

SWEAT

by Lynn Nottage

EDUCATION PACKET

ABOUT THE PLAY

Play Synopsis

Filled with warm humor and tremendous heart, *SWEAT* tells the story of a group of friends who have spent their lives sharing drinks, secrets, and laughs while working together on the factory floor. But when layoffs and picket lines begin to chip away at their trust, the friends find themselves pitted against each other in a heart-wrenching fight to stay afloat.

Major Themes

- Deindustrialization
- Class Struggle
- Race and Racial Division
- The “American Dream”
- Labor Conflicts
- Addiction and Coping
- Identity and Work
- Violence and Trauma

Production Transparency

This production contains strong language, discussions of substance use and addiction (including alcohol and drugs), and depictions of economic hardship, layoffs, and labor conflict. It also includes racial slurs and themes of racism and xenophobia, references to incarceration and the criminal justice system, moments of physical violence and implied assault, and emotionally intense material involving grief, trauma, and regret.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT



Lynn Nottage is a playwright, a screenwriter and installation artist. She is the first, and remains the only, woman to have won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama twice. Her plays have been produced widely in the United States and throughout the world. She is currently an Artistic Associate at the National Theatre in London.

Her play *Sweat* (Pulitzer Prize, Obie Award, Tony Nomination) moved to Broadway after a sold-out run at The Public Theater and the West End in London. It premiered and was commissioned by the Oregon Shakespeare Festival American Revolutions History Cycle/Arena Stage.

To create *Sweat*, Nottage did extensive, immersive dramaturgical research on Reading, Pennsylvania and its industrial work-life culture. She spent more than two years visiting the city and getting to know people there, including factory workers, business leaders, public officials, teachers, social workers, and artists. She got to know a local union leader, Dean Showers, who worked at a steel tubing plant for 38 years. Just like in the play, Showers and about 50 other workers have been locked out of their plant for almost five years.

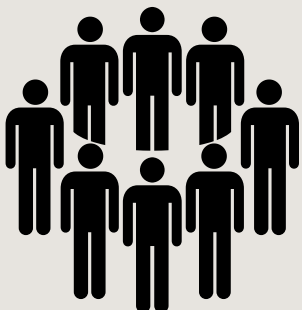
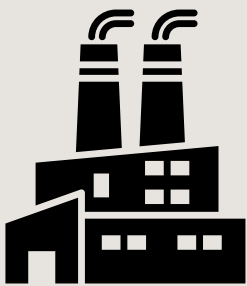
“PEOPLE ALWAYS SAID 'READING WAS ...' AND NO ONE EVER SPOKE OF THEIR CITY IN PRESENT TENSE — THEY ALWAYS SPOKE OF IT IN PAST TENSE. AND THAT REALLY BROKE MY HEART.”

Other Nottage works include *Ruined* (2008), *Intimate Apparel* (2003), *Clyde's* (2021), and the book for *M̄ the Musical* (2021).

TERMS TO KNOW

Deindustrialization

The decline of manufacturing industries and factory jobs in a region or economy. *Sweat* focuses on how deindustrialization affects places like Reading, PA in the 2000s.



Factory Struggle

Companies face pressure to cut costs, increase profits, or compete with cheaper production elsewhere. This often leads to conflict between management and workers over wages, benefits, unions, layoffs, and factory closures.

Relocation of Labor

Jobs move away from older industrial communities to places where labor is cheaper, regulations may be looser, or production is more profitable. This can mean factories moving to the South, overseas, or shifting to nonunionized workforces.

Community Impact

When industrial jobs disappear, the effects spread beyond the factory. Workers lose stable income, local businesses suffer, tax revenue declines, families experience stress, and communities can face long-term economic and social decline.

TERMS TO KNOW

Labor Union

An organized group of workers who advocate and fight for better wages, safer conditions, benefits, and job protections. The workers in *Sweat* Olstead's steel tubing plant.

Outsourcing

When companies move jobs or production elsewhere to reduce labor costs. This process often involves moving factories overseas, hiring lower-wage workers, and weakening unions

NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement (1994) was intended to increase trade between the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Many Americans blamed NAFTA for job losses in manufacturing, factory closures, and a national decline in wages.

The Rust Belt

The "Rust Belt" refers to regions in the Northeastern and Midwestern United States that once relied heavily on manufacturing and industry. Cities often associated include: Pittsburgh, Detroit, Cleveland, Buffalo and Reading.

Lockout

A lockout occurs when employers prevent employees from working during labor negotiations. Unlike a strike workers do not leave voluntarily and management blocks access to work.

TERMS TO KNOW

Labor Strike

A strike is an organized work stoppage in which employees collectively refuse to work. Strikes usually happen when a union and an employer cannot reach an agreement, often over wages, benefits, or working conditions, and workers vote to authorize the strike. By stopping work, employees halt or slow production, which can directly affect a company's output and profits.



The RTC Reno labor strike happened in 2021 when local bus drivers stopped working to protest problems with their jobs. They wanted better pay, health care, safety, and working conditions from Keolis, the company running the buses. Because many people in Reno and Sparks depend on buses to get to work, school, and appointments, the strike affected the whole community.

Another example of a labor strike is the **Great Railroad Strike of 1877** which was ignited after workers' wages of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad was reduced for the time in a single year. This was the first strike that spread across multiple US states. The strike resulted in 100+ deaths, 1,000+ arrests, and no immediate gains by union laborers.

READING, PA

Reading (pronounced REDDING), Pennsylvania is the backdrop of Nottage's *Sweat*. The city's economic and social history is central to the play's conflicts, themes, and characters.

During the 20th Century, Reading was known for the production of steel, textiles, and railroads, along with the presence of union labor. Factories provided stable middle-class wages, benefits, and long-term employment.

By the 2000s, factories closed, jobs moved elsewhere, and poverty increased. Based on 2010 U.S. Census Bureau data, Reading held the title of the poorest small city in America,



Late 1800s



Early 1900s



1960s



2023

DURING THE SHOW

A few reminders as you join us in the world of the play:

There is **no photography or recording** of any kind allowed during the performance.

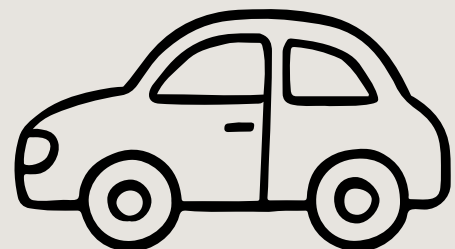
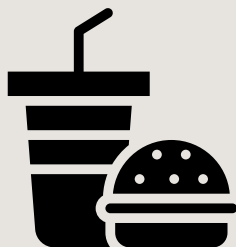
Please **silence your phone and refrain from texting**, as it can be distracting to those around you and those on stage.

No outside food or drink is allowed in the theater. However, any purchases made at our concession stand may be enjoyed throughout the show.

There will be a **15-minute intermission** between acts. Take this time to talk about the play with your classmates!

Timeliness is key. It is important to arrive before **the show's start time: 7:30 p.m. for preview** and evening shows, and 2:00 p.m. for Sunday matinees. Consider arriving early to beat the lines and find good parking. Doors open thirty minutes before curtain.

Parking: Please do not park in the space between our building and the red brick building located on the east side, or you will be towed. Street parking is available but limited.



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Why *Sweat*? A statement from Reno Little Theater's Artistic Leadership Committee:

The Artistic Leadership Committee chose *Sweat* for our 91st season because it powerfully captures the struggles of working-class America, exploring friendship, economic hardship, and the impact of change on communities. A Pulitzer Prize winner for Best Drama in 2017, this play has been on our list for several years, and we're now thrilled to bring it to our stage with director Lily Baran, whose credentials and community connections make this production possible. With its unflinching look at the human cost of societal shifts, *Sweat* resonates deeply with today's challenges and sparks important conversations about empathy, division, and hope.

Sweat is being produced by Reno Little Theater at 147 E. Pueblo St. Reno, NV. The show runs from May 29 to June 14, with a preview on Wednesday, May 27 and a post-show talkback with the audience on Sunday, June 7.



*Two stages,
one company.*

