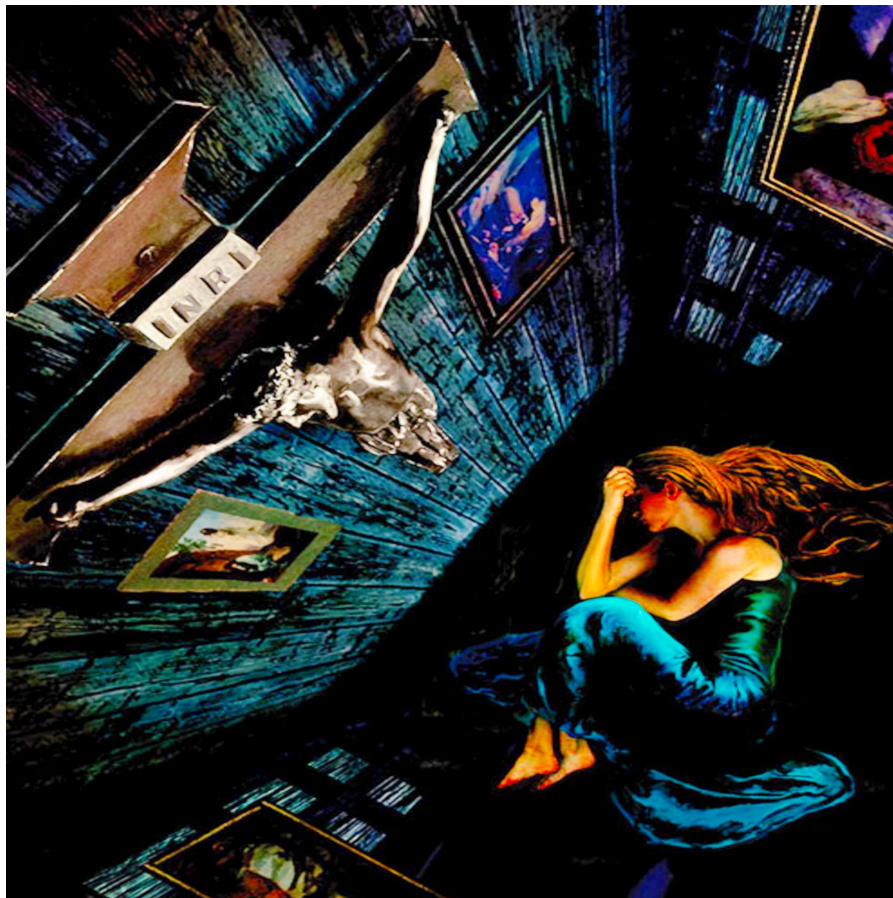


Carrie: The Musical

The Dramaturgy Packet

Compiled and Drafted by Lexi Silva, Production Dramaturg

CW: violence, abuse, mental illness, blood



Please direct any additional dramaturgical inquiries to alesilva@iu.edu

IU Department of Theatre, Drama and Contemporary Dance
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Background on *Carrie* as a Cultural Phenomenon:

Carrie: The Musical derives its core story from the Stephen King novel *Carrie* and pulls from iconic imagery presented in the 1976 film of the same title directed by Brian De Palma and starring Sissy Spacek. A triple adaptation means that there's been room for artistic collaborators across mediums to contribute to the characterization of Carrie White and her story. In order to have a fuller awareness of how our production hopes to frame this story, it seems worthwhile to examine the evolution of how *Carrie* has shifted across time, page, screen and stage. In this first section, I'll note major nuances in each major rendition of *Carrie*.

KING'S INSPIRATION for *CARRIE*:

On King's website, it is stated that:

The character "Carrie" was a composite of two girls Stephen knew during high school. The story is largely about how women find their own channels of power, and what men fear about women and women's sexuality. "Carrie White is a sadly mis-used teenager, an example of the sort of person whose spirit is so often broken for good in that pit of man- and woman-eaters that is your normal suburban high school. But she's also Woman, feeling her powers for the first time and, like Samson, pulling down the temple on everyone in sight at the end of the book." (King)

In the introduction to the *Carrie* audiobook (which can be acquired via Audible), King notes that his early and challenging start as a writer led him on a long adventure of submitting short stories in hopes of being published and teaching high school English to support his family. In the winter of 1972, King got the idea for a short story about a girl with psychokinetic powers inspired by the story of a poltergeist in a suburban home. Upon closer examination, there was speculation that the "haunting" seemed to have less to do with a supernatural presence and much more to do with a teenage girl inhabiting the home. This led him to draw connections in adjacent research about telekinetic abilities and children, especially girls on the cusp of puberty.

King goes on to state that Carrie White was inspired by two young women (who King names “Tina White” and “Sandra Irving” to protect each woman’s privacy) he knew in high school that suffered social hardships akin to those that Carrie experiences in the novel. One woman “Tina”, King describes as pudgy and backwoods, a clear outcast, who wore the same clothes to school day after day. When “Tina” finally came to school in new clothes, he notes in detail that she seemed so hopeful at school only to be met with fierce repudiation from her classmates. “Sandra” is described as having a strange and very religious upbringing. King describes in detail an image of a gruesome crucifix emblem, complete with a suffering Christ. “Sandra” was an outcast because she wore modest clothes, had epilepsy and was simply discernibly strange in a way that only high school kids can sense with certainty. Neither of these women made it to thirty, King notes. *Carrie* is the product of King’s imagining a world in which it might be possible for women like Tina and Sandra, tormented as they were, to have the ability to seek vengeance on their tormentors.

THE NOVEL:

Stephen King’s *Carrie* (1974) is set in Chamberlain, Maine (a real town that King fictionalized in his novel) in the year 1979. The novel centers around Carrietta White, a shy high school girl whose daily life is plagued with abuse at home and at school. King’s Carrie is characterized as a naive, slightly overweight* sixteen year old who struggles to navigate social situations due to her nearly cloistered upbringing. Her mother Margaret fears Carrie’s potential, alluding to signs of Carrie’s **telekinesis (the supposed ability to move objects at a distance by mental power or other nonphysical means)**, and abuses her physically and mentally in order to subdue her daughter. Margaret primarily uses her extreme religious beliefs as a basis for harming Carrie.

Major plot points:

- Carrie gets her period at school and is ruthlessly made fun of because she struggles to understand what is happening to her body. This moment incites a clear activation of her powers and a memory from her childhood in which she first showed signs of being telekinetic.

- The gym teacher (Rita Desjardin, in the musical named Miss Gardner) reprimands Sue and Chris. Chris's additional defiance gets her suspended from school and the prom, which catalyzes her determination to seek revenge on Carrie by joining forces with her boyfriend Billy.
- Sue regrets her behavior towards Carrie in the locker room and convinces her boyfriend Tommy to ask Carrie to the prom.
- Carrie is suspicious but accepts Tommy's prom proposal and decides to sew herself a dress.
- The prom goes well until Chris and Billy dump pig's blood on Carrie as she and Tommy accept their titles of Prom King and Queen.
- The force of the bucket kills Tommy, Carrie is deeply humiliated and storms out of the event.
- Carrie remembers her powers and wreaks horrific vengeance on her classmates, but the violence is not contained and she ends up murdering hundreds of townspeople.
- Carrie comes home to her mother Margaret, who is convinced that Carrie is possessed by Satan. Margaret reveals that Carrie is potentially the product of sexual assault.
- Margaret stabs Carrie, which causes Carrie to stop Margaret's heart with her mind.
- Carrie encounters Chris and Billy and murders them by telekinetically sending their car into a wall.
- Sue finds Carrie bleeding, a telepathic conversation ensues between the two. Carrie dies.
- A state of emergency is declared and survivors attempt to relocate.
- Sue writes a memoir about the events that occurred at the prom in 1979.
- A government report reveals that there will be further interrogation regarding others with abilities like Carrie's.
- An Appalachian woman writes about her daughter's powers and alludes to the power being similarly evident in her grandmother.

**This characteristic is only noted as a means of tracing the evolution of portrayals of Carrie across different forms of media over time.*

THE 1976 MOVIE:

Now that the general *Carrie* story has been established in the section above, I want to note how the visualization of the story in this iconic film adaptation has changed the way that what and who we envision when we think of Carrie White:

Sissy Spacek's portrayal of Carrie diverges notably from the description offered by King in his novel. Here we see a plain, thin, haunting but still beautiful young woman hidden in modest clothing that sets her apart from her peers. *This* representation of Carrie is important, partially, because of her beauty (I mean, those *cheekbones*, come ON!).

This Carrie signals something different to an audience that might have otherwise been presented with a woman truer to King's description (which is perhaps more telling about Hollywood casting traditions and white beauty standards than anything else). Spacek's portrayal of Carrie is, in this dramaturg's opinion, a brilliant one. I simply care to call attention to the ways in which shifting the appearance of Carrie also changes the way that we interpret her journey and connect with her character. Think along the lines of that trope in 2000's teen movies when a girl who wore glasses and was already pretty, removed those glasses. The already-pretty-glasses-effect (trademark). *That's* similar to what I'm talking about.

Apart from the ending, this film adaptation adheres fairly closely to the plot of the novel. **In the film, Carrie dies in her home after murdering her mother. Sue comes to leave flowers for Carrie when suddenly an arm reaches up from the rubble.**



Sue wakes up from a
nightmare, *fin*.

THE MUSICAL:

- Opened May 12, 1988 at the Virginia Theater after a four-week run at the Royal Shakespeare Festival in Stratford-Upon-Avon and stayed relatively close to the plot of the film.

- The ending varies from the 2012 version in that the concept of Sue Snell's recollection of events as a framing device for the plot is not yet integrated.
- As you all may know, *Carrie*'s Broadway debut was a historic flop, closing after sixteen previews and five full performances.

For an extensive and fun account of *Carrie*'s legacy on stage, check out the “**Out for Blood**” podcast on Apple, Spotify, or at Broadway Podcast Network, linked here: [Out for Blood: The Story of Carrie the Musical | Broadway Podcast Network](#)

Here is a link to the reviewer's reel for the 1988 production:

📺 CARRIE Broadway '88

THE 2012 REVIVAL (March 1-April 8th, 2012):

- The score and book were revised by original composers Michael Gore and Dean Pitchford, and writer Lawrence D. Cohen.
- Again, it was met with mixed reviews but largely more positive ones than the 1988 production.
- We finally got a cast album!
- After the close of this production, *Carrie* began circulating in high schools and community theaters.

RELIGION (and Margaret White):

Although the specific branch is never clearly defined, it is clear through imagery and contextual clues that Margaret White subscribes to Christianity to the extent of clear extremism. The many crucifix images that permeate the *Carrieverse* perhaps imply a connection to Catholicism, but I recommend taking that specification lightly. At her core, Margaret's interpretation of Christianity paired with her own personal trauma leads her to weaponize religion and use it to abuse Carrie. Margaret fears that Carrie's powers are antithetical to the image of God that she worships, and therefore, unjustly punishes her daughter in response.

Carrie entering the threshold of puberty is deeply threatening to Margaret's convictions about sex and the female body being innately impure. If we consider the novel again for a moment, the spike in Carrie's power that coincides with her first menstruation also foreshadows a grave threat to Margaret.

Let's revisit a key moment of dialogue from the 1976 film that aptly showcases these ideas:



Margaret: I should have killed myself when he put it in me. After the first time, before we were married, Ralph promised never again. He promised, and I believed him. But sin never dies. **Sin never dies.**

At first it was alright. We lived sinlessly. We slept in the same bed, but we never did it. And



then, that night... I saw him lookin' down at me that way. We got down on our knees to pray for strength.

I smelled the whiskey on his breath... Then he took me. He took me, with the stink of filthy roadhouse whiskey on his breath, and I liked it. I liked it!

With all that dirty touchin' and his hands all over me.



I should've given you to God when you were born, but I was weak and backslidin'... And now, the devil has come home.

We'll pray. We'll pray. For the last time we'll **pray.**



At the core of the relationship between Margaret and Carrie is **fear**. Conflict emerges when the power dynamic shifts and Carrie shows signs of growing more dangerous than her mother, marked and heightened by her progression into womanhood.

I recommend watching this brief video essay on the evolution of Margaret White on screen, including key cuts from various film adaptations that showcase her religious fanaticism and its impact on Carrie:

▶ **Carrie: Margaret White Through the Years (1976, 2002, 2013)**

MAINE:

Dude, what's up with Maine? As noted in an earlier section, King likes to pull his stories from his life experiences. **Stephen King grew up in Maine!** The state landscape is haunting, but beautiful. A meeting of lush forests and craggy coastlines. Maine is an especially foggy place, which amplifies the sense of mystery and the supernatural.



The real village of Chamberlain is located near the coast of Maine and currently has a population of **44 people with a median age of 64 years old.**



Check out this link to an interactive map tracking Stephen King’s Maine! The page denotes approximations of where King’s fictional towns might be located and the real places that they are speculated to be based upon: [Stephen King’s Maine: Storymaps](#)

Here’s a list of other King novels set in Maine:

- *Pet Sematary* (1983)
- *Salem’s Lot* (1975)
- *Cujo* (1981)
- *Hearts in Atlantis* (1999)
- *Bag of Bones* (1988)
- *Different Seasons* (1982)
- *Dreamcatcher* (2001)
- *Dolores Claiborne* (1992)
- *It* (1986)

POP CULTURE INSPIRATION:

Lauren has indicated that she is interested in how Carrie’s powerful awakening has a ripple effect on everyone in King’s Chamberlain. Not unlike the modern characterization of superhero universes, what might the world of the musical look like if there is a general understanding that Carrie’s transformation is felt by her peers; the town; the *world* in some small but profound way?

A relevant example in contemporary pop culture is Marvel’s *WandaVision*, a narrative in which Wanda Maximoff (also known as Scarlet Witch) creates an alternate reality to

cope with her tremendous grief in the wake of losing her partner. That artificial reality is based on different eras in the evolution of the American sitcom. Wanda uses her power as a means of exerting control in the face of events and circumstances that make her feel powerless. The series' reliance on popular culture references functions as an accessible framework for a story that is ultimately about a woman realizing and attempting to cope with her power, rage, and pain.

Sound familiar? (Look familiar?)



SPEAKING OF SITCOMS, let's chat about archetypes, shall we?

Our production of *Carrie* is set in high school, in the year 2022; a very contemporary moment for a source material that originates from the 1970s. We are certainly not the first team to attempt such a revamping of this story with a contemporary voice. The CW's *Riverdale* featured a musical episode in which the cast put on *Carrie* for their high school (S2;E18).

This is exciting for several reasons: 1) *Riverdale* is a hugely popular series with a teenage and young adult audience, 2) the show is an edgy, modern imagining of the high school adventures of characters from the popular Archie comics (first published in 1941) and 3) it is a show that features similar high school social archetypes that have danced across stage and screen relentlessly since the mid-20th century.

What is an archetype?

- An archetype can be defined as “a very typical example of a certain person or thing” or “an original that has been imitated”, or even “a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, or mythology.”

Show me the examples, Lexi, we’re already on page 12!

Okay, okay! I’m getting there!

Let’s refer back to our *Riverdale* rabbit-hole! Here’s a photo of the major players in the series (L-R) Jughead Jones, Betty Cooper, Archie Andrews, Veronica Lodge, and Cheryl Blossom.

Their body language in this specific image communicates the classic high school archetype that each embodies. Jughead’s smolder paired with an all-black, rough-looking outfit indicates that he is something of an outcast, bad-boy type. On the far right, Cheryl Blossom’s posture and reach for her hair perhaps communicates pride and vanity (she’s our resident head-cheerleader, mean girl type, so that checks out). Betty and Veronica are strategically placed on either side of Archie, our leading man to communicate not only the love triangle that is central to the comic and television series, but that these two women are on two sides of the spectrum. Betty is a goody-two shoes, girl-next-door, high-achiever type, while Veronica is a bit more confident, outspoken, and defined at least in part by her proximity to her father’s wealth.



***Riverdale*'s representation of modern high school life is fictionalized and heightened, but is not dissimilar to the ways in which our production of *Carrie* attempts to contemporize itself as a means of being more accessible to a young adult cast, and a modern audience.**

Although *Riverdale* serves as a helpful example visually and conceptually for the framing of the characters in this production of *Carrie*, I'd argue that these same archetypes were mega-popularized in the 1980's "brat pack" films, *The Breakfast Club*, *Sixteen Candles*, *Say Anything*, *St. Elmo's Fire* and *Pretty in Pink*, later evolving during the 90's and early 00's movie scene in films such as *10 Things I Hate About You*, *She's All That*, and *Clueless*.

These iconic films about life as a modern high schooler (modern being defined as relative to the moment in which each film came out) continue to impact the fashion, colloquialisms and culture in teen and young adults to this day! I mean, how many of you are in a pseudo-80's, 90's or y2k fashion moment right now?

FYI, "brat pack" refers to a rowdy and ostentatious group of young celebrities, typically movie stars. The term went on to define the group of actors specifically affiliated with the first six films I list above. Specifically, Anthony Michael Hall, Molly Ringwald, Rob Lowe, Andrew McCarthy, Demi Moore, Emilio Estevez, Judd Nelson and Ally Sheedy!



Mental Health in High Schoolers Today:

****Content Warning for the following section:** information relating to mental health crises in young adults. Self-harm, racism, homophobia, teen dating violence.

Seeing as we've spent a good deal of time chatting about fictionalized representations of high school students, let's check in on how **real** high schoolers in the U.S. are doing these days:

According to the CDC's recent report on mental health in adolescents:

- More than 1 in 3 high school students had experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness in 2019, a 40 percent increase since 2009.
- In 2019, approximately 1 in 6 youth reported making a suicide plan in the past year, a 44% increase since 2009.

An excerpt from the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data, Summary & Trends Report 2009-2019 notes the following:

In a number of areas, particularly regarding sexual behavior and high-risk substance use, trends over time are improving and moving in the right direction. **These include declines in the percentage of students who ever had sex, had four or more sex partners, are currently sexually active, or ever used or injected drugs.**

On the other hand, **experiences of violence, such as bullying (both electronically and at school) and [sexual assault], remain high among youth, and trends in these experiences also remain flat. More can be done to create safe environments for youth.**

Some trends are moving in the wrong direction. **Condom use among youth has declined for the past decade, which is cause for concern. As STD rates increase among young people in the US, lack of condom use leaves many adolescents vulnerable to HIV and other STDs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis.**

Of significant concern is that student reports of negative mental health and safety issues continue to increase. A growing percentage of students surveyed reported that **they did not go to school because of safety concerns.**

An increasing percentage of American youth felt sad or hopeless for at least two weeks to the degree that they could not engage in their usual activities.

The percentage of students who seriously considered suicide or made a suicide plan also increased significantly in the last decade. **These trends show that adolescents are critically in need of adult support in addressing safety and mental health issues, problems which are largely beyond an adolescent's control.** While these trends apply to all high school students in the US, closer examination reveals that subsets of students have very different experiences, some better and some worse. (5)

Here is a link to the full report: [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2009-2019](#)

I encourage you to take a breath.

That information is difficult to take in. For those of you on this cast who do not yet feel far removed from your own high school years, it may be difficult to confront these statistics having potentially experienced these things through others or firsthand.

In a show that is partially concerned with what happens when you push people beyond their limits, it is important to acknowledge how that plight is not simply compartmentalized in the realm of *Carrie*, but is a phenomenon that has incredibly real implications for adolescents and young adults **right now**.

Okay, so a lot has happened.

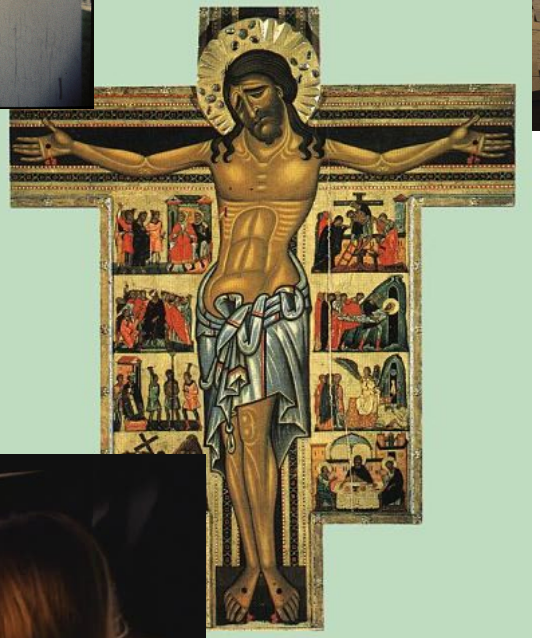
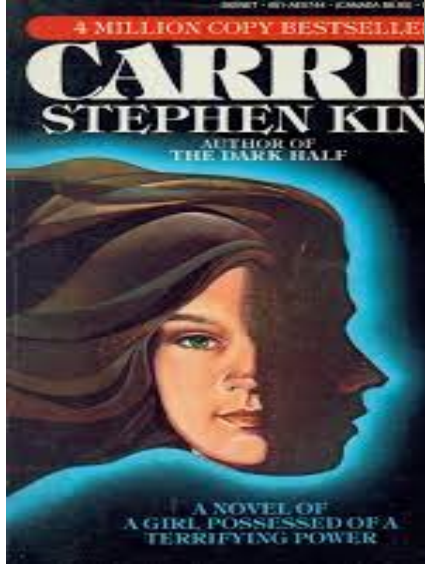
I've offered you a lot to think about.
You may be asking yourselves: **"So what, Lexi?"**

"What am I to do with all these sort-of-interesting but sometimes seemingly marginal lines of inquiry into the *Carrieverse*?"

Well, here's the thing about a dramaturgy packet. **It's not meant to be a homework assignment, it's meant to be a resource.**

My hope is that there is information in this packet that ultimately aids in the development of your work in this production process. The whole point is to give you access to information that helps you make **tangible connections between this musical and the world you're performing it for.**

Let's close out with a mood board:



*Wouldst thou like
to live deliciously?*

