Dial “M” for Murder
By Frederick Knott

*Especially for Grades 9 and up

Barter Theatre Main Stage – Fall, 2013

(NOTE: standards included for completing the study guide as well as seeing a performance of Dial “M” for Murder.)

Virginia SOLs
Theatre Arts – TI.4, TI.10, TI.11, TI.13, TI.17, TII.1, TII.5, TII.9, TII.12, TII.13, TII.14, TII.15, TII.17, TIII.5, TIII.7, TIII.10, TIII.11, TIII.12

Tennessee Standards (Common Core State Standards)
Theatre 9-12 –7.1, 7.2, 8.1, 8.2

North Carolina Standards (North Carolina Essential Standards)
Theatre Arts – B.A.1, B.AE.1, B.CU.2, I.C.1, I.A.1, I.AE.1, I.CU.2, P.C.1, P.A.1, P.AE.1, A.A.1, A.AE.1

Setting
Characters
Margot Wendice – a wealthy housewife
Max Halliday – American television crime writer, Margot’s former lover
Tony Wendice – Margot’s husband, former tennis pro
Captain Lesgate – Tony’s classmate at Cambridge, formerly known as Swann
Inspector Hubbard – police detective
Thompson – a policeman

Synopsis
Tony’s plot to murder his wife Margot for her money goes awry when Margot kills her would-be assailant in self-defense. Now Tony shifts his plans and schemes to frame his Margot for premeditated murder. Can Margot’s ex-lover Max solve the mystery and discover the truth before Margot is hanged for the crime? A thrilling, suspenseful piece that will keep you guessing until the last moment!

Vocabulary Words
suffocate  lucrative  deputation  export
motive  tournament  bookmaker  reprieve
revenge  obsession  nightcap  beneficiary
gimmick  anonymous  collaborate  attaché
eminent  court-martial  inquest  execution
blackmail  matrimonial  latchkey  flatfoot
alteration  alibi  conviction  amateur

Biography of Frederick Knott, playwright

Frederick Knott was born on August 28, 1916 in China to English missionary parents. He was educated in England and eventually earned a law degree from Cambridge University. From 1939 to 1946, he served in the British Army, rising to the rank of Major. After he left the military, he began writing what would be his most successful work, Dial “M” for Murder. Initially, theatre producers rejected the play until the BBC aired a production of it on television to rave reviews. It finally received a wildly popular London production in June of 1952, followed by a successful transfer to Broadway that same October. Knott also wrote the screenplay for the 1954 Hollywood movie directed by Alfred Hitchcock and starring Ray Milland and Grace Kelly. Knott followed up this success with two more plays: Write Me a Murder (1960) and Wait Until Dark (1966). Knott died in New York City in 2002.
Dial “M” for Murder Movie Trivia

Director Alfred Hitchcock had chosen an expensive robe for Grace Kelly to wear in the telephone scene. Kelly balked, stating that no woman sleeping alone would don a robe to answer the phone. Hitchcock agreed to let her wear only her nightgown and liked the way the scene turned out so much that in all their subsequent films, he allowed Kelly to make all her own costume decisions.

The whole movie was shot in only 36 days!

Warner Brothers Studio insisted that director Alfred Hitchcock film the movie in 3D, a technology that prohibited extreme close-up camera shots. Because Hitchcock wanted a close-up of a finger dialing a rotary phone, he ordered a giant phone and a huge finger made of wood built to achieve the desired effect.
Alfred Hitchcock was famous for making cameo roles in the movies he directed. In *Dial “M” for Murder*, he appears in a photograph taken at a college reunion – a prop used in both the play and the movie.

Hitchcock underscored the gradually darkening tone of the film with the clothes worn by Grace Kelly’s character. She starts out wearing scarlet and then, as the movie progresses, her clothes lose their brightness.
Word Search
Find the following words in the puzzle below: tennis, latchkey, Tony Wendice, perfect murder, Lesgate, reunion, blackmail, mystery, alibi, Margot, Max Halliday, motive, Old Bailey, scissors, Inspector Hubbard, stocking, Frederick Knott, London, telephone, Wimbledon, Cambridge

C G P R E U N I O N L E T M T D
A N E Y K L O E O A N E I O R M
M I R E Z C D D T O N U N A P Y
B K F L K X N C H N E Y B R T S
R C E I Z O H P I T W B M E U T
I O C A L K E S A E U J Y L I E
D T T B E L U G N H E Z P F H R
G S M Y E B S D R L O V R K A Y
E L U T B E I O O I A L I B I O
U H R J L C T Y S A U P D T L U
Z X D A E C V W I M B L E D O N
F R E D E R I C K K N O T T W M
O R R P H K M K X C R S Z S U U
K H S Y A D I L L A H X A M L V
L N C N I E I V T L T O G R A M
I S R O S S I C S B G R M W Y T
True and False

Write T if the statement is True and F if the statement is False.

1. _____ Alfred Hitchcock wrote *Dial M for Murder*.
2. _____ Wimbledon is London’s most notorious prison.
3. _____ *Dial M for Murder* premiered on television before it was ever produced on stage.
4. _____ Frederick Knott was born in China.
5. _____ Blackmail is legal in England.
6. _____ Broadway is a street in New York City.
7. _____ Scotland Yard is the lawn outside Buckingham Palace.
8. _____ Grace Kelly was a princess as well as an actress.
9. _____ *Dial M for Murder* was the first 3D film ever released.
10. _____ Frederick Knott also wrote the play *The Dark at the Top of the Stairs*.
11. _____ Cambridge is a university in New Jersey.
12. _____ In England, they use letters instead of numbers on their phones.
13. _____ Alfred Hitchcock liked to make cameo appearances in his movies.
14. _____ Hitchcock used costume color to help set tone in the film version of this play.
15. _____ Frederick Knott was a Major in the U.S. Army.

Matching

Match the noun in the 1st column with its corresponding description in the 2nd.

1. Tony Wendice  
   2. Wimbledon  
   3. Max Halliday  
   4. Lesgate  
   5. Old Bailey  
   6. Cambridge  
   7. Inspector Hubbard  
   8. Margot Wendice  
   9. Warner Brothers  
  10. Maida Vale

   a. London’s Criminal Court  
   b. television crime writer  
   c. Hollywood film studio  
   d. police detective  
   e. famous English tennis club  
   f. the Wendice’s neighborhood  
   g. English university  
   h. former tennis professional  
   i. accused of murder, formerly known as Swann
Alfred Hitchcock Presents…

Using the clues below, fill in the blanks with the appropriate Hitchcock movie title: Psycho, The Birds, Vertigo, Rear Window, North by Northwest, Rebecca, Notorious, Spellbound, Dial M for Murder, To Catch a Thief, Lifeboat, The 39 Steps, Topaz, Torn Curtain, Marnie, The Man Who Knew Too Much, Suspicion, The Paradine Case, Rope, Jamaica Inn

Across
7. spying on Nazis
9. scissors in the back
10. shipwrecks for profit
14. amnesia & murder
17. gambling husband a killer?
18. escape from East Germany
19. Manderley
20. beware The Cat

Down
1. Moroccan vacation
2. feathered friends
3. Mt. Rushmore
4. binoculars & broken legs
5. don't look down
6. Cuban Missile Crisis
8. Mr. Memory's secret
11. habitual thief
12. lawyer loves poisonous woman
13. strangled classmate
15. John Steinbeck
16. shower scene
Questions/Activities

The Perfect Crime

In Dial “M” for Murder, the character of Tony Wendice sets up what he thinks is the perfect crime. What is the definition of the “perfect crime?” This story is set in 1952; what advances in criminology and forensics have been made since then? Is it possible for a criminal, in this day and age, to commit a perfect crime? Discuss.

MAP IT!

Three different locations in London are mentioned in this play: Wimbledon, Old Bailey and Maida Vale. Using the internet, locate these three places and map three routes between them: one for a car, one for a pedestrian, and one for someone riding the Tube (subway). Is London an easy town to navigate?
Suspense: a lack of certainty, on the part of a concerned reader, about what is going to happen

English novelist Daphne Du Maurier had three of her works turned into Hitchcock films: the novels *Jamaica Inn* and *Rebecca* and her short story *The Birds*. Read one of these stories. How did Du Maurier create suspense in her novels? What literary techniques does she employ to keep her readers guessing? What role does the story’s setting play in creating suspense? Each character’s history and the choices available to them? Discuss.

Novelist Daphne Du Maurier

Now watch Hitchcock’s film adaptation of the same story – how does it compare to Du Maurier’s original? Was the story changed in anyway? What film techniques did Hitchcock use to create suspense? (Consider music, lighting, camera angles, etc.) Which did you consider more suspenseful, the story as written or the film adaptation? What role does the reader’s imagination play in creating suspense?

ADAPT IT

Read Edgar Allen Poe’s suspenseful short story *The Tell-Tale Heart*. Breaking into groups, adapt it into a short play or film. Be sure to incorporate technical elements to create suspense: sound effects, music, lights, etc. Rehearse it, film it (if appropriate) and present it to your class!
AFTER THE SHOW

Write a critique of Barter’s production of Dial “M” for Murder. Include the production values (set, costumes, lights, props, sound, etc.), each actor’s performance and the script. What did you like? What didn’t you like? How would you have designed/directed/acted it differently?

How were the sound design, lighting design and set design useful in creating suspense?

Suggested Further Reading/Links:

Other plays by Frederick Knott
Write Me a Murder
Wait Until Dark

Biographies about Alfred Hitchcock
Hitchcock, Piece by Piece by Laurent Bouzereau and Patricia Hitchcock O’Connell

Hitchcock on Hitchcock: Selected Writings and Interviews by Alfred Hitchcock and Sidney Gottlieb

The Dark Side Of Genius: The Life Of Alfred Hitchcock by Donald Spoto

For more information about the life of Tony and Margot Wendice, check out the links below

Wimbledon Tennis Club
www.wimbledon.com

Cambridge University
www.cam.ac.uk

Old Bailey
www.oldbaileyonline.org