

# Born Yesterday

by Garson Kanin



## Education Mini-Pack

14 JANUARY – 25 FEBRUARY

Southbank Theatre, The Sumner

### About the Play

World War II has just ended and junkyard tycoon Harry Brock is settling into his swank hotel in Washington DC, ready to grease the palms of crooked US Senators. He's set to win over Congress, but soon realises his girlfriend, Billie Dawn, may not fit in with the socially and politically elite. Enter Paul Verrall, a charming young reporter who is hired as Billie's tutor. As the lessons begin, so does a burgeoning romance and a plot to foil Harry's dodgy dealings.

### About the Playwright

Garson Kanin's magnum opus, *Born Yesterday*, opened on Broadway in 1946 and ran for 1,642 performances. His portrayal of corruption in Congress was considered brazen and scathing, and his social critiques of the time landed him in hot water during Senator McCarthy's Red Scare investigations. The impetus for Kanin's criticism of Washington DC was never made crystal clear, however his participation in WWII had an unquestionable impact. In 1941, Kanin's directing career was gaining momentum at legendary Hollywood Studio RKO, until he was suddenly enlisted into the Army Signal Corps. He was then transferred to Washington DC and then to London, where he participated in the production of propaganda war films. It was during the bombing blitz over London in 1941, in a hotel room with his first wife (Broadway star Ruth Gordon) that Kanin penned his first draft of *Born Yesterday*.

### Cast

**Mrs Hedges / Helen / Manicurist** Heidi Arena

**Ed Devery** Tyler Coppin

**Harry Brock** Russell Dykstra

**Eddie Brock** Chris Fortuna

**Bellhop / Bootblack / Waiter** Josh Gates

**Paul Verrall** Joel Jackson

**Senator Norval Hedges / Assistant Manager / Barber**

Richard Piper

**Billie Dawn** Christie Whelan Browne

### Production

**Director** Dean Bryant

**Set & Costume Designer** Dale Ferguson

**Lighting Designer** Matt Scott

**Composer & Sound Designer** Mathew Frank

**Voice & Dialect Coach** Leith McPherson

**Choreographer** Andrew Hallsworth

**Fight Choreographer** Felicity Steel

**Stage Manager** Julia Smith

**Assistant Stage Manager** Meg Richardson

### Genre

Classic Broadway comedy

### Running Time

Approximately 2hrs including interval



Turn the page for activities, and discussions.

## Before the show



Read our articles about the political climate of Washington DC in the late 40s, and the big business of scrap metal in post-WWII USA at [mtc.com.au/backstage](https://mtc.com.au/backstage)

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The play begins with a self-made millionaire going to the US capital to lobby politicians. Have a class discussion about the intersection of business and politics in contemporary society.

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See the *Born Yesterday* team prepare for the show in our rehearsal gallery at [mtc.com.au/backstage](https://mtc.com.au/backstage)

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## Post-show Activities



Dean Bryant (Director) describes *Born Yesterday* as 'a play written seventy years ago with ideas as hot as those in the op-ed pages now'. Discuss the play's relevance to politics on global and local scale. Read more from Dean Bryant at [mtc.com.au/backstage](https://mtc.com.au/backstage)

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- Have a class debate based on these two quotes from the play:
    - 'A world full of ignorant people is too dangerous to live in.' – Paul Verrall
    - 'I'm stupid and I like it ... I'm happy. I got everything I want.' – Billie Dawn
  - Christie Whelan Browne (Billie) says of her character: 'A massive shift occurs in this seemingly simple woman over the course of the play. She literally educates herself into becoming a brilliantly smart citizen, turning the tables on the men who would keep her in her place. She ends up taking full control of herself and her position in the world.' **Discuss** the portrayal of women in the script, and in contemporary society.
  - Think about this moment in the play:
    - DEVERY: What if I told you this whole operation is strictly according to law? ...
    - PAUL: Then I'd say the law needs revision.In pairs, use these lines as the start of an improvisation about an issue you care about.
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- Research the lyrics to *Anything Goes* by Cole Porter. Why did the playwright include references to this song in the play? How else did Mathew Frank (Composer and Sound Designer) incorporate music into the play?
  - Compare and contrast *Born Yesterday* with *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, and the film *Legally Blonde*.
  - Write an epilogue for the play. What do Billie and Paul do next? What happens to Brock?
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Think about the set and costume design by Dale Ferguson. How did these stagecraft elements support the play's themes? Watch a behind-the-scenes video at [mtc.com.au/backstage](https://mtc.com.au/backstage)

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Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges the Yalukitj Willam Peoples of the Boon Wurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which Southbank Theatre and MTC HQ stand, and we pay our respects to Melbourne's First Peoples, to their ancestors past and present, and to our shared future.



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MTC Education

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