Ally as a woman who manages to give 100% to everything she does. In addition to being a playwright, she's an actor, director, dramaturg, and teacher. She has been a highly engaged theatre advocate on the national level through her work with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival (KCACTF) and she is the D.C. representative for the Dramatist's Guild. She also happens to be the mother of twin daughters graduating from college this year. As a lover and teacher of theatre history, Ally has learned dramatic structure from reading and teaching the great plays in the canon. She is a painstakingly careful craftsperson and that's one of the reasons I was so pleased to serve as dramaturg on this Mosaic production of *Sooner/Later*. This play received a terrific reception at the Cincinnati Playhouse and I was curious to see what kinds of adjustments and revisions would or would not be necessary for the Mosaic production. Given the extraordinary volume and variety of work she does, I felt lucky indeed just to catch Ally for this interview.

**CALEEN:** What lit the fire for *Sooner/Later*?

**ALLY:** At a KCACTF festival a number of years ago, a student wrote a charming rom com (romantic comedy) with a strong female lead. I complained to a colleague, "I used to be able to write comedies. Now, I'm too jaded and cranky." My colleague said, "Why don't you write a jaded cranky rom com?"

**CALEEN:** When did you begin writing it?

**ALLY:** Probably around 2013. It started as a one-act called *The Sooner Child*. A savvy audience member said, "Lexie's so idealized. What would happen if we saw an actual teen?" A lightbulb went on.

**CALEEN:** What other ingredients went into the writing of it?

**ALLY:** A nightmare—in fact, it's my only recurring nightmare. I wake up and realize that my life never happened. I never got married and I never had children. I mashed this up with my curiosity about Probability Theory. It was liberating to develop this play from a one-act into a full length. It was fun to write a second act and flip something on its head.

**CALEEN:** What, if anything has changed in your life since the early days of writing this play?

**ALLY:** The Cincinnati production got me a New York agent, for starters. The play has had some wonderful powerhouse people working on its development. Director Wendy Goldberg, of the O'Neill Theatre Center, did a New York workshop of it in spring 2016. She gave me fantastic insights and articulated fundamentals I knew in my gut but it was nice to have them reinforced.

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## **DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY** *continued*

The play was in the Cincinnati Playhouse 2016-2017 season. I partnered with director Lisa Rothe formerly with the Lark. She's an actor/director and one of the most sensitive people I know. She had a profound understanding of the play in its odd, liminal space. She glided between the real and not real, but grounded that dance in practical choices. She also built a family on stage. We were like-minded about casting, design, everything. Blake Robison, the Cincinnati Artistic Director, trusted the team. There was a lot of "yes/and". Nobody was saying no.

**CALEEN:** How does it feel to bring a play back into development after a first production?

**ALLY:** I've never had the experience of having a production at one theatre then tailoring it for another. I had remind myself to not get defensive or possessive over my baby. I'm pretty good at being a collaborator. And that's where the dramaturg and director come in handy.

**CALEEN:** Speaking of directors, what does Director Gregg Henry bring to this production?

**ALLY:** He is the fiercest, most idealistic advocate for new work that I've ever come across. I've been dying to have him direct something of mine. My previous work with him was all administrative. Then I worked with him on The Welders' production of happiness (and other reasons to die). I loved what I heard about him from the actors. He's got profound technical skill and he just gets it.

**CALEEN:** What risks did you have to take, either expected or unexpected in writing this piece?

**ALLY:** The biggest challenge for me was how to adapt the play for a D.C. audience. I had to figure out what it looked and felt like to make it specific without compromising the emotional integrity of the story. The adjustments I made had to do with DC-centric detail and some structural elements. This casting is certainly very different from the Cincinnati production. But, interestingly, with this casting there was no shift at all in the core of the characters or the emotional heart of the story. There is something universal about their situation.

**CALEEN:** What's been your biggest discovery in developing this Mosaic production?

**ALLY:** During the week we workshopped the script, we talked about this specific cast and what, if anything, we needed to change in the script. By end of the week, the actors were saying not to change a word. I find it fascinating, that there is such a different visual take on this production, yet, independent of each other, this team is making some of the same kinds of choices that the Cincinnati team made. Gregg and the actors have come up with stage business that is not written in the script but is the same as stage business in the Cincinnati production. That says something about the consistency of the characters—that they demand things even on a sub-textual level. Mosaic's team is emotionally invested. The actors are bringing their A-game and the chemistry is wonderful to watch.

**CALEEN:** Did this play reveal more of you than other plays you've written?

**ALLY:** All my plays are pretty revealing of me. I'm a very personal writer. I write a lot of plays about trying to go home. This play is my experience but so is every other play I write.

**CALEEN:** How has this play helped you grow as an artist and craftswoman?

**ALLY:** I had a lot of fun with form and style—honoring conventions until you break them. That's an area where my more recent plays are beginning to live. I'm moving away from convention and this play is a logical extension of that personal trend. I had fun with the structure and despite seriousness of story, there's a lot of play in it.

**CALEEN:** Where are you now in terms of your own development and what you want to write about in the future?

**ALLY:** I have my antenna up. I always have plays I'm working on. There's not a whole lot of realism in my future although I'm writing "Return to Latin" and that is quite realistic. I tend to pendulum swing. If I've written something serious, I want to write a comedy. I've got plenty of projects but I don't know what the next catch-me-by-the-throat idea will be. I get a lot of good stuff from my dreams and from being a student of history.

**CALEEN:** What do you want the audience to go away thinking and feeling? What experience do you want them to have after seeing this play?

**ALLY:** I want to give the audience a meal -- the whole thing. I hope that they'll laugh, cry, and have a full range of emotions. This is a very specific story and I believe that when stories are specific, they get to be the most universal. The world of the play has very specific rules and I hope they resonate personally with people in Mosaic's audience.

**CALEEN:** How do you think that this play fits into Mosaic's mission and culture?

**ALLY:** Mosaic has walked its talk in terms of its dual mission. The plays in their season reflect a great combination of global responsibility and support for D.C. artists. Mosaic has demonstrated in all of its seasons that it has a genuine commitment to support D.C. playwrights. I'm grateful for that dedication. The idea of making Sooner/Later a D.C.-specific play puts the Mosaic stamp on it. Audiences will see a fresh spin on the story, now that it's written for my hometown.

## Discussion Themes

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**Family Dynamics**

**Stages of Grief and Laughter**

**Relationships and Dating As A Single Parent**

**Multi-Racial Families**

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# Activities After the Play

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## SCENE STUDY

In this scene we see the relationship between Nora, and her daughter Lexie, unfolding. Lexie has clearly taken on the role of the adult here and is helping her mom get ready for a big date but throughout this exchange a lot of their own fears and insecurities climb to the surface.

- NORA:** What do you think you're going to be when you grow up?
- LEXIE:** I've got to grow up first.
- NORA:** I never answered that question. I never knew what I wanted to be.
- LEXIE:** You've still got time.
- NORA:** One of these days I'm going to figure out what that is and then you better watch out!
- LEXIE:** Maybe you never wanted to limit yourself.
- NORA:** That's not it.
- LEXIE:** You saw too many possibilities in the world.
- NORA:** Nope.
- LEXIE:** You are great at living in the moment?
- NORA:** Certainty makes me jealous.
- LEXIE:** Certainty is for sissies..
- NORA:** Some people know, I mean they just KNOW, what they're supposed to be doing with their lives.
- LEXIE:** I know. I know exactly.
- NORA:** Don't rub it in. (Modeling an outfit) What do you think?
- LEXIE:** Two grays do not make a right.
- NORA:** I feel gray. I need gray. I want gray.
- LEXIE:** Sounds pretty much like certainty to me.
- NORA:** Do I have to go on this date?
- LEXIE:** I'm making you. His name is Duncan..
- NORA:** Ugh.
- LEXIE:** Try it with the other earrings.
- NORA:** I could be one of those women, you know. One of those women who just spend their lives alone.

**LEXIE:** Nooo...

**NORA:** I don't think I would mind it, not if I didn't know any different. I could get a dog.

**LEXIE:** I'm probably allergic.

**NORA:** Do some cool travel. Hang out with fabulous girlfriends. Buy better shoes.

**LEXIE:** Don't...

**NORA:** What? As long as I could find a decent booty call I'd be fine.

**LEXIE:** That's not you.

**NORA:** I wish it was though.

**LEXIE:** (meaning it) I want someone, Mom.

**NORA:** (understanding it) Fine. (Beat) How do I look?

**LEXIE:** Like a catch.

**NORA:** I'm only doing this for you.

(As Nora grabs her purse and exits...)

**LEXIE:** (yelling after her) Serious prospects only! NO BOOTY CALLS!

### Questions:

1. Describe the relationship between Nora and Lexie. How did you and your scene partner express that relationship through vocal tone, body language, etc.?
2. What does Nora want in this scene and what are they feeling?
3. What does Lexie want in this scene and what are they feeling?
4. What is the flow of the scene? Where does the scene pick up and slow down? Why?
5. Discuss the difference of the length of the lines for each character. Why do you think one character speaks more than the other?
6. What can you and your scene partner change or add to make the scene more believable and dynamic?

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## MONOLOGUE STUDY

In this monologue we see Lexie, Nora's daughter, describing how she, a teenage girl, views women's roles at different stages of life.

### LEXIE

Is it him? Is he the one?

Hm.

I think it must be very hard to be a woman. I mean, think about it.

I look at my mom and I think about what it's like to be a woman in the world...

All the world's like a big movie, right, and women get stuck in these parts they have to play. I've made a study of this.

First you're the "princess" – Daddy's little girl in dresses and tights. Everyone thinks you hung the moon and little old ladies stop your mom in the mall to say how pretty you are. That builds expectations, right – that you're always going to stop traffic.

That's why the next part sucks – because you turn into a teenager with zits and hormones, feeling like everyone is STILL talking about you - behind your back.

Then to add insult to injury they slap braces on your teeth, throw you in the lion's den with a bunch of other maladjusted teens, and tell you all about self-esteem.

The career woman is next – probably a pretty cool phase to be in. People listen to you in the office, martinis after at the bar. Good shoes, single friends.

Great place to be – until all your friends pair up and settle into townhouses and cul-de-sacs.

The mom is next – if you choose it, it's supposed to be an awesome role, like the role of a lifetime! It's when you stop thinking about yourself, I would imagine, for the longest stretches of time. You have to. That little guy in the bundle didn't come with instructions like your flat screen did.

And it's your job not to kill him!

Then when he's all grown up and moving on, that's right when you get the sucker punch – I did some research on it, and it sounds like menopause stuff sucks ass. Like, it sounds AWFUL. It's like being a teenager again – about to crawl out of your own skin with...whatever...and you can't control it. But you're, like, 55, so you're supposed to know better. Ugh.

I'd imagine things get better when you're officially over it, and officially old. You get to say a lot of I-Told-You-So's to your kids who are trying not to kill their own little adorables in the bundles of blankets.

You get to spoil the grandkids rotten, be totally adored, and then leave the whole situation to go off on a tour of the Peloponese with a busload of fellow geriatrics.

Just to stay relevant.

Must be scary. To know that you've had this whole life and it's got...a limit.

I wouldn't know.

And then you're old. Really old. Scary old.

And you maybe can't hear so well, or see so well, or walk so well.

And somebody shuts you into a room that a lot of other really old people have lived in before, and you don't know what happened to them, they're all gone, but you know they were there.

And you watch tv and you do your crossword puzzles and your needlework and they make you play humiliating games like Bingo that you actually start to enjoy...

(Silence)

So that's my take on what a woman's life is like, kind of.

In seven ages!

Like Shakespeare might have written if he was a teenage girl like me.

Waiting.

Now.

I don't mean for it to sound as depressing as I just made it sound.

In my situation...well. It all sounds perfectly lovely to me.

## CREATIVE WRITING

*Allyson Currin conducted a playwriting workshop as a part of Mosaic's Mosaic On The Move DC Public Libraries program. In the workshop Ms. Currin discussed ideas, process, and how to create dialogue. Her advice in getting started? Just get writing! Getting something unedited and raw down on the page so you have material to pull from. Here, we detail Ms. Currin's workshop method for creating dialogue between two characters by using personal memory as your foundation.*

**Step 1:** Using one of the prompts below, write continuously for 10 minutes. Set a timer and don't stop until it goes off.

**PROMPT 1:** Write about your favorite childhood toy

**PROMPT 2:** Write about your favorite dessert.

**Step 2:** When the 10 minutes is up, read what you wrote down. Soak in your own story. What message are you trying to convey? How does your story make you feel? What emotions does your story bring up?

**Step 3:** Taking your story based on one of the prompts, add a sub-prompt.

CHILDHOOD TOY PROMPT: Give it away to someone.

FAVORITE DESSERT PROMPT: Make it with someone who doesn't know how to cook.

**Step 4:** Using the sub-prompt for each of the initial prompts, create a dialogue between two people. Continuously write dialogue for 10 minutes. Set a timer and don't stop until the timer is up. Don't worry about actions or stage directions. Be sure to write your dialogue in the below format -

CHARACTER NAME: Line

**Step 5:** YOU DID IT! You've written down a rough outline for the start of a scene!

Yes, it is that easy. Now go forth and create!

## SOONER/LATER

## IN DISCUSSION

Sooner/Later is a comedy. However, this doesn't mean that it doesn't have its gut punch of sadness. At the end of play, Nora and Lexie are dealing and coping with a significant personal loss. Grief and loss are extremely difficult things to go through and process no matter if you're middle-aged, like Nora or a teen, like Lexie.

Discuss with your class the stages of grief (Denial, Anger, Depression, Bargaining, Acceptance) and how they can safely process and work through their losses. Also, discuss how grieving is different for everyone and how to establish a support network of friends and family.

## ARTS EDUCATION/ESSAY EXPLORATION

### The Evolution of the American Family

by Catherine Chmura

In Sooner/Later we are presented with Nora, Griff, and Lexie, an American family who deals with things that every normal American family goes through. Teenage child rebellion, loss, love, laughter, and a parent just trying to make it all happen. What's different and makes them more relevant than ever to today's American family is that they are a blended family. Their family is what we know and see every day in our personal lives and in popular culture.



From SOONER/LATER.  
Tony K. Nam and Erica Chamblee.



Leave It To Beaver  
CBS

However, depending on what generation you come from, the American family differs vastly. The classic nuclear family that has been imprinted on the country's imagination had been primarily provided by classic TV shows. Shows like *Leave It To Beaver* and *The Wonder Years* have been at the forefront of our minds when imagining the all-American family. Here we are, more than half a century later and only 16% of households resemble those classic TV families. What's changed?

Higher numbers of blended families and families that are differently constructed.

According to the Pew Research Center here in Washington, DC, five major factors contributing to the change in shape of the American modern family are -



*The cast of Modern Family*  
ABC

1. Americans are putting off major milestones, like marriage, until later in life to focus on their careers.
2. American women, on average, are having less children or are having no children at all.
3. There is more diversity in same-sex coupling to include lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. They are also having children by means of adoption or surrogacy.
4. Families today are much more blended to include single parents, step-parents/siblings, and adopted parents and family members.
5. Intermarriages among people of different races, heritages, religions, etc. are on the rise.

There definitely is not one way to have a family. In the “golden age” of TV, we saw white families with children galore where the father worked and the mother was a stay at home mom. Now we have families on TV like Modern Family, This Is Us, and The Fosters.

We all come from diverse backgrounds and it's important to showcase those diverse family ties in popular culture and of course, on theatrical stages.

CREDIT: (<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/04/30/5-facts-about-the-modern-american-family/>)





**The Mosaic Theater Company of DC**

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