

Sarah Silverman's THE BEDWETTER

A New Musical

LEARNING GUIDE



ON THE KREEGER THEATER STAGE
FEBRUARY 4 – MARCH 16, 2025



THE PLAY

It's the 1980s in New Hampshire, and 10-year-old Sarah Silverman is dealing with the chaos of being the new kid in a small town. She's also navigating her parents' difficult divorce, her mom's battle with depression, and a secret: she still wets the bed.



Sarah's quick wit at school earns her both friends and trouble as she tries to come to terms with feelings of shame and the pressure to fit in, including her decision to take a daring leap and participate in the school talent show. Through humor, her strength, and a little mischief, Sarah begins to find her voice, celebrate her unique qualities, and learn that even life's most upsetting moments can be a part of what makes you who you are.



About Sarah Silverman

Sarah Silverman is a comedian, actress, and writer known for her fearless approach to tackling taboo topics with humor and insight. Her career took off with her stand-up performances and led to her Emmy-nominated work on *The Sarah Silverman Program*. She has become one of the most recognizable voices in modern comedy.

In 2010, she published her bestselling memoir, *The Bedwetter: Stories of Courage, Redemption, and Pee*. The memoir earned critical acclaim for its raw honesty and humor, setting the stage for its off-Broadway debut. The adaptation of *The Bedwetter* into a musical opened at Atlantic Theater Company in New York City in spring of 2022. The show brings her unique comedic voice and emotional depth to life on stage, solidifying her place as a versatile and influential artist.



How the Creative Team Adapted *The Bedwetter* from Memoir to Stage

Adapting *The Bedwetter* into a musical required reimagining Sarah Silverman's witty and irreverent memoir with a delicate balance of humor, emotion, and authenticity, transforming key moments from her childhood into poignant, comedic musical numbers that explore themes of family, self-discovery, and resilience. Sarah Silverman shared her voice and personal experiences in the book, while Joshua Harmon, a Tony-nominated playwright known for *Bad Jews*, crafted the script, capturing the hilarity and heart of Silverman's memoir. Adam Schlesinger, the late Grammy- and Emmy-winning and Oscar-nominated composer and lyricist, injected the show with original songs that combined upbeat, comedic moments with touching ballads, underscoring the characters' emotional journey. The collaboration was deeply hands-on, with the team working closely together through workshops and rewrites over several years to ensure the musical retained the authenticity, humor, and vulnerability of Silverman's original story.



Actors Aria Kane (Sarah), Shoshana Bean (Beth Ann), and Liz Larsen (Nana) in rehearsal.

The Role of Humor in Healing

Humor has long been recognized as a powerful coping mechanism; a way for individuals to process trauma, hardship, and other difficult experiences. In writing *The Bedwetter*, Sarah Silverman uses comedy to navigate the experiences of her childhood, turning painful moments into sources of laughter, creating distance from difficult memories, while still acknowledging their impact. Studies have shown that laughter can reduce stress, improve mood, and help reframe traumatic events into something more manageable.

If you or someone you know is struggling with their mental health, help is available. Speak to someone today. Call 988, the national crisis and suicide hotline.



Shoshana Bean (Beth Ann), Avery Harris (Laura), Aria Kane (Sarah), Liz Larsen (Nana), and Darren Goldstein (Donald) for *The Bedwetter*. Photo by Tony Powell.

RESOURCES

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SETTING:
1980s
NEW HAMPSHIRE

Cultural Snapshot of the 1980s

The 1980s was a decade marked by bold cultural shifts across music, fashion, and societal attitudes. Musically, the era was defined by the rise of pop icons like Michael Jackson, Madonna, and Prince, as well as the emergence of genres like new wave, hair metal, and hip-hop. Fashion was all about excess, with neon colors, leg warmers, mullets, and oversized clothing. The "yuppie" lifestyle emphasized consumerism and material success, while the punk and grunge movements countered by an anti-establishment stance. Attitudes during the 1980s were often marked by economic optimism, a push for individualism, and, in the case of the Reagan era, an emphasis on traditional values and political conservatism. Mental health research advanced in the 1980s, including new knowledge of the role of endorphins. The actor Patty Duke became one of the first celebrities to publicly and candidly share her experience with bipolar disorder. However, mental health struggles were still often stigmatized, overlooked, or a source of shame. Treatment typically focused on medication or institutional care.

New Hampshire in the 1980s

For some children, growing up in New Hampshire during the 1980s meant experiencing the slower-paced, close-knit vibe of rural New England. Many kids spent time outdoors, enjoying activities like hiking, skiing, or sledding, while still being influenced by 1980s pop culture through TV shows, movies, and radio. MTV debuted its first music video, "Video Killed the Radio Star," in 1981. Saturday morning cartoons were packed with shows, like *G.I. Joe.*, that were made to sell toys, clothes, and accessories. As a part of the US war on drugs, '80s kids also received more messaging around resisting peer pressure to use drugs, alcohol, and tobacco in schools through the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program and "Just Say No" campaigns. Kids in the state might have found themselves navigating the pressures of small-town life while also trying to relate to the bigger, trendier world of the 1980s.

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