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## THE PLAY

Alexandra sits at the center of her Brooklyn home, cornered and ready to attack. Once a fearless world traveler and artist, she is now 79 years old and growing more forgetful and frail. Her children don't trust her to live on her own. They are prepared to take drastic measures to get her to move out of her home. However, even the threat of the police is not enough to move Alexandra.

Enter Chris, the wayward third child, on a mission to infiltrate the apartment and talk some sense into his mother. Now in his late 40s, Chris has been wandering the country for years. He did not even come home for his own father's funeral. Now he's climbing back into the living room of his childhood home. Alexandra is unwilling to compromise with his siblings, but Chris is ready to fight for common ground.

Life, freedom, dignity and family are at stake...and the clock is ticking. The police arrive in one hour. ●

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# THE VELOCITY OF AUTUMN

Now playing in the Kreeger Theater  
September 6- October 20, 2013  
Written by Eric Coble  
Directed by Molly Smith

*"I'm a cornered animal,  
Christopher. I'll do  
whatever it takes."*

—Alexandra



## MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT:



Eric Coble

Although Eric Coble was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, he grew up on Navajo and Ute reservations in the southwestern United States until he was 15. He took to acting in high school, and continued to study theater at Fort Lewis College and Ohio University, where he received his master's degree in acting. All the while, he wrote plays.

Among his plays that have been produced around the world (including at the nearby Kennedy Center), Coble receives much attention for his *Alexandra Trilogy* (see article). Coble's other notable works include a stage adaptation of *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *Side Effects May Include*, with former *Seinfeld* writer Marc Jaffe. His awards include a regional Emmy nomination for *Ask Gilby*.

Coble is currently a staff writer for the nationwide radio program *Footlight Parade*, an occasional contributor to NPR, and an actor and teacher at Great Lakes Theater Festival. He lives with his family in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, where he is a member of the Board of Education. ●

### SEE IT HERE FIRST!

*The Velocity of Autumn* heads to Broadway later this year after being at Arena Stage.

# THE ALEXANDRA TRILOGY



**T**he *Velocity of Autumn* is the last part of a **trilogy** of plays. *The Alexandra Plays* chronicle the life of an artist named Alexandra. Playwright Coble says, "I was intrigued with the notion of how we define personal freedom, art, commitment, and self-identity and how those definitions change as we age. *The Alexandra Plays* is my trilogy to wrestle with all this."

## THE FIRST & SECOND PLAYS

***A Girl's Guide to Coffee***  
"looks at the themes from the perspective of Alex, a woman in her early 20's, free and smart and sexy and utterly confident."

**Graphic Depictions**, the middle play, "explores [these themes] from Alex's point of view, in her mid-40s, with a family and steady job and many, many roots holding her down."

**a! ACTIVITY** Imagine a trilogy about your life. Write a

synopsis for each of the three plays. The first should be an important story from your life right now. The second play describes a moment from your 40s, and the third synopsis is a story about you in your 70s. ●



## PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN

Brooklyn is one of five boroughs in New York City. Alexandra's home of Park Slope (named for its spot on the western slope of the enormous Prospect Park) is one of many neighborhoods in Brooklyn. Park Slope is one of New York's most desirable neighborhoods. It is frequently recognized for its historic architecture, vibrant arts and night life, involved community, quality schools and locally owned businesses.

## THE BROOKLYN BROWNSTONE

Brownstones are row houses: one of a group of houses that line the same block and share side walls. Brownstones are made of brick, but have façades (fronts) made of brown sandstone.

**The First Brownstones:** Brooklyn brownstones were first built in the early 1800s in response to a growing middle class, many of whom were laborers and immigrants. Brownstone, a sedimentary rock native to New Jersey and Connecticut, replaced brick and wood as the primary construction material for the façades of these new houses because it could be cheaply shipped.



## Brownstone Brooklyn:

After WWII, many families left the city to live in growing suburbs. Some brownstone homes and offices were abandoned, neglected, and eventually torn down to make room for more modern homes. In the 1960s and 70s, a community of families began protesting the demolition by buying them up, renovating them and advocating for laws to protect them. (Alexandra's family most likely bought their home at this time.) These activists became known as "brownstoners." They saw the restoration of brownstone houses as key to the preservation of history in the neighborhood.

**Rising Costs:** Brownstones are no longer being built in Brooklyn. Thus, the demand and price for these historic homes has risen dramatically. According to a 2012 *NY Times* article (see resources), the average cost of a brownstone in Park Slope had risen to nearly \$1.45 million. In nearby Carroll Gardens, brownstones bought in 1974 for \$50,000 have sold for \$1.6 million in 2012. ●



# NEW YORK MUSEUM ADVENTURES

Alexandra *"I took you out too, you know...I was the museum mom!"*

New York City boasts nearly 100 museums, many of which Chris and Alexandra visited together when Chris was a child. Alexandra remembers these trips as a time where she felt the most connected to her son. She says, "That's how you should remember me – a young woman running past exhibits with her little boy, laughing."

## The Guggenheim:

Art: Non-objective art, abstract art, modern art and sculpture

**FACT:** Designed by architect Frank Lloyd Wright, the spiral building took 16 years (1943-1959) to complete.



## The Guggenheim's Unique Shape

Visitors view the art by walking up a ramp that spirals to the top of the building. At the play, listen for Alexandra's description of their memorable visit.

## The Met (Metropolitan Museum of Art):

Art: Art, sculpture and cultural treasures from around the world.

**FACT:** The museum has over 2 million objects, tens of thousands of which are on view at any given time. It has the largest exhibition of Egyptian art outside of Cairo, including 13 mummies.



## The Cloisters:

Art: Medieval art and architecture

**FACT:** Using the medieval tapestries and artwork as a guide, the Cloisters planted many of its gardens with plants indicative of medieval times.



## Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM):

Art: Multi-arts center for film, theater, music, dance and visual art

**FACT:** First lady Mary Todd Lincoln attended BAM's first opera in 1861.



## Whitney:

Art: Modern American art

**FACT:** It was the first museum to create branches in other parts of the city to tour its exhibits.



**ACTIVITY** What are the places where you share

special memories with a family member? Write a journal entry describing your memories of that place. Then, find a way to illustrate your writing with drawing, collage, photography, etc. ●

# MUSEUM MATCHES

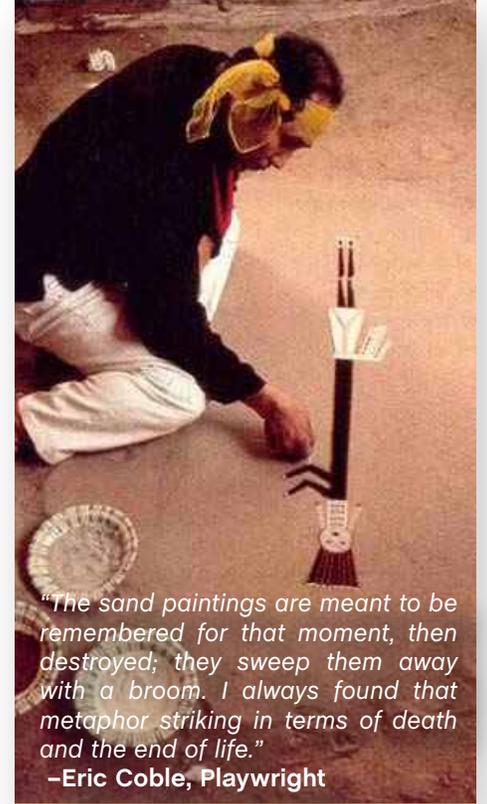
## If you like...in DC

National Gallery of Art  
Hirshhorn Museum  
Phillips Collection  
Kennedy Center

## You might like...in NYC

Metropolitan Museum of Art  
Guggenheim Museum  
Whitney Museum  
Brooklyn Academy of Music

# SANDPAINTING IN THE SOUTHWEST



*"The sand paintings are meant to be remembered for that moment, then destroyed; they sweep them away with a broom. I always found that metaphor striking in terms of death and the end of life."*

–Eric Coble, Playwright

The Navajo people of the American Southwest pour colored sands in intricate patterns to create paintings of tribal myths. Sandpaintings are created to cure sickness and promote well-being. Known in the Navajo language as "places where the gods come and go", these dry paintings are believed to attract the gods to Earth during 1 to 9-day ceremonies. The use of the sands and other painting materials are believed to be harmful in a non-ceremonial setting, so the artists destroy all evidence of their work at the end of the ceremony. Navajos are forbidden to create permanent sandpaintings, although many artists get around these rules by creating partial paintings.



**ACTIVITY** Chris and Alexandra discuss the Navajo sandpainting

ceremonies as a metaphor for memories. Think of an important memory from your life. Using scraps of colored paper, paper clips, or any other items, create an image that represents your memory. Share your images, and then sweep them away. ●



# LIVING WITH DEMENTIA

**A**lexandra is not just aging, she is showing signs of dementia. Dementia is not a disease. Rather, it is a set of symptoms affecting memory, language, personality, problem solving and judgment. Dementia can be the result of a disease, like Alzheimer's, or a brain injury, like a stroke.

As it progresses dementia impairs one's ability to do daily tasks, maintain a social life and continue lifelong hobbies. Symptoms can come and go, creating "good days" and "bad days."

Those with dementia and their families face difficult questions. How long can you be safely independent? What happens if you can't live at home? If you are different from how you've always known yourself, who are you? Who are you if you can't remember?

## DEMENTIA VS. AGING

Not everyone who ages gets dementia. Here are some distinctions between aging and dementia:

### TYPICAL AGE-RELATED CHANGES

- Making a bad decision once in a while
- Forgetting what day it is and remembering later
- Sometimes forgetting which word to use

### SIGNS OF DEMENTIA

- Poor judgment and decision making
- Losing track of the date or season
- Difficulty having a conversation

*From the Alzheimer's Association's "Know the 10 Signs."*

## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

*"This story is one being played out in living rooms all over America as the elderly grapple with the loss of who they are – the 'gracelessness of old age.' It's also a play about truth and reconciliation as these two tell each other the truth about who they actually are, not just who they've been told they are."*

**–Molly Smith, director**

## THREE BIG QUESTIONS

- 1) What is it like to age?
- 2) How much control do we have over our life and death?
- 3) To what degree do our parents influence who we are and shape who we will become?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### ON THE WEB

- The Alzheimer's Association: [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- The Playwright's Website: [www.ericcoble.com](http://www.ericcoble.com)
- Interview with Playwright: <http://tinyurl.com/cobleinterview>
- Navajo Sandpainting: [navajopeople.org/navajo-sand-painting.htm](http://navajopeople.org/navajo-sand-painting.htm)
- NY Times: "Brooklyn's Gold Rush." <http://tinyurl.com/brooklyngoldrush>
- Brownstones & Gentrification: <http://tinyurl.com/osmaninterview>

### PLAYS

- A Girl's Guide to Coffee* by Eric Coble
- Graphic Depictions* by Eric Coble
- Proof* by David Auburn

### FILM

- My Brooklyn*: [mybrooklynmovie.com](http://mybrooklynmovie.com), 2012
- A Beautiful Mind*: Universal Studios, 2006.

### MUSEUMS

- National Gallery of Art
- Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden

## Helpful Hints for Theater Audiences

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience. To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive at least 30 minutes early.
  - Visit the restroom before the show starts.
  - Before the show begins, turn off your cell phone, watch alarms, pagers and other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, shut it off immediately.
  - Save food and drinks for the lobby. There is no eating or drinking inside the theater.
  - Walk to and from your seat - no running in the theater!
  - Do not talk, whisper, sing or hum.
  - Do not use cell phones for calls, text messages, pictures or games.
  - Keep your feet on the floor, not on the seat in front of you.
  - Avoid getting up during a show because it distracts your neighbors and the performers. If you must leave, wait for a scene change, then exit quietly and quickly.
  - Performers appreciate enthusiastic applause rather than whistling or shouting.
  - Cameras and videotape are prohibited because they are distracting to the performers.
- Enjoy the show!**



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