

Porridgegate—A Study Guide

- 1) Why do you think the play is called *Porridgegate*? The character names Woodsman, Bernadette, and Kitty Saltine are inspired by the names of real people—can you discover whom? How are these characters like the real people who inspired them? How are they different? Can you find other characters whose names are inspired by real (or fictional) people? What is appropriate about the name Ursula?
- 2) Comedy sometimes involves action that contradicts our expectations. How does the scene in the Locks' household on p. 4–5 contradict expectations? How would you expect that scene to read in a traditional fairy tale?
- 3) What two classic fairy tales are woven together in *Porridgegate*? What do these two stories have in common? How does the playwright use these common elements to connect the two stories? How does he change the stories from the originals? What two stories do you think would work well together? Why?
- 4) Consider the names of the three pigs? Would you describe any of them as ironic? Why or why not? What is irony? Can you come up with an ironic name for a fairy tale character? Do you think an ironic name is funnier than a non-ironic name? Why or why not?
- 5) Some comedy uses stereotypes to set up certain expectations about how characters will act. What is a stereotype? What stereotypes about law enforcement officers are evident in the characters of Sherlock McGarrett and Danielle Hoover? When you first meet these characters on p. 5, which of them do you suspect will be a better police officer? Why?
- 6) Some of the elements of a crime drama are: a crime, victims, suspects, evidence, and detectives. Do you think that *Porridgegate* is a crime drama? Why or why not? If so, how does it differ from traditional television crime dramas? How serious would the crimes committed in *Porridgegate* be considered in the real world? How serious are they in the world of the play?
- 7) Four members of the cast of *Porridgegate* are reporters—Katie and Matt work in television, while Woodsman and Bernadette write for a newspaper. How does the reporting in these two branches of the press differ? How is it portrayed in *Porridgegate*? What elements of television reporting are exaggerated for comic effect? Which of the four do you think is the best journalist? Why?
- 8) What does Builda Bear mean by his line on p. 12.24, “She’s putting her paws in the river but she’s not catching any fish”? Why is this way of expressing this sentiment especially appropriate for a bear? Can you think of a funny way to express the same sentiment if the character were a horse? A dog? A pig? An anteater?

9) What is amusing about the titles of the songs that Oscar Meyer and Jimmy Dean mention on p. 13.14–16? Can you come up with other song titles that would be similarly amusing? How about movie titles or book titles?

10) One of the plotlines in *Porridgegate* involves not a crime but a competition. What is this plotline? In what other ways does it differ from the other plotlines? How does the playwright connect it to the two crime-related plotlines? Which of the three major plotlines do you find most relevant to your own life?

11) How do Tracy and Lindsey talk Sandy into changing majors on p. 16? How could you use this same technique to talk one of your friends into doing something? Do you think it would work? Has anyone ever used this technique on you? Why do you think it works on Sandy?

12) Why do you think Lou the UPS Guy becomes suddenly rude to Bernadette on p. 18.32? If you were (or are) playing the part of Lou, do you think it would be better, at this point, to try to hint to the audience your involvement in the porridge plot or hide it? How might you perform this line differently depending on this decision?

13) Were you surprised when Goldie Locks was arrested on p. 22? Why or why not? Did you think she was guilty? In the original tale of “Goldie Locks and the Three Bears,” Goldie is, in fact, the one who stole porridge. Do you think the audience will suspect her because of this? How do you think it feels to Goldie to be falsely accused?

14) On p. 28.27–33, we learn that Papa and Mama Locks often say the opposite of what they mean—saying positive things rather than negative things. Why do you think they do this? Is it funny when they do so? Why or why not? Do you know anyone who is always positive even if it means they have to lie about things? What sort of things would you say if you followed Papa and Mama Locks’ rule?

15) On p. 30 we finally discover the secret behind the missing porridge. Do you think the audience will be surprised? What hints have there been throughout the play about what is really going on? In mystery writing a “red herring” is something that distracts the reader from the real solution. Are there red herrings in *Porridgegate*? What are they?

16) The solution to the missing porridge is followed quickly by the solution to the mystery of the blown down houses. Why do you think this information follows so quickly? What clues to the real identity of “Alfred” did the playwright give earlier in the play?

17) The end of a play or mystery usually involves the resolution of all the different conflicts in the story. How are all the conflicts in *Porridgegate* resolved? How does the playwright do this quickly? Are there any conflicts that are not resolved? In what way does the play end exactly the same way it began? Is this funny? Why or why not?