



COME SEE HOW THE WORLD COULD BE

# HADESTOWN

THE TONY-WINNING BEST MUSICAL

## STUDY GUIDE



THE  
NATIONAL THEATRE  
FOUNDATION

Hadestown  
The National Theatre  
June 6 - 18, 2023  
Edmonton, The Citadel Theatre, 2017  
London, The National Theatre, 2019  
Broadway, Walter Kerr Theatre, 2019

Music by Anaïs Mitchell  
Lyrics by Anaïs Mitchell  
Book by Anaïs Mitchell  
Directed by Rachel Chavkin  
Choreography by David Neumann  
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Leayne C. Dempsey



For almost 200 years, The National Theatre has occupied a prominent position on Pennsylvania Avenue—“America’s Main Street”—and played a central role in the cultural and civic life of Washington, DC. Located a stone’s throw from the White House and having the Pennsylvania Avenue National Historic Site as its “front yard,” The National Theatre is a historic, cultural presence in our Nation’s Capital and the oldest continuously operating enterprise on Pennsylvania Avenue.

The non-profit National Theatre Foundation oversees the historic theatre and serves the DC community through three free outreach programs, *Saturday Morning Live! At The National*, *Community Stage Connections*, and *Teens Behind the Scenes*. These programs provide the greater Washington area with access to high quality performing arts experiences while promoting and employing local and regional artists.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE FOUNDATION  
David J. Kitto, Executive Director  
Olivia Kosciusko Tritschler, Director of Operations  
Jared Strange, Education & Community Programs Manager

Written and Curated by Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg  
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

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# DRAMATURGICAL ESSAY

*See, someone's got to tell the tale...*

Why do we tell stories? What is it about exposition, rising action, climactic moments, and resolves that draw our ears near as humans? The art of storytelling has been with humankind for centuries. Oral histories of far off lands, of mythic beings, and of lovers both young and old have been passed down to us for centuries. And each story of humanity we inherit comes with a responsibility to keep it alive—to never let it die.

*Whether or not it turns out well...*

Even when we know how the journey ends, there is still so much to gain from embarking on it. *Hadestown* takes its audience on an epic trip of love and loss, using popular characters from Greek mythology like Hades, Persephone, Orpheus, Eurydice, and Hermes to explore what it means to live life for the journey of it.

There are so many themes presented in the show that echo our world today. Eurydice's isolation, the exploitation of the workers, and the declining state of our climate are just a few examples that make us think about our own realities. Like the characters in the show, we don't know what the future holds, and we don't know if things will get better or worse. Yet, we continue to pursue the good things: love, music, dancing, and our passions. We can still envision a life where things do work out in the end.

*Maybe it will turn out this time...*

That is what makes our hero, Orpheus, so unique. He sees the world and how it could be.

*It's a sad song...*

*Hadestown* invites you to do the same, even if it means you may not be right in the end. It dares you to put your hopes in the unknown.

*We're gonna sing it anyway.*

And I dare you, too.

**Leayne Dempsey, Dramaturg**

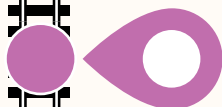
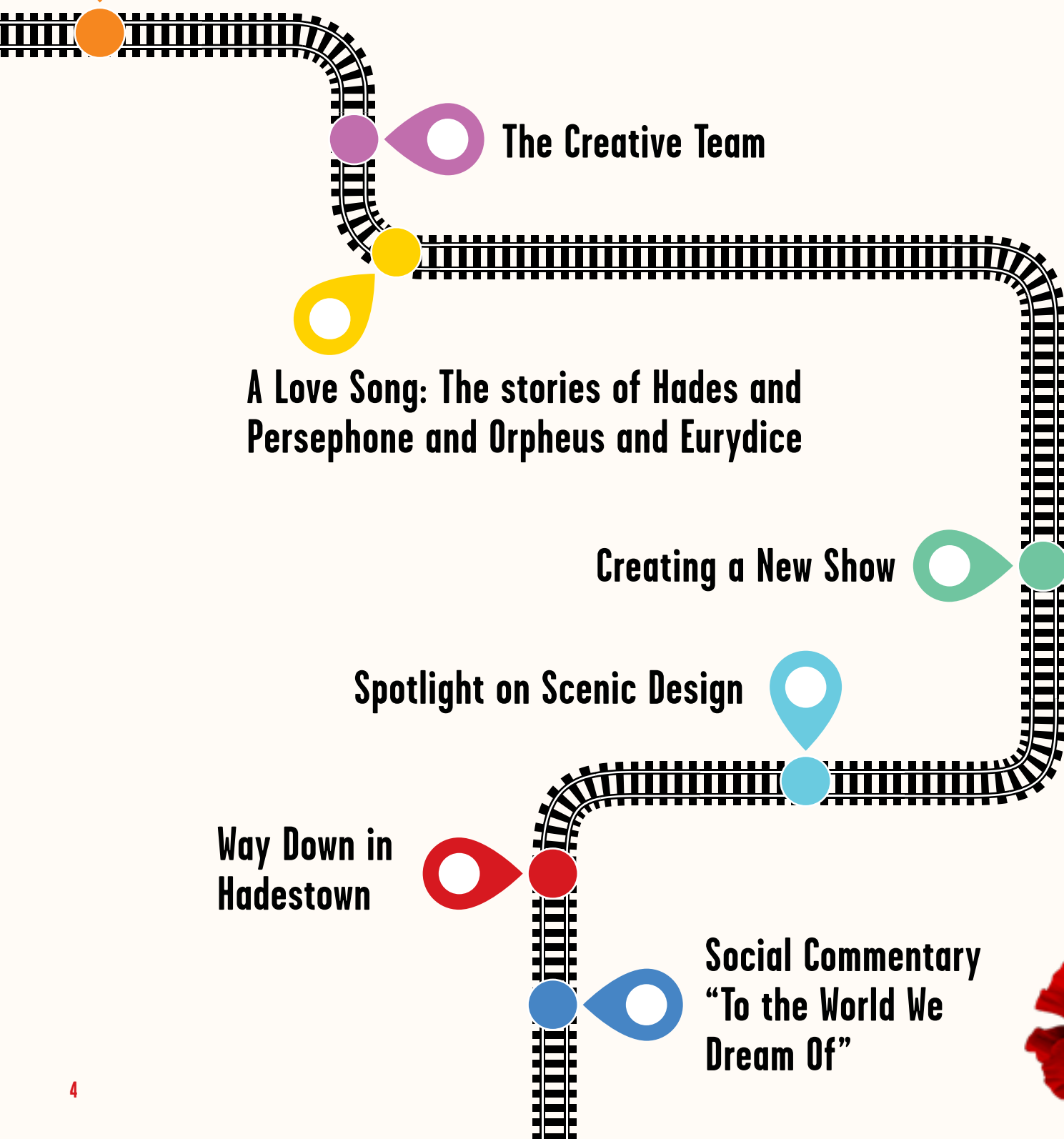
Nathan Lee Graham  
in *Hadestown* North  
American Tour 2022



# THE JOURNEY TO HADESTOWN



**Dramaturgical Essay**



**The Creative Team**



**A Love Song: The stories of Hades and Persephone and Orpheus and Eurydice**



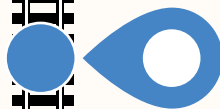
**Creating a New Show**



**Spotlight on Scenic Design**



**Way Down in Hadestown**



**Social Commentary  
"To the World We Dream Of"**

# THE CREATIVE TEAM

**ANAÏS MITCHELL** is the composer and writer of both the book and lyrics of *Hadestown*. Mitchell is an accomplished singer-songwriter who based *Hadestown*, her first musical, on her 2010 album of the same name. She received a Tony Award for Best Original Score and was nominated for Best Book of a Musical. In total, *Hadestown* won eight Tony Awards in 2019.

**DC Connection:** Anaïs Mitchell held a concert at DC's very own 9:30 club in May 2022. She even sang "The Wedding Song" from *Hadestown* during the show.

**RACHEL CHAVKIN** is the director of *Hadestown*. Chavkin is also known for her directorial work on *Natasha, Pierre, and the Great Comet of 1812*, and is an Obie Award-winning, Drama Desk and Lucille Lortel Award nominated artist.

**DC Connection:** Rachel Chavkin was born and raised in Silver Spring, Maryland, right here in the DC Metro area.

**DAVID NEUMANN** is the choreographer of *Hadestown*. Neumann is a 2019 Outer Critics Circle, Lucille Lortel, and Tony Award nominee. He is also the recipient of the Chita Rivera Award for Choreography for his work in *Hadestown*.

**DC Connection:** In 2006, David Neumann choreographed a production of *Cabaret* at DC's very own Arena Stage.

**RACHEL HAUCK** is the set designer of *Hadestown*. Hauck's set designs can be seen in many theatres across the country. She often works in new play development and on world premiere shows. You can see her work in John Leguizamo's *Latin History for Morons* (which came through The National Theatre in 2019) and Heidi Schreck's *What the Constitution Means to Me*. Hauck has received many distinguished nominations and awards, including an OBIE Award for Sustained Achievement in Design.

**KEN CERNIGLIA** is the dramaturg of *Hadestown*. Cerniglia played a significant role in the developmental process that brought the show to Broadway. Cerniglia was also the dramaturg for *Peter and the Starcatcher* on Broadway.

**DC Connection:** Received his Master's in Theatre History and Criticism at The Catholic University of America in Washington, DC.

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## ADDITIONAL CREATIVE TEAM:

**MICHAEL KRASS** Costume Design

**BRADLEY KING** Lighting Design

**NEVIN STEINBERG** and **JESSICA PAZ**

Sound Design

**LIAM ROBINSON** Musical Director  
and Vocal Arrangements

**"IT'S A LOVE SONG.  
It's a tale of love  
from long ago..."**

—Road to Hell (Reprise), *Hadestown*

# A LOVE SONG: THE STORIES OF HADES AND PERSEPHONE AND ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE

## WHAT IS GREEK MYTHOLOGY?

Greek mythology was what the Ancient Greeks used to make sense of their world. The myths included famous Greek gods, goddesses, and heroes such as Zeus, Apollo, Persphones, Hades, Hercules, and Achilles. Greek mythology was intertwined with the Ancient Greeks' religious practices.

### HERE ARE SOME IMPORTANT TERMS TO KNOW:

- **HERMES** A Greek god known to be a messenger of the gods. He was known for wearing winged sandals that let him travel between Mount Olympus, the Earth, and the Underworld.
- **THE RIVER STYX** One of the rivers in the Underworld that separated the living from the dead.
- **THE UNDERWORLD** The place that holds all the souls of those who have died, often referred to as Hades after the Greek god who presides over it.
- **FATES** A group of three goddesses who assign destinies to people at birth.



Matthew Patrick Quinn, Chibueze Ihuoma, and Maria Christina Oliveras in Hadestown North American Tour, 2022

## WHO ARE HADES AND PERSEPHONE?

Our story begins with Persephone, the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. Zeus was the sky and thunder god, and the king of all gods. Demeter was the goddess of the harvest and therefore responsible for the growth of crops, grain, and food for humans on Earth.

One day, Persephone was “hanging out” with a nymph named Cyane. While the two were admiring a narcissist flower, Hades emerged from the underground and kidnapped Persephone. Why? Unbeknownst to her and Demeter, Zeus had made a deal with Hades that allowed for Hades to take Persephone as his wife in the Underworld.

Demeter appealed to the gods to help get Persephone back, but she did not receive any help. As a result of her grief, Demeter abandoned her duties as the goddess of harvest, and the earth became desolate. The world above

Chibueze Ihuoma  
and Hannah Whitley  
in *Hadestown* North  
American Tour 2022



Photo by T. Charles Erickson

ground was harsh, and humans began to suffer due to a lack of food.

Zeus realized that if the humans were to die, then there would be no one to worship the gods. In response, a deal was made to return Persephone above ground. But, she could only return for two-thirds of the year. Why? While Persephone was in the Underworld, she longed for the fresh vegetables and fruits above ground. In her hunger, she ate seeds from a pomegranate that grew down there. These seeds tied Persephone to the Underground for part of the year.

When Persephone was released above ground to her mother Demeter, the sky began to rain, and the crops began to grow again. Persephone's release from the Underworld each year is marked by the season of Spring, and her descent back to Hades and the Underworld is marked by the coming of Winter.

Check out this cool TED-Ed animation of the story of Hades and Persephone!

THE QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD

## WHO ARE ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE?

Orpheus was the son of Apollo. Apollo was the god of many things, including poetry and music. It is believed that Apollo gave Orpheus his first lyre. Orpheus's singing could overcome any enemy. It could even overcome the great power that was the Siren's Song.

In some versions of Greek mythology, Eurydice is believed to be a daughter of Apollo. There isn't much about her lineage, and most of what we know is connected to her marriage to Orpheus.

Eurydice and Orpheus fall in love and get married. While out in the forest, Eurydice gets bitten by a snake and dies. Orpheus mourns the death of Eurydice and is obliged by the gods to go after her in the Underworld (with their protection, of course).

Orpheus meets Hades in the Underworld and asks to take Eurydice back.

## WHAT NEXT?

The second act of *Hadestown* will reveal their fates...

# CREATING A NEW SHOW

How is a musical made? Does it come from something already written and then music is put to it? Is it sparked out of the mind of one person, and then shared with the world? Or is it inspired by the world around us: a current event, a person, a song? When you stop to think about the origin of a piece of art, you'll often find yourself lost in the midst of many possibilities.

So what's the answer? Well the answer to all of those questions is: yes, of course.

The origin of a musical, and of any piece of theatre, has come through all of those ways and more. In fact, I'd like to argue that it is not the origin of the idea that is the most profound part of making a musical. It is the *making* of the musical that is the true marvel. The creative process of getting the idea, or the muse, from a concept to a fully staged production is extraordinary.

*Hadestown* first began as a community theater project in 2006. Anaïs Mitchell set out to create a "folk opera" that she initially titled *A Crack in a Wall*. Some of the songs were then revised and the music of the show was turned into an album in 2010, with Mitchell singing the part of Eurydice. Mitchell and her band toured a concert version of the album around the United States. Still determined to create her "folk opera," Mitchell, along with Rachel Chavkin, continued the development process at the New York Theatre Workshop, and the show made its Off-Broadway debut in the summer of 2016. In 2017, the show debuted in Canada at the Citadel Theatre, and in 2018 it opened in London at the National Theatre. Finally, in the spring of 2019, *Hadestown* opened on Broadway.

*Hadestown* went on to receive 14 Tony Awards, winning 8, but before it could earn such praise, it first had to go through a beautiful, challenging, and evolutionary developmental process. From the song "Any Way the Wind Blows," being inspired by the irony of wildfires in California existing simultaneously as Hurricane Sandy in New York City in 2012, to the debate on whether "Road to Hell" was truly the right opening number, to long conversations about how to make the audience fall in love with Orpheus, this show is a perfect example of how much work goes into the making of a musical (Mitchell, 2020).

In her book *Working on a Song: The lyrics of Hadestown*, Anaïs Mitchell describes the creative process of writing the show:

What is seen and heard on stage is the blooming flower, but *most* of the plan is underground. Every line, verse, or chorus—every idea any of us who worked on it ever had, even the ones that never saw the light of day—they're down there. They're the roots of the plant, and the flower wouldn't exist without them. *The ones who bloom in the bitter snow* bloom because they are supported from below by a thousand tries and failures. (Mitchell, 2020)

It's the "thousand tries and failures," and the almost decade-long process, that is so profound. The idea to create a new musical is just the beginning of a process that requires both resilience and tenacity to see through. No one truly knows how long it will take to make it to Broadway; some shows never make it at all. The joy comes from the process of trying, and failing, and making it over and over again.



Nyla Watson Belén Moyano Dominique Kempf  
in *Hadestown* North American Tour 2022

Photo by T. Charles Erickson



# DESIGNER'S CORNER: AN INTERVIEW WITH SCENIC DESIGNER RACHEL HAUCK.

## The 2 Worlds Disguised in 1 Set for Broadway's *Hadestown*

Tony Award-winning scenic designer Rachel Hauck reveals the secrets hiding in plain sight onstage at the Walter Kerr Theatre.

BY RUTHIE FIERBERG  
PLAYBILL  
DECEMBER 10, 2019

From the very beginning, *Hadestown* was intended to be a musical that would embrace the audience.

So when the Anaïs Mitchell musical originally premiered Off-Broadway at New York Theatre Workshop, scenic designer Rachel Hauck conceived a space in the round to convey “the generosity of that idea.”

Though the set onstage today at Broadway's Walter Kerr Theatre varies vastly from NYTW's “Greek amphitheatre in a barn,” Hauck's now Tony-winning design harkens back to the original inspiration of [the] community. The designer created a semicircular bar so its walls curve to hug the audience. She removed two rows of seats in the orchestra to extend the stage into the crowd. “The intimacy of how it comes into the house and lets the audience be a part of this,” she says, “it feels like an old friend.”

That feeling of intimacy is at the core of the show. “If you ever lose the intimacy, you lose the context of Anaïs' music. And if you lose your relationship to the music, you're sunk,” says Hauck.

To keep the focus on the music and maintain a mysticism about the characters and their story, Hauck and director Rachel Chavkin opted for abstraction over realism, a choice that allowed Hauck to play with dualities.

At first glance you see a dilapidated yet romanticized jazz club with wood floors caked in beer and plaster walls logged with water. Look again and you'll notice the rot is simultaneously the industrial underworld. The bar's blue-green walls create a decay; blink, and suddenly they become the sky for Orpheus and Eurydice's poetic outdoor summer scenes.

But the duplicity intentionally hides in plain sight. “Rachel said to me, ‘It should feel like the bar is a cog in the giant machine that is *Hadestown*,’” Hauck recalls.

When the bar cleaves to expose the depths of hell, the true mechanism of that cog is revealed. “These [bartops] don't move very far, but it feels like somebody's ripping your chest out when it happens because it's so emotional to see it split,” says Hauck. The simple design echoes the romanticism, conflict, desire, and loss all wrapped up in *Hadestown*.

In the end, the whole world reassembles. “It's the circular nature. You're right back where you started as soon as it ended,” says Hauck, “and we're going to try again.” Therein lies Hauck's triumph, her ultimate duality: the end is just the beginning.



# WAY DOWN IN HADESTOWN

What does a jazz hall in the French Quarter of New Orleans and the Coliseum in Greece have to do with *Hadestown*? They are part of the inspiration of the scenic design. Take a look at the images below and see if you can identify the inspiration in the final scenic design.

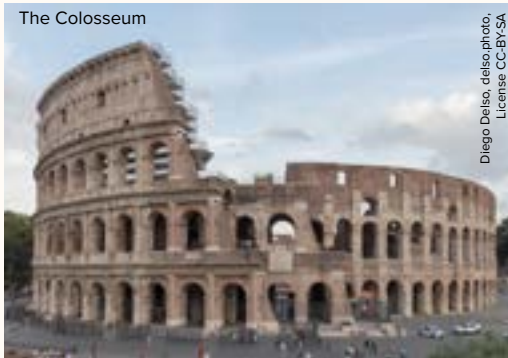


Preservation Hall Jazz Band playing at the Preservation Hall, New Orleans, LA

Photo by: Meg Saline - Summit

**PRESERVATION HALL** is a jazz hall located in the French Quarter of New Orleans. Historically, Preservation Hall was one of the only integrated jazz halls in the south. It is dedicated to maintaining the spirit of and celebration of traditional jazz music.

**What do you notice about textures, colors, and materials used in the scenic design? How are they similar to Preservation Hall's design?**



The Colosseum

Diego Delso, celso.photo, License CC-BY-SA

**THE COLOSSEUM** is an elliptical shaped amphitheater located in Rome, Italy. It has existed for over 2,000 years. Throughout history the colosseum has been used for multiple purposes such as gladiator games, housing Rome's poor, and a cemetery. **Notice the use of the elliptical shape in the scenic design.**



Matthew Patrick Quinn, Maria Christina Oliveras, Chibueze Ihuoma, Nathan Lee Graham, Hannah Whitley, and company in *Hadestown* North American Tour 2022

Photo by: T. Charles Erickson

# “TO THE WORLD WE DREAM ABOUT. AND THE ONE WE LIVE IN NOW.”

—Orpheus, *Hadestown*

**DIRECTION:** It’s amazing how a show changes over time as the world around us changes, too. Take a look at these lyrics from the musical. How do the lyrics allude to the world we live in now?

## Excerpt from **WHY WE BUILD THE WALL**

Why do we build the wall?  
My children, my children  
Why do we build the wall?

Why do we build the wall?  
We build the wall to keep us free

How does the wall keep us free?  
The wall keeps out the enemy  
And we build the wall to keep us free  
That’s why we build the wall  
We build the wall to keep us free

Who do we call the enemy?  
My children, my children  
Who do we call the enemy?

Who do we call the enemy?  
The enemy is poverty  
And the wall keeps out the enemy  
And we build the wall to keep us free  
That’s why we build the wall  
We build the wall to keep us free

Because we have and they have not!  
My children, my children  
Because they want what we have got!  
That’s why we build the wall  
We build the wall to keep us free

How does the wall keep us free?  
My children, my children  
How does the wall keep us free?

## Excerpt from **IF IT’S TRUE**

If it’s true what they say  
I’ll be on my way  
But who are they to say  
What the truth is anyway?  
Cos the ones who tell the lies  
Are the solemnest to swear  
And the ones who load the dice  
Always say the toss is fair  
And the ones who deal the cards  
Are the ones who take the tricks  
With their hands over their hearts  
While we play the game they fix  
And the ones who speak the word  
Always say it the last  
And no answer will be heard  
To the question no one asks  
So I’m asking if it’s true  
I’m asking me and you, and you, and you  
I believe our answer matters  
More than anything they say





# TAKE A MOMENT TO REFLECT.

Make a list or write a brief description of the world you dream of in the future.  
Use images, myths, ideas—anything that gives your vision life.



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