

Unwrapped Study Guide

1) *Unwrapped* is a comedy inspired by low-budget horror movies of the 1930s. The most famous of these movies starred monsters such as Frankenstein's Monster, the Wolfman, the Mummy, and Dracula, most of whom appear in *Unwrapped*. The movies were filmed in black and white and were usually very dark, with many scenes taking place at night. Vansyltrania, where *Unwrapped* is set, is a transposition of the word Transylvania—the region in Eastern Europe where Dracula is supposed to have lived. Find some plot summaries of horror movies from this period to become familiar with the genre. If you can rent a DVD or video of one of these movies, watch it.

2) *Unwrapped* is not a parody of a particular movie, but rather a comedy based on the idea of an incompetent crew trying to make a typical 1930s horror film. In what ways does the creative team manifest its incompetence? Why is this funnier than if a highly competent team were making a movie?

3) Several of the names of characters in *Unwrapped* are parodies of the names of real Hollywood personalities or screen characters. Can you find out who these people were: Hedda Hopper, David O. Selznick, Eric von Stroheim, Marcus Welby and Norma Desmond. Does knowing about the original personality or character make the parody funnier? Why or why not?

4) In his speech beginning on page 4, line 25, Dimwit describes the hero of his new movie in terms that should remind the audience of another film hero. How does Dimwit's hero's name (North Dakota Smith) parody the name of this famous hero? In what other ways are the two characters similar? How do they differ?

5) The audition scene (p. 4–7) presents a comic commentary on many types of actors—the actor with stage fright, the actor constantly asking about his motivation, the actor who gives all his lines in a dull monotone. Notice how the playwright exaggerates these traits for comic effect. How could actors further exaggerate these traits? The final sequence of this scene (at the top of page 7) uses lyrics from a Broadway musical. Can you find the source of these lyrics? Why might the playwright allude to this particular show in this context?

6) Some scenes with Ivan Hoo (for instance page 8 and page 43) use the sound of his name and his organization (VAT) to create comic confusion. Why is this funny? For an extreme (and famous) example of this type of humor, find a copy of the Abbott and Costello routine "Who's on First." How does this routine resemble Ivan Hoo's conversations? Can you find another way in which Abbott and Costello are connected to *Unwrapped*?

7) Comedies usually depend on a contrast between zany characters and "straight" or normal characters. Who would you say are the "straight" characters in *Unwrapped*? Why? In what ways does their behavior differ from the comic characters? Which type of character do you imagine it would be more difficult to portray on stage? Why?

8) Lines are often funny because they are unexpected. A scene or speech sets up a character to react in a certain way, and she reacts in a way completely different from the way we thought she would. An example of this occurs at the bottom of page 15 and top of page 16. Lacy says she is scared and, after Jack lists all the reasons she *should* be scared, she surprises us by saying “No, I’m scared I might catch a heel in the floor of this ancient tomb.” Can you find other examples of unexpected lines used for comic effect?

9) There are many small references to popular culture in *Unwrapped*. Can you trace the origins of some of these bold-faced allusions: “Ivan Hoo had to import a wagonload of marshmallows from **Freedonia**”; King **Ramalama Dingdong**; Princess **Do Wa Diddy**; “The murder was committed by **Professor Plum in the conservatory with a lead pipe**”; “**Miss Leighton**? Get me Otto von Strongman.” (The last one is *really* obscure!)

10) Another type of stage comedy is called the “running gag.” This is when a piece of comedy is repeated over and over, with the effect that it not only becomes funnier each time, but the audience comes to anticipate it with some glee. Can you find examples of running gags in *Unwrapped*? How about in your favorite television comedy show?

11) *Unwrapped* makes fun of some of the conventions of old horror movies. An example of this is on page 34, when dramatic music plays after Lacy’s murder is announced and Chief Inspector Idiot goes on to explain that dramatic music must mean murder. Dramatic music equaling something bad happening is part of the language of film that we, as audiences, have all come to accept. What other examples of this sort of cinematic shorthand can you think of? What other horror movie conventions does *Unwrapped* poke fun at?

12) The sight gag is one of the oldest comic techniques. A sight gag is a visual joke, one that does not require dialogue. An example would be the way Lacy Donohue looks wearing Groucho glasses on page 33. Can you find other examples of sight gags in *Unwrapped*. If you were directing the play, can you think of sight gags not specifically mentioned in the script that you might add?

13) The character of Chief Inspector Idiot is inspired by one of the most famous screen comic characters of all—Inspector Clouseau as portrayed by Peter Sellers in the *Pink Panther* films. What can you find out about Clouseau, either through research or by watching one of the films? How is his character similar to Chief Inspector Idiot? Why is Clouseau so funny? What tips can the actor playing Chief Inspector Idiot take from Peter Sellers’ performance?

14) The difference between a comedy and a tragedy is often the last few pages of the script. If, for instance Romeo and Juliet had not had a communications problem late in the play, their story might have ended happily. Although there are many funny lines and gags in *Unwrapped*, most of the story is about people getting murdered. The plot seems like a tragedy. How is the plot turned around to a comic plot in the end? Can you think of other ways this might have been achieved? What changes would you have to make to *Unwrapped* to make it a tragedy (like many horror films)?