

Study Guide

FAMILY

A new play by Eric Samuelsen

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From the Prophets

The Prophet Joseph Smith declared—and he never taught more comforting doctrine—that the eternal sealings of faithful parents and the divine promises made to them for valiant service in the Cause of Truth, would save not only themselves, but likewise their posterity. Though some of the sheep may wander, the eye of the Shepherd is upon them, and sooner or later they will feel the tentacles of Diving Providence reaching out after them and drawing them back into the fold. Either in this life or the life to come, they will return. They will have to pay their debt to justice; they will suffer for their sins; and they may tread a thorny path; but if it leads them at last, like the penitent Prodigal, to a loving and forgiving father’s heart and home, the painful experience will not have been in vain. Pray for your careless and disobedient children; hold on to them with your faith. Hope on, trust on, till you see the salvation of God.

—Elder Orson F. Whitney
Conference Report, Apr. 1929, 110.

From the beginning, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has emphasized family life. We have always understood that the foundations of the family, as an eternal unit, were laid even before this earth was created! Society without basic family life is without foundation and will disintegrate into nothingness.

—Spencer W. Kimball,
“Families Can Be Eternal,”
Ensign, Nov. 1980, 4.

Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. . . .

We warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

—“The Family: A Proclamation to the World,” *Ensign, Nov. 1995, 102.*



Understanding the Hulls



Though the members of the Hull family may appear familiar on the surface, they sometimes use a lingo all their own. Take a peek at the following explanations to learn more about them and the world in which they live.

People

Cyrus the Great: King of Persia (6th century BC) who gained independence from the Median empire and favored the Jews.

Derrida: founding philosopher of Deconstruction.

Eugene England: one of the greatest thinkers, ethicists, and essayists in the history of Mormon culture.

Foucault: founding philosopher of Post-Structuralism.

Hammurabi: King of Babylonia (1792–1750 BC) who created one of the greatest legal codes of ancient times. He was possibly the king who started the city tower that became known as the Tower of Babel.

Louis L'Amour: popular Western novelist.

Anita Stansfield: popular Mormon romance novelist.



Zoroaster: Persian religious leader and founding prophet of Zoroastrianism (7th century BC), a peaceful, contemplative religion that emphasizes personal purity and kindness to all living creatures.

Video Games

RPG (Role Playing Game): consists of a character on a quest, looking for something specific, in an exotic landscape. Player watches from an omniscient perspective (e.g., “Final Fantasy” or “Quest”).

FPS (First Person Shooter): game of fight-and-kill against other characters. The player is the shooter (e.g., “Doom” or “Quake”).

deathmatch: fighting online with other gamers around the world.

MMORPG (Media Multi On-line Role Playing Games): the next best thing to a deathmatch.

Hockey

hat trick: when a single player scores three goals.

the crease: the area right in front of the goal where you are most likely to get whacked by the defensemen. It’s hard to find a good crease player.

the line: a group of three players (center, left wing, right wing)

who play together and come onto the ice together as substitutes.

Games

Euchre: an old railroaders’ card game in which four people play in two partnerships, using half the deck.

The Farming Game: a board game in which each player is a farmer, has a small plot of land, and makes decisions about purchasing property and machinery, harvesting, etc.

Other

Brown University: located in Providence, RI. Brown offers an MA in history of mathematics, a subset within the larger discipline of history of science. The current enrollment in that program is four.

The Vagina Monologues: a one-woman Broadway show in which Eve Ensler explores the knowledge gained from over 200 interviews with women about their experiences and feelings on intimacy. It is often celebrated as the “Bible for a new generation of women.”

Shelter

Not a word was spoke between us,
there was little risk involved;
Everything up to that point had
been left unresolved.
Try imagining a place where it’s
always safe and warm.
“Come in,” she said, “I’ll give you
shelter from the storm.”

—Bob Dylan, “Shelter from the Storm”

The LDS Art Debate



Since the Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ in 1830, its leaders have encouraged the artistic talents of members of the church. Music, dance, art, theatre, and architecture have been seen as ways for the saints to worship God and serve their fellow men. Even as they faced the hardships of persecution, created new societies, and developed their new found faith, the saints dedicated time to the arts, which that they considered a vital part of Zion.

Study Guide Questions:

Do you feel that this play was directed to a narrow audience?

Is *Family* a story about a Mormon family or about a family of people that happen to be Mormon?

Throughout the years, members have found multile means to answer the call of the prophets to use their talents. Many have taken to heart the challenge issued by

President Spencer W. Kimball, when, in his plea to the artists of the church, he proclaimed: “In our world, there have risen brilliant stars in drama, music, literature, sculpture, painting, science, and all the fields of excellence. For long years I have had a vision of members of the Church greatly increasing their already strong positions of excellence till the eyes of all the world will be upon us.”¹ Saints have continued to produce different types of art, experimenting with different

form, genre, and styles.

However, in recent years, the answers to this challenge have sparked debate regarding the “Mormon Movement” in the arts. Most of the recent discussion has stemmed from portrayals of members of the church or “Mormon culture” in films, television, and theatre. These forms of art, reaching an increasingly worldwide audience, have raised concerns.

For many, the recent trend has been a welcome break from mainstream Hollywood to see clean, fun entertainment that not only shows a culture that we are familiar with but allows us to laugh at the quirks that exist within it. Most applaud the attempt to create LDS art with LDS standards.

Others, however, grimace over quality issues that arise due to low budgets or scripts that strive to set records for Mormon-jokes-per-second. And they wonder what effect this latest movement will have—the stereotypes presented as reality, and the public portrayal of subjects many consider sacred.

Whatever reactions the recent works have inspired, both sides hope to see improvement in the quality of the works performed. As M. Russell Ballard said, “with so many choices for viewers and listeners, the artistic works of the Latter-day Saints not only need to be uplifting, they must be excellent, to set them apart from the worldly

and the mediocre.”² As Mormon artists increase standards of their work, the hope materializes of being able to broaden the current narrow audience appeal with stories that engage all races, cultures, and religions.

Ballard continues, “We call upon all members, those in the arts and those seeking to appreciate the message of good art, to expand their vision of what can be done.” Editor of the Mormon Art Symposium Herman du Toit finds this a worthwhile goal. He suggests that “from a gospel perspective, it may be more useful to see to what extent the inspired products of artistic expression contribute to edification—both for the artist and the viewer—by opening up new venues of knowledge and wonder and by instilling the attitudes and qualities of character that are consistent with our individual struggles for perfection. Hopefully such an art of true affirmation would lead people to more reverential and meaningful relationships with each other, their environment, and the objects of our faith.”³

As with all movements, growing pains and learning lessons occur. However, LDS artists have the great opportunity to inspire and open new doors of learning, and even faith. As the exploration continues amidst the challenges before us, the answers and breakthroughs that follow will allow us to move forward and reach the “strong positions of excellence” that await us. ■

1. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Gospel Vision of the Arts,” *Ensign*, July 1977, 3.
2. M. Russell Ballard, “Filling the World with Goodness and Truth,” *Ensign*, July 1996, 10–14.
3. Herman du Toit “Toward a Mormon Art,” *Art, Belief, Meaning: The Arts and the Restored Gospel*, (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 2003.

The LDS Art Debate

To those who have artistic talent, a challenge has been issued:

“You who have such talents might well ask,



‘Whence comes this gift?’ And gift it is. You may have cultivated it and developed it, but it was given to you. Most of us do not have it. You were not more deserving than we, but you are a good deal more responsible. . . .

“Go to, then, you who are gifted; cultivate your gift. Develop it in any of the arts and in every worthy example of them. If you have the ability and the desire, seek a career or employ your talent as an avocation or cultivate it as a hobby. But in all ways bless others with it. Set a standard of excellence. Employ it in the secular sense to every worthy advantage, but never use it profanely. Never express your gift unworthily. Increase our spiritual heritage in music, in art, in literature, in dance, in drama.”

—Boyd K. Packer,
“The Arts and the Spirit of the Lord,”
Ensign, Aug. 1976, 60.

New Plays and Playwrights

The BYU Department of Theatre and Media Arts is committed to helping new plays and playwrights to take scripts from page to fully staged productions. Classes in playwriting help new writers hone their craft, while workshop classes (such as the Writers' / Directors' / Actors' Workshop) help develop those scripts further. Each year, BYU dedicates a slot in the season to a new work, allowing new writers a chance to further the process of collaboration and revision, work closely with directors, actors, and designers, and bring their script to life.

Eric Roy Samuelsen, PLAYWRIGHT

- 1956** April 10: Born, Provo, UT
- 1961** Moved to Indiana
- 1980** December 27: married Annette Elizabeth Mason
- 1982** BA in Playwriting from BYU; son Kai born
- 1986** Daughter Rebekah born
- 1989** Son Tucker born
- 1991** PhD in Theatre History and Dramatic Literature from Indiana University
- 1992** Hired at BYU as professor in theatre history, theory, and criticism
- 1993** Daughter Lexie born
- 2000** After third win, declared no longer eligible for the Association for Mormon Letters Best Play award
- 2001** Switched to teaching playwriting at BYU

Eric Samuelsen's selected playwriting credits:

Accommodations (1993, winner AML Best Play), *Gadianton* (1994, winner AML Best Play), *The Seating of Senator Smoot* (1996), *Without Romance* (1997), *Three Women* (1998), *A Love Affair with Electrons* (1999), *The Way We're Wired* (2000, winner AML Best Play), *Peculiarities* (2001), *Family* (2003), *The Butcher, the Beggar and the Bedtime Buddy* (2004).

Samuelsen on *Family*:

"I call it a comedy, but it sort of isn't. I didn't want to write a comedy, really, or a tragedy, or a play with a protagonist. I just wanted to show a family dealing with some stuff.

"We are afraid to reinvent ourselves as Mormons, and it holds us back. We need to, we need to constantly be reborn. I think that's what repentance is. I think this play is about people who have decided who they are; they've settled. They're done thinking about themselves; they're happy enough as they are. But it's not good enough. So they become unsettled, and it's good for them. We can't ever settle. Life won't let us."

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