Resource Guide

This resource guide serves as an educational starting point to understanding and enjoying George Axelrod’s play *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* With this in mind, please note that the interpretations of the theatrical work may differ from the original source content.
Performances

February 14 - 16
7 p.m.
February 17
2 p.m.

High School Preview Performances

February 14 & 15
1 p.m.

Dr. W.W. O’Donnell Performing Arts Center
Brenham, Texas

Tickets can be purchased in advance online at
www.blinn.edu/BoxOffice, by calling 979-830-4024,
or by emailing BoxOffice@blinn.edu

Directed by
Brad Nies

Technical Theatre Direction by
Kevin Patrick

Costume, Makeup, and Hair Design by
Jennifer Patrick

Produced by Special Arrangement with
Samuel French, Inc.

TCCSTA Play Festival Entry

Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter is Blinn College-Brenham’s entry to the 2019 Texas Community College Speech and Theatre Association Play Festival. This state-wide organization has been actively enriching the lives of Texas Community College students since 1922. The annual Play Festival celebrates the art of theatre in an atmosphere of friendliness and respect and provides an opportunity for two-year colleges to share their work in a festival setting, receiving awards and important feedback from educated theatre critics.
George Axelrod was born in New York City on June 9, 1922. After serving in World War II, he wrote radio program scripts for such comedians as Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin. He wrote his play *The Seven Year Itch* in 1952 which was an overnight success. His second play, *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*, ran for more than a year on Broadway and starred Jane Mansfield as movie sex symbol Rita Marlowe. His script for Truman Capote’s *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* was nominated for an Academy Award, and he wrote the screenplay for the film *The Manchurian Candidate* in 1962. George Axelrod died of heart failure in 2003 at his home in Los Angeles.

**Synopsis**

When a mild-mannered reporter, George MacCauley, comes to interview movie goddess Rita Marlowe, he meets a high-powered agent who, for successive ten percents of his soul, arranges for Rita to fall madly in love with him. But after winning an Oscar for Best Screenplay, George finds he must free himself from Hollywood and the Devil in this hilarious satire of the motion picture film industry.
**The Broadway Play (1955)**

*Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* opened at the Belasco Theatre in New York City on October 13, 1955. The cast included such comic actors as Orson Bean, Walter Matthau, and Jayne Mansfield. It moved to the Shubert Theatre on July 9, 1956 where is played until November 10th of that year. Mansfield received the 1956 Theatre World Award for her performance as motion picture sex symbol and movie studio owner Rita Marlowe.

**The Film Version (1957)**

Directed by Frank Tashlin and released on July 29, 1957, the screen version of *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* starred such veteran actors as Tony Randall, Joan Blondell, Groucho Marx, and Jayne Mansfield who revived her role of Rita Marlow. The film also featured Mansfield’s then-husband, Mickey Hargitay, as Marlowe’s boyfriend Bobo Brannigan. Rewritten to be a satire of the television industry, playwright George Axelrod refused to see the film as the movie studio allowed Tashlin to completely change the story. The movie was nominated for a Golden Globe (Best Motion Picture Actor-Tony Randall) and for the Writers’ Guild of America (Best Written American Comedy.)
The Basis for the Play Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?

George Axelrod’s play *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?* is a Faustian story based on the German legend of Dr. Faust. In the legend, Faust is a highly successful, but unhappy, scholar who makes a deal with the Devil. The evil bargain includes the granting of magical powers to Faust for a set number of years in exchange for his soul. When the years are up, the Devil appears to Faust to enslave him forever.

The following works are just a few of the theatrical interpretations of this famous tale:

*Faust: The Third Part of the Tragedy* (1862) by Friedrich Theodor Vischer
*The Death of Doctor Faustus* (1925) by Michel de Ghelderode
*Mephisto* (1933) Klaus Mann
*Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (1938) by Gertrude Stein
*Doctor Faustus* (1979) by Don Nigro
*Faustus* (2004) by David Mamet
*Wittenberg* (2008) by David Davalos
*Faust* (2009) by Edgar Brau
*Faust 3* (2016) by Peter Schumann

The Legend of Faust in Films

The legend of Faust can also be found in several motion pictures:

*The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1945)
*Damn Yankees* (1958)
*The Little Shop of Horrors* (1960)
*Bedazzled* (1967)
*Rosemary’s Baby* (1968)
*The Witches of Eastwick* (1987)
*Death Becomes Her* (1992)
*The Devil’s Advocate* (1997)
Themes in Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?

The following are some of the themes seen in George Axelrod’s satire:

**Power:** George’s bargain with the Devil is motivated by the lack of power and control he has in his life. By the end of the play, however, he realizes that in order to gain power, he will ultimately have to relinquish it back to the Devil.

**Pride:** Michael Freeman, a Los Angeles-based playwright, represents the deadly sin of pride. He has had one successful play, and he is afraid that his second play will flop. As a result of his fear of failure, he simply refuses to write any more dramas.

**Religion:** At the beginning of the play, George admits that he does not believe that people have souls. His lack of religious conviction makes him a prime candidate to be taken advantage of by Lucifer.

**Sexuality:** Movie star Rita Marlowe represents the deadly sin of lust. Her blatant use of sex appeal to get what she wants is indicated by her habit of openly discussing sexual matters. She is also used as a pawn by the Devil when he wills her to fall in love with George.

**Wealth:** At the beginning of the play, George asks for a million dollars. Once that is granted to him, he finds he must ask for more things in order to explain his sudden windfall. He eventually becomes the vice-president of Rita’s movie studio, thus increasing his wealth and the power he so badly desires.

Satire in Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?

Satire is defined as the use of humor or stereotyping to criticize the stupidity of a group of people. With this in mind, here are some stereotypes the audience will see while viewing Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter? Remember...stereotypes are not always true!

**All Writers are Alcoholics:** Michael Freeman, the story’s failure-fearing playwright, is very emotional and drowns his sorrows in liquor to deal with it.

**Blonde Actresses are Dumb:** Rita Marlowe, the story’s blonde bombshell, is portrayed as an incredibly sexy woman with absolutely no brains.

**All Talent Agents are Unscrupulous:** Talent agents are seen in this story as manipulative and unethical...even to the point of one of them being the Devil!
*86 to 1: Michael tells Rita he will make her martini “86 to 1.” The 86 refers to the 86 proof gin he intends to use, and the 1 refers to the 1 splash of dry vermouth he will add.

*Coronet Theatre: A Hollywood-based regional theatre that was built in 1947 and served as a venue for famous plays in the mid-20th century.

*Suspants: A panty and garter combination used in place of a girdle or garter belt to hold women’s stockings up.

*The Ritz in Paris: A reference to the Ritz Bar which opened in Paris, France in 1921. Several famous American artists frequented this bar to escape prohibition.

*Pantages Theatre: A Hollywood-based theatre that was built in 1930 and hosted the American motion picture industry’s annual Academy Awards from 1949 to 1959.

*Ricardo Cortez: An American actor and director who was an amateur boxer and a runner for Wall Street before going into the film industry.

*Billy Wilder: An Austrian-born American film director and screenwriter best known for his films *Some Like It Hot*, *The Apartment*, and *The Seven Year Itch*.

*Leon Spiegelgass: An American film producer and screenwriter. He is best known for his musical films *Silk Stockings*, *Pepe*, and *Gypsy*.

*Richard Brooks: An American screenwriter nominated for eight Oscars in his career. Brooks is known for his screenplays of *Blackboard Jungle* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*.

*Daniel Taradash: An American screenwriter known for *From Here to Eternity*, *Don’t Bother to Knock*, *Picnic*, and *Bell, Book, and Candle*.

*Milton Sperling: An American film producer and screenwriter who won the Academy Award in 1955 for *The Court-Martial of Billy Mitchell*.

*Bad Day at Black Rock*: A 1955 thriller film starring Spencer Tracy and Robert Ryan.

*Cedars of Lebanon*: Originally named Cedars-Sinai, this Los Angeles-based hospital moved to Fountains Avenue and changed its name in 1930.

*Herbie Flam: An American tennis player who was ranked as the World No. 4 amateur by British Sports Journalist Lance Tingay in 1955.


*Buddy Adler: An American film producer, as well as production head at 20th Century-Fox studios during the 1950s.*
Hey, Teachers!

This theatre is a proud member of the Theatre Collective of the Brazos Valley. This organization has been kind enough to develop the following rules of theatre etiquette. Please review these rules with your students to assure that all audience members enjoy the show!

1. Be on time by being in your seat 10 minutes before the performance is scheduled to begin. Live theatre begins at the published performance time with a darkened theatre and actors frequently in the aisles ready for entrances. Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of the theatre and in locations chosen by the theatre.

2. Remain seated until intermission and until curtain calls are completed to allow performers free access to the exits. If an emergency requires leaving your seat, please remain outside the theatre until allowed to return by the theatre’s volunteer staff.

3. Finish and/or discard all food and drinks before entering the theatre. Community theatres in the Brazos Valley use volunteers to clean debris from the theatre and restrooms. Please be respectful of these volunteers by disposing of your own trash.

4. Silence or turn off all electronic devices, including cell phones, beepers, and watch alarms. You are encouraged to share your theatre experience via social media, but you must refrain from sharing or texting during the performance. The glow from all media is easily discernable in the dark theatre and is distracting to your neighbors and the actors.

5. Video and flash photography of live performances is not allowed. Community theatres in the Brazos Valley do not purchase the rights to tape live performances. Actors will generally be available for photographs after the show.

6. Tickets and programs will be provided for all students who need to receive credit for attending theatre performances. The Theatre Collective of the Brazos Valley provides a stamp for proof of attendance after every performance.

7. To allow all patrons easy access to theatre seating, saving more than one seat for a latecomer or volunteer is not allowed.

8. Please refrain from talking during the performance.

9. Your courtesy is much appreciated as it allows for the ultimate experience of theatre productions for all our patrons.
Sources


Everett Collection. (1954). George Axelrod Seated at a Typewriter [Photograph]


Sources

Internet Source, www.imdb.com, Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?


Internet Source, www.samuelfrench.com, Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?


Internet Source, www.wikimapia.org, Cedars of Lebanon Hospital Building.


