



# STUDY GUIDE

## THE BOOK OF MORMON



THE  
**NATIONAL THEATRE**  
FOUNDATION

# THE BOOK OF MORMON

The National Theatre  
March 5–17, 2024

Trey Parker, Original Co-Director, Book, Music, and Lyrics  
Robert Lopez, Book, Music, and Lyrics  
Matt Stone, Book, Music, and Lyrics  
Casey Nicholaw, Original Co-Director and Choreographer  
Tour Directed and Choreographed by Jennifer Werner  
Packet prepared by Dramaturg Lindsey R. Barr

*The New York Times* calls it “the best musical of this century.” *The Washington Post* says, “It is the kind of evening that restores your faith in musicals.” And *Entertainment Weekly* says, “Grade A: the funniest musical of all time.” Jimmy Fallon of *The Tonight Show* calls it “Genius. Brilliant. Phenomenal.” It’s *The Book of Mormon*, the nine-time Tony Award® winning Best Musical.

This outrageous musical comedy follows the adventures of a mismatched pair of missionaries, sent halfway across the world to spread the Good Word. With standing room only productions in London, on Broadway, and across North America, *The Book of Mormon* has truly become an international sensation. Contains explicit language.



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  
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Jared Strange, Director of Education & Community Programs  
Paul Reagan, Director of Operations  
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Necole Lelarue, Development Coordinator  
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Written and Curated by Lindsey R. Barr, Dramaturg  
Designed by Carolyn Donarski

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# LETTER FROM THE DRAMATURG

In June 2011, I participated in a theatre internship at the WordBRIDGE Playwright's laboratory based in Clemson, South Carolina. As an intern, our housing accommodations were modest and there were no televisions with cable available to us in our rooms. We, as a gathering of theatre students and musical enthusiasts, were particularly distraught that we would miss that year's Tony Awards broadcast, the annual awards ceremony celebrating excellence on Broadway. We were left with only grainy YouTube videos the next day to see which productions performed musical numbers and how they were received by the audience. We saw on social media that one particular performance had people talking: Andrew Rannells' rendition of "I Believe" from *The Book of Mormon*. Expertly performed by a classically trained singer, the song captures much of the musical's story in brief: a Mormon missionary travels to Uganda on assignment in an attempt to convert them to Mormonism.

Undoubtedly, the performance from the 2011 Tony Awards ceremony, coupled with the positive word-of-mouth the musical received both prior to and in the wake of winning the Tony Award for Best Musical—the evening's most coveted prize—launched *The Book of Mormon* into mainstream popular culture as the next must-see

Broadway hit. I was certainly not immune to this influence. I found myself at various moments looking up the cost of a ticket to see the show on Broadway (which in the immediate aftermath of their successful Tony night were in excess of \$150 per person) and if I could squeeze my money far enough to take a bus to New York

City. I wasn't able to make it to Broadway to see the show in 2011 for a number of reasons, but when the first National Tour made its way through Baltimore in 2015, I was able to snag a pair of tickets, much to my delight.

On the night of the show, I sat in the theatre giddy with anticipation (I was seeing a bonafide hit!) but what I was left with as the curtain came down at the end of the show was a mix of complicated emotions. There were moments of pure comedy that I quite enjoyed, but overall I was troubled by the reductive representation of Uganda and its citizens that the show portrayed. I certainly did not have the words then to articulate exactly what felt off about it, but I knew that something did. As I point to later in this guide, there are people far more eloquent than me who have taken on the work of describing what exactly in the musical's DNA might cause discomfort.

What's interesting to me about my own experience and the subsequent discourse about the musical is that it continues to be a popular show with no signs of slowing down. Audience members continue to laugh at the jokes that once earned the show praise as being groundbreaking but now seem outdated. Its aura, as a descendent of *South Park* genius, is one of self-aware offensiveness in the interest of shaking up traditional notions of the Broadway musical. The musical exists in a fascinating place: at once critically acclaimed for its humor and tongue-in-cheek pointedness, one that people flock to experience for themselves, and yet also a piece that writers continue to take to task on its representation of developing nations.

As you watch the show, I encourage you to think about how you might make sense of your own emotional response to the work. Where do you find yourself laughing? Where do you find yourself pulling back from what's being shown? Are you reacting to some things more than others? What makes musical theatre brilliant is its ability to make us think, feel, question, and observe, and *The Book of Mormon* certainly gives us a lot to consider!

