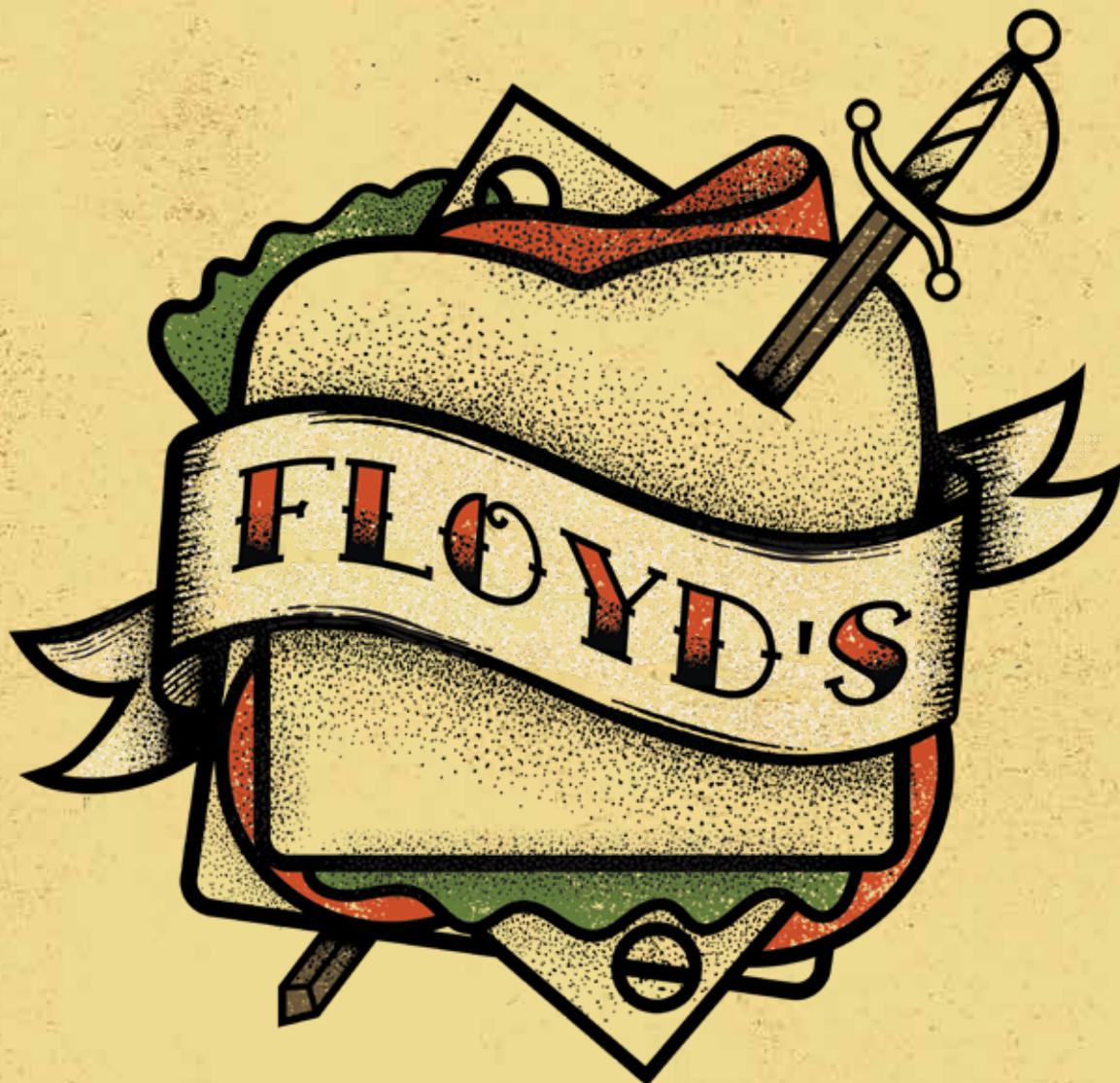




GUTHRIE
THEATER

McGuire Proscenium Stage / July 27 - Aug 31, 2019



WORLD PREMIERE

Floyd's

by LYNN NOTTAGE

directed by KATE WHORISKEY

PLAY GUIDE

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The Guthrie creates transformative theater experiences that ignite the imagination, stir the heart, open the mind and build community through the illumination of our common humanity.

Guthrie Theater Play Guide

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PHOTO: REZA SALAZAR, JOHN EARL JELKS, DAME JASMINE HUGHES AND ANDREW VEENSTRA IN FLOYD'S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

“Ain’t nobody gonna hire you except for Floyd.
'Cuz if you here, you done something. We all done
something. And we just biding our time 'til we
can get to another place.”

- Letitia to Jason in *Floyd's*

About This Guide

This play guide is designed to fuel your curiosity and deepen your understanding of a show’s history, meaning and cultural relevance so you can make the most of your theatergoing experience. You might be reading this because you fell in love with a show you saw at the Guthrie. Maybe you want to read

up on a play before you see it onstage. Or perhaps you’re a fellow theater company doing research for an upcoming production. We’re glad you found your way here, and we encourage you to dig in and mine the depths of this extraordinary story. [G](#)

DIG DEEPER

If you are a theater company and would like more information about this production, contact production dramaturg Morgan Holmes at morganh@guthrietheater.org.



PHOTO: DAME JASMINE HUGHES, JOHANNA DAY, JOHN EARL JELKS AND REZA SALAZAR IN FLOYD'S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

Synopsis

Truckers drive miles out of their way to stop at Floyd's — a sandwich shop in Pennsylvania run by the eponymous, tough-as-nails Floyd. Her business plan? To only hire folks desperate for work after returning from incarceration. While her sometimes criminal and always devilish savvy keeps the pantry stocked and the plates of food expedited, it's the five-star artistry from head chef and sensei Montrellous that draws in customers.

Line cooks Letitia and Rafael, both hungry for a path forward in life, envision the gourmet ingredients of their perfect sandwich while slinging cheesy bacon fries. That is until Jason, a new line cook with oppressive tattoos, brings the Zen kitchen flow to a sudden halt. Guided by Montrellous, the three sous chefs-in-training must work together to seek enlightenment and transcend Floyd — or else roast in truck-stop purgatory. [G](#)

SETTING

A truck stop in Pennsylvania

CHARACTERS

Floyd, owner and the one in charge, has gravel in her voice that betrays a life of cigarettes and whiskey lived with gusto and no apology

Montrellous, master chef, cooking is all love for him

Letitia, line cook, always adds a hint of style to her work ensemble

Rafael, line cook, gives off a player attitude but his game is a little lame

Jason, line cook, moody with white supremacist face tattoos



"*Floyd's* is the grace note in the Reading trilogy. It's about formerly incarcerated people who have been marginalized and are unsure if they can reintegrate into society. They struggle until they realize they have all the tools necessary to rebuild their lives."

- Lynn Nottage on *Floyd's*



"Many projects begin with Lynn calling me and then, suddenly, we're going somewhere. Whether it's Reading, Pennsylvania, or Uganda or a theater in Minneapolis, a spirit of adventure and curiosity has given us common experiences from which to draw."

- Kate Whoriskey on her longtime collaboration with Lynn Nottage

Playwright Lynn Nottage

Lynn Nottage is the first woman in history to win two Pulitzer Prizes for Drama (*Ruined* in 2009 and *Sweat* in 2017, which moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater). Recently named one of *TIME's* 100 most influential people, Nottage brings her work to the Guthrie stage for the second time, her first being *Intimate Apparel* in the fall of 2005. Other plays include *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark* (Lilly Award, Drama Desk Award nomination); *Ruined* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award); *Intimate Apparel* (American Theatre Critics Association and New York Drama Critics' Circle Awards for Best Play); *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine* (Obie Award); *Crumbs From the Table of Joy*; *Las Meninas*; *Mud, River, Stone*; *Por'knockers*; and *POOF!*

Nottage recently wrote the book for the musical adaptation of Sue Monk Kidd's novel *The Secret Life of Bees*, with music by Duncan Sheik and lyrics by Susan Birkenhead. The world premiere, directed by Sam Gold, played at the Atlantic Theater Company from May 12 to July 21, 2019.

In addition, Nottage is working with composer Ricky Ian Gordon to adapt her play *Intimate Apparel* into an opera. She has also developed *This Is Reading*, a performance installation at the Reading Railroad station in Reading, Pennsylvania. She is a writer and producer on the Netflix series "She's Gotta Have It" directed by Spike Lee, a Dramatists Guild member and an associate professor at Columbia University School of the Arts. Awards include the MacArthur Genius Grant Fellowship, Steinberg Distinguished Playwright Award and PEN/Laura Pels Master American Dramatist Award, among others.

Director Kate Whoriskey

Kate Whoriskey has directed on Broadway, off-Broadway and regionally. Her directing credits for productions on Broadway include *Sweat* at Studio 54 and *The Miracle Worker* at Circle in the Square Theatre. Selected off-Broadway credits include *Songs for a New World* at Encores! Off-Center, *Sweat* at The Public Theater, *How I Learned to Drive* at Second Stage Theater, *Ruined* at Manhattan Theatre Club, *Her Requiem* at Lincoln Center Theater, *Aubergine*; *Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine*; and *Inked Baby* at Playwrights Horizons and *The Piano Teacher* at Vineyard Theatre.

Whoriskey's regional credits include the Goodman Theatre, Geffen Playhouse, South Coast Repertory, Sundance Institute Theatre Lab, Shakespeare Theatre Company, American Repertory Theater, Huntington Theatre Company, Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Baltimore Center Stage and Arena Stage, among others.

Her opera direction has been seen at the Place du Châtelet in Paris and Teatro Municipal de São Paulo in Brazil. She has taught at Princeton University, New York University and University of California, Davis. 

Praise for Lynn Nottage

Lynn Nottage is dedicated to opening up stories that we're not used to hearing. She brings a sense of curiosity to all sorts of subjects and a clear eye to notoriously difficult parts of American culture and society. She's the only writer I can think of working now, in any medium, who so understands poor white Americans, with compassion for their terror but no pity for the racial attitudes people end up getting stuck in. It's been a tremendous privilege to explore this aspect of American life in *Sweat* — the play for which she won her second Pulitzer, becoming the only woman ever to have won twice in the drama category.

The key is Lynn's empathy for her characters and their stories. She spent years traveling to Reading, Pennsylvania, to research *Sweat*, but her intellectual rigor never comes at the expense of humanity. I have no doubt that there are many other worlds she's going to continue opening up to us for a long time to come.

Actor Martha Plimpton, "*TIME* 100: The Most Influential People of 2019," *TIME*, April 17, 2019

I think Lynn is one of the most compelling writers today, so it's very exciting to be in the room with her. She's one of the absolute most adventurous people I know and one of the most compassionate. She loves complexity. It's in



PHOTO: JOHANNA DAY AND JOHN EARL JELKS IN *FLOYD'S* (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

every character she creates. So having the chance to be part of the research process and the developmental process is extraordinary.

Lynn is constantly evaluating the work, honing in on the story. She creates worlds that she wants people to see that are as yet unseen. I think she has a drive to be very specific in the creation of the worlds. For me, that's why I love working with her and will always say yes, because I feel like she's pushing the boundaries of what theatre is and also who the audience is for theatre.

Director Kate Whoriskey, "On creativity and collaboration: A conversation with Lynn Nottage, Seret Scott and Kate Whoriskey," *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*, England: Routledge, 2016

When I read Lynn Nottage's work, I feel the excitement, the allure, that early cartographers must have felt; I discover these continental

maps of the human psyche never before charted onstage. Her work explores depths of humanness, the overlapping complexities of race, gender, culture and history — and the startling simplicity of desire — with a clear tenderness, with humor, with compassion.

Paula Vogel, *Crumbs From the Table of Joy and Other Plays*, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003

It is Ms. Nottage's special gift — I'm tempted to call it, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, her genius — to bring politically charged themes to dramatic life by embodying them in characters whom she portrays not as spokesmen for a cause but as ordinary people living ordinary lives.

Terry Teachout, "'Sweat' Review: Hard Work Is Hard to Find," *Wall Street Journal*, August 20, 2015

In Lynn Nottage's Own Words

The time I was in graduate school coincided with the time that was a crucial moment in American social history. It was the AIDS Crisis and the Crack Epidemic. So in school we were losing students, we were losing professors. It was really hard to make art in that environment. It felt like there were many more urgent things that needed to be attended to. After I graduated from Yale School of Drama, I felt that I wanted to do something with impact. I went to work for Amnesty International, which at the time was the largest human rights organization in the world. I was a press officer and I spent four, intense, really concentrated years doing human rights work. In many ways the time I spent with Amnesty International became my second graduate school.

During that time at Amnesty International, we were struggling with the notion that women's rights should be separated out from human rights. The organization wasn't doing enough to address specific human rights abuses. ... I knew that there was nothing that we as an organization could do. But as a human being, I felt that I needed to respond. ...

So I closed my office door and I wrote a play. I had returned to playwriting and it felt really good. I arrived at a total synthesis of the human rights brain and the writing brain. I thought, I can do both things. I don't know why I have to compartmentalize. For me, that was incredibly liberating.

Edited from "Lynn Nottage in Conversation With Elisabeth Vincentelli," A NYPL and LPTW Event, Parts I & II, Carole Di Tosti, February 6 and 8, 2019

During the preview process, [the audience is] incredibly important to me. I see the audience as the final collaborator. I think it's kind of bullshit when people say, "I'm not interested in the audience reaction." I'm like, "Then why do you do theater? You can write a book; then you don't have to see how the audience reacts." It's a living, breathing thing. I'm interested in the moments where the audience is restless. I'm interested in the moments where they lean in and become incredibly engaged: the laughter, the silence. All of that is part of how I think about shaping and rewriting the play. ...

I don't write in opposition, so I never think, "Oh, I can't write about that." I know that there are some writers that do write that way; I think I just follow my imagination and things that really excite me and intrigue me. When you begin a play, you're going to have to spend a lot of time with those characters, so those characters are going to have to be rich enough that you want to take a very long journey with them. That's how I begin thinking about what I want to write about and who I want to write about.

"Lynn Nottage's *Sweat and Blood*," *Interview*, December 13, 2016

My argument for theater is this: it's the fact that it's a community, that it's an opportunity for us to breathe the same air and exchange energy and to have a really dynamic, vital conversation in ways that we can't do in any other forum. That's what I love, and I think it's become increasingly rare.

In fact, one of my arguments for theater is to get rid of the lights onstage and to get rid of the proscenium and [theater] buildings and figure out how we can make theater in ways in which we aren't dividing ourselves as much, in which theater is made in places where people actually live and breathe.

Theater is one of the few places we really get to process our American narrative in real time. I think of *Sweat* and *Ruined* and even *Floyd's*. As a theater artist, I can raise this conversation and then get immediate feedback. Sometimes that feedback is positive; sometimes people walk out and they'll be angry. But at least I feel like we're having a conversation.

Excerpt from the In Conversation interview at the Guthrie Theater, "Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Lynn Nottage on why theater matters," Minnesota Public Radio News, August 1, 2019

[Paula Vogel and I] write history plays, and we write political plays, and I think that's why, perhaps, our journey has been a little different. The plays are unabashedly political and they're about very difficult subject matters and they tend to be unafraid of the darkness. And I think that women writers are supposed to embrace the light.

"Two Female Playwrights Arrive on Broadway. What Took So Long?" *The New York Times*, March 22, 2017

A Playwright Among Us

It's hard to talk about American theater and not mention Lynn Nottage. She's a powerhouse playwright known for propelling the art form forward through unsung voices and untold stories. Many call her prolific, but that seems too small a word for a woman who has won two Pulitzers and was named one of *TIME*'s most influential people of 2019. We asked her to share — in her own words — about playwrighting, developing *Floyd's* and dreaming up all those sandwiches.

What advice did you find most helpful as a young playwright?

Playwright August Wilson once told me, "A writer writes." As a young writer, I was confused by that simple statement. But I now understand that he was wisely encouraging me to write every single day regardless of the outcome. Today, I tell young writers that succeeding in playwrighting is a battle of attrition. The work doesn't happen overnight and you have to spend time honing your craft. We live in an impatient culture that wants instant results. Too often, young writers abandon their voice before they've had time to develop it.

Who helped you stay the course and develop your voice?

There were two instrumental people who shaped me as a playwright. The first was my professor George Bass at Brown University. He was a playwright, director and founder of Rites and Reason Theatre, which celebrated

the voices of African American theater artists. He taught me the essential ingredients of making theater — joy and ritual.

The second was Paula Vogel, who was also my professor and the first female playwright I ever met. Prior to her class, most of the plays I read in school were written by white men. I had to go well outside the academy to find plays written by women and people of color. So meeting Paula was a breath of fresh air. She was the one who encouraged me to consider being a playwright. Up until then, I thought it was a hobby and not a possibility for someone who looked like me.

When a play idea sparks, which comes first: people, plot or platform?

It depends. *Sweat* began with a commission from Oregon Shakespeare Festival to write a play that engaged with American history — specifically a revolution. I didn't know where to start, so I

found my way through immersive research. I wrote *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, a play about an African American starlet in the 1930s, after watching a film series on Turner Classic Movies. I became acutely aware of the absence of strong, black females in film during that period, and I wondered about the fate of talented black actresses who dared to challenge the status quo.

What was the spark that became *Floyd's*?

Floyd's began as a conversation with *Sweat*, which takes place in Reading, Pennsylvania, where I spent a great deal of time interviewing residents. I wanted to write about the deindustrialization happening there, but I also wanted to write something fun, accessible and irreverent — hence *Floyd's*.

Is it challenging to write multiple plays at once?

When I'm writing a play with weighty themes, I often have



PHOTO: DAN NORMAN

another play going — my side hustle — that becomes my escape. The plays are in conversation, but they demand opposite parts of my brain. With *Sweat*, I wanted to dialogue on an immediate, political and visceral level. With *Floyd's*, I wanted to dialogue on a spiritual and emotional level. My research involved eating delicious food and chatting with a friend who owned an artisanal sandwich shop. I tasted things I love and came up with flavor combinations that felt delightful and unexpected. My favorite part of writing *Floyd's* was imagining the sandwiches.

Tell us about the development process that led to *Floyd's*.

Floyd's was a commission from the Guthrie, so I was fortunate to hold developmental workshops here that helped me find the characters' voices and dig into the play in a more expansive way. Writing at my computer is a solitary act where I spend time fully visualizing and

exploring the play. But one of the best things about writing a play is the moment when you place the work into the hands of a director, actors and designers. They breathe fresh and different life into the piece, and I'm always delighted and surprised by what they discover.

You and director Kate Whoriskey are longtime collaborators. What have you discovered together?

The first time Kate and I worked together was on my play *Intimate Apparel*. We instantly found that we shared a vocabulary and had fun making theater together. I feel incredibly blessed to have found an amazing collaborator I can depend on and who responds to my work. We've grown and evolved together. *Floyd's* is our fifth collaboration, and working at the Guthrie with Kate is really quite special.

Tell us more about your research in Reading. Why did this community captivate you?

On my first visit, I assumed I would do a quick series of interviews and I'd develop a play. But I found that Reading demanded more attention. There was an air of despair, frustration and an overall sense of abandonment permeating the city, and I felt I couldn't walk away. I was drawn to the honesty and spirit of the people and became invested in understanding their circumstances and how the economic downturn led to the city's decline. It echoed what was happening throughout the country, and I wanted to fully understand the how and the why. What began as a simple trip became more than two years of immersion, and that engagement led to the writing of *Sweat*.

Yet my conversations with the people of Reading didn't feel complete. So I created a massive performance installation with Kate Whoriskey and Tony Gerber called *This Is Reading*, which was based on our interviews and designed to help heal and engage the community through constructive and collective dialogue.

Floyd's is the grace note in the Reading trilogy. It's about formerly incarcerated people who have been marginalized and are unsure if they can reintegrate into society. They struggle until they realize they have all the tools necessary to rebuild their lives. I also think that's true of Reading.

You often write about marginalized characters. Why is that important to you?

I'm an African American woman who is interested in writing plays through my own unique gaze. As someone who has had to embrace my outsider status, the characters I'm drawn to are the ones I understand.

Every character in *Floyd's* has been impacted by the criminal justice system. Why this deliberate choice?

I was interested in people who find themselves in limbo and attempt to emerge from a place of darkness without knowing how to fully embrace the light. The equivalent of that in our society are formerly incarcerated individuals who must reengage with a culture that doesn't necessarily welcome them home with open arms. In that sense, the sandwich shop in *Floyd's* is purgatory. Each character is trying to negotiate their freedom and fully inhabit a body that was held captive physically and emotionally. They're learning how to lean into forgiveness and understand that they have the power to transcend their mistakes.

Mindfulness also seems to be a key theme in *Floyd's*.

I often get anxious about the expectations for a commission. It's not rational, but it's real. While writing *Floyd's*, mindfulness helped me manage my own anxiety. Instead of thinking about where and how I wanted the play to exist, I thought about the process of writing and focused on the joy of exploring the characters. I think that's why *Floyd's* became a play about mindfulness. Making a sandwich can be an exercise in mindfulness — particularly if you create it with intention, have a keen awareness of the elements and find joy in infusing it with a sense of self.

Besides being hungry, how do you hope audiences will feel after seeing *Floyd's*?

Eating is a deeply spiritual experience, so I hope they'll want to eat and be much more mindful about what they consume. In the play, Montrellous explains that



PHOTO: DAN NORMAN

the bread he's holding comes from a seed of wheat cultivated a thousand years ago. We don't think enough about the origins of our food and how many people touch it before it reaches us. I hope people will think about the journey a sandwich takes from the field to the market to the restaurant to the unseen, under-recognized community of people who prepare it.

Which playwright would you like to share a sandwich with?

Lillian Hellman. She's an astonishing woman who wrote plays like *Watch on the Rhine* during a time when women didn't have much access to the American stage. Yet she wrote with tenacity and bravery. I'd love to break bread with her, hear about her experience and learn how she kept her fire burning. I'd also love to break bread with Lorraine Hansberry, who wrote *A Raisin in the Sun*, which is, in my opinion,

one of the few absolutely perfect plays. I would love to bask in her glow and have the pleasure of sharing a good meal with a brilliant playwright and activist.

Is playwriting a form of activism for you?

My parents were ordinary folks with activist impulses. I think that spirit of activism is deeply embedded in my work. It stems from my parents' passion and my own experience working in human rights for several years. It's in the DNA of who I am as a writer.

Inquiring minds want to know: What's your favorite sandwich?

I love a good tuna sandwich with habaneros, red onions and chopped pickles. 🥪

The Road to *Floyd's*

By Morgan Holmes
Production Dramaturg

2008: Oregon Shakespeare Festival commissions Lynn Nottage through their American Revolutions: The United States History Cycle program.

September 2011: Nottage reads a report in *The New York Times* on the 2010 U.S. Census, which reveals that Reading, Pennsylvania, has the most residents living in poverty for a population over 65,000. The 41.3% poverty rate is due to the loss of major manufacturing plants and other jobs, low education rates and economic changes.

October 2011: Nottage receives an email from a friend in dire financial straits. Together they participate in the Occupy Wall Street protests. Her interest in the “de-industrial revolution” and the impact of the 2008 financial crisis grows.

January 2012: Nottage takes her first trip to Reading and sees it as a microcosm of what is happening to small cities across the country. She and director Kate Whoriskey spend two years interviewing residents, which leads to the writing of *Sweat*.

January 2014: The Guthrie Theater receives a Joyce Award to support the commissioning of Nottage to write a companion piece to *Sweat*.



Above left: Reading residents in line at a food pantry; Above right: Lynn Nottage at Occupy Wall Street; Right: *This Is Reading* installation; Below: *Sweat* on Broadway



July 2015: *Sweat* opens at Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

November 2016: *Sweat* opens at The Public Theater in New York City. Nottage receives an Obie Award for Playwriting and a Drama Desk Award for Outstanding Play.

December 2016: *Sweat* is performed in Reading.

March 2017: *Sweat* opens on Broadway and receives three Tony Award nominations.

April 2017: Nottage wins her second Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Sweat*, making her the first female playwright to win the award twice.

July 2017: Nottage and a team of artists produce *This Is Reading* — a performance installation in the abandoned Reading Railroad station. The project tells the story of the city's past and points toward a hopeful future.



March 2018: The Guthrie announces *Floyd's* (originally titled *Reading Play*) as part of its 2018–2019 Season.

October 2018: The Public Theater's Mobile Unit National brings free performances of *Sweat* to 18 cities in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota. Performances and community engagement programming in Mankato, Rochester and St. Cloud are produced in collaboration with the Guthrie.

August 2019: *Floyd's* opens at the Guthrie. 

Zen *Kōans*

Mindfulness — a form of meditation that directs your awareness to your present biological, emotional and/or mental state — may seem like a modern trend. However, Americans have long been interested in the practice, from Dr. Marsha Linehan, who developed the mindfulness-focused dialectical behavior therapy in the 1980s, to Jack Kerouac, who made a kind of pop Buddhism central to beatnik rebellion in his 1950s novel *The Dharma Bums*.

The secular tenets of mindfulness have spiritual roots in Zen Buddhism dating back to its initial prominence in eighth-century China and 12th-century Japan. One meditation practice of Zen Buddhism focuses on *kōans* — questions or parables Zen Masters use to test their disciples' mental and spiritual resolves. *Kōan*-like parables appear throughout *Floyd's*, like Rafael's lesson to Jason about salt: "A little salt makes the food taste good; too much makes it inedible."

After following his teacher and moving to California at the turn of the 20th century, monk Nyogen Senzaki became one of the first proliferators of Zen in the U.S. His *101 Zen Stories*, a collection of *kōans*, anecdotes and parables by Chinese and Japanese Zen Masters, is especially popular. In "The Sound of One Hand," a master asks his young protege, "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" The boy attains *satori*, a flash of enlightenment, only when he transcends intellectual answers to this divine problem.

Consider how the following parables from *101 Zen Stories* resonate with the lessons learned in *Floyd's* about the pursuit of the sublime sandwich. 

"A CUP OF TEA"

Nan-in, a Japanese Master during the Meiji era (1868-1912), received a university professor who came to inquire about Zen. Nan-in served tea. He poured his visitor's cup full and then kept on pouring.

The professor watched the overflow until he no longer could restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

"Like this cup," Nan-in said, "you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"

"THE MOON CANNOT BE STOLEN"

Ryokan, a Zen Master, lived the simplest kind of life in a little hut at the foot of a mountain. One evening, a thief visited the hut only to discover there was nothing in it to steal.

Ryokan returned and caught him. "You may have come a long way to visit me," he told the prowler, "and you should not return empty-handed. Please take my clothes as a gift."

The thief was bewildered. He took the clothes and slunk away. Ryokan sat naked, watching the moon. "Poor fellow," he mused. "I wish I could give him this beautiful moon."

"A PARABLE"

Buddha told a parable in a sutra: A man traveling across a field encountered a tiger. He fled, and the tiger chased after him. Coming to a precipice, he caught hold of the root of a wild vine and swung himself down over the edge. The tiger sniffed at him from above. Trembling, the man looked down to where, far below, the mother tiger was waiting to eat him. Only the vine sustained him.

Two mice, one white and one black, little by little started to gnaw away the vine.

The man saw a luscious strawberry near him. Grasping the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other. How sweet it tasted!

Words Have Power



PHOTO: JOHN EARL JELKS AND ANDREW VEENSTRA IN FLOYD'S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

In 2013, Philadelphia Mayor Michael Nutter signed an ordinance to remove all references to “ex-offenders” from official city language in favor of “returning citizens.” Justice organizations like All Square, our community partner and real-life Minneapolis sandwich shop employing returning citizens, also use person-first, destigmatizing language. As Shared Justice, an online initiative of The Center for Public Justice, explains:

We use language to define our world, but what is it exactly that our words do? The effect of our words on our lives may seem obvious, but further reflections reveal that we do not know the strength of our everyday talk. Changing our language is a small step we can take that can help us to think and act in new, redemptive ways.

For men and women leaving prison and integrating back into society, the language used to describe

them can often perpetuate harmful stigmas and make their transition even more difficult.

While most of us don't spend time in prisons, the men and women who have been to prison come from and return to the neighborhoods we live in. One of the more common stories they share is the culture shock that comes with leaving prison and returning to public society. They have been under a strict schedule and find reentry to be frightening and open-ended. And it is in this exact situation that many of them struggle to find work and a place back in society.

Reflect for a moment on your mental model of the term “ex-convict.” Are your thoughts positive, negative or both? A look at legislation across the U.S. presents us with our answer as a culture. When trying to reintegrate into society, “ex-convict” acts as a scarlet letter. In other words, it is an unconcealable symbol that

shows off the returning citizen's past deeds for all interested parties to see. A variety of laws across many states ban ex-convicts from various types of work. Thus, their past haunts them regardless of the growth and change they have experienced.

Even in states without legal bans, there is prejudice and distrust from private employers who worry about how the public or customers might respond to individuals with a prison record. The stigma that comes with a prison record can be attached to someone in the juvenile justice system and may stay with them for their entire life. The terms we use must change.

On one hand, the term “ex-convict” emphasizes what they've done and hangs it around their neck as a millstone. It is a loaded term that categorizes a human being's identity in past illegal activity for which they have already been punished. On the other hand, the language of “returning citizen” provides hope and honors both their humanity and their capacity to contribute to a flourishing society. It gives space for hope by acknowledging their capacity to act as a citizen despite the barriers they may face. Yet, on an even deeper level, it honors their humanity by reminding them that they are not defined by past actions; rather, we expect them to contribute as one citizen among many. 

Edited from “Unlocking the Second Prison: Changing Our Words to Help Returning Citizens,” www.sharedjustice.org

People, Places and Things in the Play

PEOPLE

Buddha

In Sanskrit, one who is “awakened” or “enlightened.” Buddha is most associated with Siddhartha Gautama — a prince, monk, enlightened one and founder of Buddhism who lived between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C. While there is little authoritative knowledge about the historical person, oral and written traditions tell his story with variations across South and East Asia, as well as other regions where Buddhism is practiced. Buddha exists in Western consciousness through statues of his image with his legs folded in prayer. More generally, the title of “Buddha” is given to teachers of Buddhism who achieve enlightenment.

Colonel Sanders

Harland David Sanders (1890–1980) was an American businessman famed for franchising his 1929 Harland Sanders Cafe into Kentucky Fried Chicken after earning his honorary “Colonel” title from Kentucky’s Governor Ruby Laffoon in 1935. The fast food chain’s signature fare is based on Sanders’ 11-spice blend of “finger lickin’ good” fried chicken. KFC had expanded to 600 locations by 1964 when he sold the company to investors. Sanders remained the brand’s spokesperson until his death.

Doctors Without Borders/ Refugees in Chad and Sudan

A medical humanitarian group, also known as Médecins Sans Frontières, that provides care to victims of political conflict and natural disasters in places where

medical treatment is limited. Their mission states that “all people have the right to medical care regardless of gender, race, religion, creed or political affiliation, and the needs of these people outweigh respect for national boundaries.” While the organization has been celebrated for its mission and received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999, its outspokenness on issues of injustice has offended some governments and led to their expulsion from countries like Myanmar. In Chad and Sudan, most care for mothers and children is focused on prenatal, maternal and pediatric care, malnutrition screening and malaria prevention and treatment.

dominatrix

A woman who dominates a submissive partner in bondage, sadomasochism or other role-playing and non-erotic domination/submission activities like financial domination.

guru

In Hinduism, a personal spiritual guide. More generally, an influential teacher or mentor.

line cook

A cook in a commercial kitchen who is usually responsible for a specific dish or cooking method.

parole officer

A law enforcement officer who supervises and assists in the rehabilitation of a person granted parole who must serve the rest of their prison sentence in the community under certain conditions. Unlike probation officers, parole officers work with more violent offenders.

sensei

A teacher, mentor or master. From Japanese culture, especially martial arts.

shaman

A priest-doctor whose connection to the spiritual world endows them with powers of divination and curing illnesses. Originally from Northern Asian cultures, but now widespread.

sharks

People who take advantage of others through predatory lending, extortion and other financial schemes.

sous chef

Translated “under chef,” the second-in-command person in a commercial kitchen who oversees the planning and output of food.

PLACES

bodega

A wine shop or cellar, from the Latin *apotheca* meaning “storehouse.” More commonly, an urban grocery store.

Frackville

A maximum-security men’s prison in Frackville, Pennsylvania, approximately 40 miles northeast of Reading.

Godiva

An international luxury chocolatier that originated in Brussels, Belgium, in 1926 and has more than 270 retail shops globally (as of 2007). Their most popular item is gourmet truffles, which are wrapped in gift boxes for holidays and special occasions.



PHOTO: DAME JASMINE HUGHES AND REZA SALAZAR IN FLOYD'S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

Pagoda on Mount Penn

After viewing Japan's Nagoya Castle, local Reading businessman William Abbott Witman, Sr. commissioned a replica of a pagoda — a Hindu or Buddhist temple with tiered, ornamental roofs — to be built over a pit caused by Witman's quarry on Mount Penn. Intended to be a luxury resort on the 1,200-acre Mount Penn Preserve, it was eventually sold to the City of Reading in 1911 for one dollar. As one of only three pagodas in the U.S., it is a Reading landmark and symbol that offers visitors a skyline view at 620 feet.

Upstate

A "supermax" maximum-security men's prison in Malone, New York. Upstate Correctional Facility was originally established for inmates convicted of violent crimes. Some inmates participate in the cadre program, which allows them to work on prison grounds; others are double-celled in the "special housing unit" or solitary confinement.

Yale Medical School

After receiving 4,425 applicants for the class of 2020, the Yale

School of Medicine's M.D. program admitted 104 applicants in 2016 — an acceptance rate of 6.5%. A full-ride scholarship covers tuition fees of approximately \$57,600 per year (more than \$230,000 total).

THINGS

abyss

In ancient theories, the underworld or chasm from which the earth originated.

Adrenoleukodystrophy

Commonly known as ALD, a disease carried by the X chromosome that affects myelin, the fatty tissue that protects the brain's nerve cells, and the adrenal gland, which produces vital hormones. If not discovered and treated early, cerebral ALD can develop rapidly in children under 10 and cause a vegetative state or death. Other phenotypes of the disease cause a variety of non-fatal symptoms affecting the nervous system. ALD rarely affects girls and women under 40.

Beiber bus

Beiber Transportation Group is local to Berks County, where Reading is located, with

daily service from Reading to Philadelphia and New York City. Each bus is emblazoned with a highly identifiable Beiber logo on the side.

Cavalier King Charles Spaniel

A purebred of the American Kennel Club's Toy Group bred in England in the 1920s and reminiscent of the toy spaniels beloved by 17th-century British monarchs Charles I and II. The dogs weigh 13-18 pounds and have four colors: black and tan, ruby (auburn), Blenheim (tan on white) and tri-color (black on white with tan markings). They make great companions, being gentle in temperament and spunky in athleticism, but the breed is expensive. A puppy can range from \$1,800 to \$3,500 and grow in expense due to health problems as they age.

dope

A slang term referring to illicit drugs such as marijuana, heroin and cocaine. In Pennsylvania, the rate of overdose deaths per 100,000 persons has increased dramatically in the last 10 years, from nearly 15% in 2007 to 44.3% in 2017.

ecstasy

A synthetic drug that alters mood and perception. In religious or mystical thought, an out-of-body experience, rapture or prophetic trance.

eviscerate

Figuratively, to deprive or empty something of its content or essence. Medically, to disembowel or remove internal organs from the body.

grace note

In music, an ornamental note added for embellishment that is not essential to the main harmony.

hypertension

A state of high blood pressure that forces the heart to work harder to pump blood through the vessels and the blood to exert pressure against the vessel walls. This condition eventually causes the heart to enlarge and weaken, leading to heart failure.

lucha libre

Translated “free fight,” a Spanish phrase used in Mexico for freestyle professional wrestling, uniquely characterized by wrestling masks, tag-team fighting and aerial maneuvers.

meth

Short for methamphetamine, a powerful central nervous system stimulant that is often used as a recreational drug. Known for its long-lasting euphoric effect, it can be made with everyday ingredients.

mi hermana

A Spanish phrase meaning “my sister.”

money laundering

The process by which money obtained from criminal activity

(such as drug trafficking) is “cleaned” to conceal its original source, usually through a complex series of transactions to move the money around with the help of outside parties.

oxy and addy

Nicknames for two prescription medications that have become popular street drugs. Oxycontin, more generally oxycodone, is an opioid used to treat moderate to severe pain. Adderall is a stimulant most commonly associated with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder that increases the release of hormones to affect the cardiovascular system and reinforce rewarding behaviors. Both can be highly addictive. Oxycontin gives relief, relaxation and a high; Adderall gives a feeling of euphoria.

pulpit

A raised platform or desk from which sermons are delivered.

The Sentinel

A daily newspaper that serves Carlisle and Cumberland counties in Pennsylvania.

“There it is, baby!”

When Rafael reveals that he is sober, he shows Jason a medallion — an unofficial token that is part of recovery culture. Medallions are common to participants of programs like Alcoholics Anonymous, a 12-step program where former alcoholics counsel and mentor those working toward sobriety. Medallions may include a logo, a slogan or how long a member has been sober.

“Top Chef”

A reality TV competition that premiered in 2006. A group of chefs face off in a series of cooking challenges, first in a round to win immunity and then in an elimination round where they present their dishes to a rotating panel of judges and the show’s host, Padma Lakshmi.

twitchy

Irregular twitching or jerking in the muscles due to prolonged use of opioids like heroin and morphine.

“Viva la Resistencia!”

A Spanish phrase meaning “Long live the resistance!”

white supremacist tattoos

A complex series of numbers and symbols — especially the Celtic cross, swastika and runic alphabet — used to convey the supremacy of white people. For further examples, see guides at the [Southern Poverty Law Center](#) and [Anti-Defamation League](#).

Wonder Bread

A brand of processed, soft white bread that debuted in the 1930s as the first prepackaged bread that was sold presliced.

PHOTO: ANDREW VEENSTRA AND JOHANNA DAY IN FLOYD’S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)



Staging a Sandwich Shop



PHOTO: DAME JASMINE HUGHES, JOHN EARL JELKS AND REZA SALAZAR IN FLOYD'S (T CHARLES ERICKSON)

Scenic designer Laura Jellinek's onstage kitchen was specifically designed to support live sandwich-making and includes a mix of commercial appliances and modified work tables resourced from auctions and Craigslist or borrowed from Bartmann Group — Kim Bartmann's restaurant group in Minneapolis. Sound, props, special effects and the backstage crew worked together to create various cooking illusions and seamlessly orchestrate the aromas and culinary chaos onstage.

Because the business of food prep requires that ingredients are torn, chopped and diced, the production used real food versus prop food materials, which would need to be thrown out after each use. During both rehearsals and performances, most of the fresh ingredients and food prepared onstage were composted.

- 1 Sink and Undercounter Dish Table**
Borrowed from the Bartmann Group. The scene shop added a new sprayer faucet and installed plumbing so it functioned like a real sink onstage.
- 2 Undercounter Dishwasher**
Purchased on Craigslist. A special effect mimicked the steam that occurs after a washing cycle.
- 3 Handwashing Sink**
Purchased at an auction. The plumbing was installed by the scene shop.
- 4 Prep Counter and Work Tables**
The prep counter was purchased at an auction, and the work tables were purchased new and modified for the production with additional shelves, feet on the table legs and a specialized tray holder.
- 5 Strip Warmer**
Purchased at an auction. The lighting crew attached LED lights to mimic the heating element.
- 6 Undercounter Fridge**
Borrowed from the Bartmann Group. The lighting crew installed a light fixture for effect because commercial appliances don't have internal lights like home appliances.
- 7 Convection Oven**
Purchased at an auction. Another light fixture was installed inside for effect.
- 8 Cheese Melter**
Sourced from an online restaurant vendor. The lighting crew created an internal lighting effect to mimic heating elements and a smoke effect for burning toast.
- 9 Fryer**
Purchased at an auction. After a deep clean, it housed the machinery that generated the fryer's steam and sound effects.
- 10 Griddle**
Purchased new. Fun fact: It actually works. [G](#)

For Further Reading and Understanding

PLAYS BY LYNN NOTTAGE

Crumbs From the Table of Joy and Other Plays, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2003.

Intimate Apparel and Fabulation, or The Re-Education of Undine, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006.

Ruined, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009.

By the Way, Meet Vera Stark, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2013.

One More River to Cross: A Verbatim Fugue, New York: Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 2015.

Sweat, New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2017.

Mlima's Tale (to be released October 2019; currently available for preorder).

OTHER WORKS BY LYNN NOTTAGE

"Give Again?" *How Long Is Never?: Darfur — A Response*, edited by Tricycle Theatre, London: Josef Weinberger, Ltd., 2007.

"Banana Beer Bath," *A Memory, a Monologue, a Rant and a Prayer*, edited by Eve Ensler and Mollie Doyle, New York: Villard Books, 2007.

"A Stone's Throw," *Antigone Project: A Play in Five Parts*, edited by Caridad Svich, et al., New York: NoPassport Press, 2009.

"The Odds," *Decade: Twenty New Plays About 9/11 and Its Legacy*, London: Nick Hern Books, 2011.

"Lynn Nottage: The First Time I Truly Faced My Fear of Driving," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2017.

BOOKS

Jocelyn L. Buckner, editor, *A Critical Companion to Lynn Nottage*, England: Routledge, 2016.

FILM AND TELEVISION

This Is Reading (Market Road Films, 2018)

A documentary about the performance installation created by Lynn Nottage and a team of artists in an abandoned railroad station in Reading, Pennsylvania. The piece weaves resident stories into one cohesive and celebratory compelling tale of the city.

During rehearsals, the cast and creative team discussed their favorite films and TV shows to help inspire the characters' spiritual love of food:

Jiro Dreams of Sushi (Netflix, 2011)

A documentary on 85-year-old sushi master Jiro Ono, his renowned Tokyo restaurant and his relationship with his son and eventual heir, Yoshikazu.

"Chef's Table" (Netflix, 2015 – present)

Some of the most renowned chefs in the world share their deeply personal stories, inspirations and unique styles while preparing a creation of their own design. Be sure to watch the first episode of season three featuring Jeong Kwan, who infuses her vegan Korean food with spiritual energy.

"Salt, Fat, Acid, Heat" (Netflix, 2018)

Based on the bestselling book by chef and food writer Samin Nosrat, this four-part series chronicles the four foundations of flavor: salt in Japan, fat in Italy, acid in Yucatán and heat in California.

"Ugly Delicious" (Netflix, 2018 – present)

Celebrity chef David Chang and his friends set off on globetrotting adventures to tell the cross-cultural histories of the world's favorite comfort foods.