

*This Is Our Youth*  
by **Kenneth Lonergan**

**A Note from the Dramaturg**

Dear Reader,

In the pages that follow, you will find a comprehensive guide to understanding *This Is Our Youth* by Kenneth Lonergan. The information I have compiled can help you pull deeper meanings from the plot, connect history and fiction, and begin to understand what is at stake for these characters. This play takes place in the heart of 1980s Manhattan through the eyes of three young adults trying to find their way through the world. Knowing the history behind this time and place will help you to draw new meaning from the text. With the deep knowledge and understanding of 1980s Manhattan, as well as the references to drugs and pop culture, you can give new life to its characters.

Kayla Salter  
Dramaturg

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# Kenneth Lonergan

## Life

- Considered himself an orthodox Freudian
- Has dabbled in pop psychology
- Drawn to the darker insights of psychoanalysis
- Jokes that he was “raised by the New York Psychoanalytic Society”
  - His mom and stepfather were both psychiatrists and practicing analysts
- Grew up mostly on Central Park West, born in 1962
- His parents divorced when he was 5 and his mom remarried about a year later
- His childhood was privileged, but not overly so
- His door was always open to random family members and half siblings throughout his childhood and they almost always had someone else staying with them for anywhere from a few days to a few months
- Went to school at the Walden School, a private institution
  - Excruciatingly progressive exchanges between students and teachers
  - Took conversations and settings from his days there and used them almost verbatim in his movie “Margaret”
- Had a very nice apartment in a building that his grandmother owned
  - 20 foot high ceilings and skylights facing north
  - “Unusual and spectacular” for a 20 year old to have that view

## Work

- Began writing plays in high school after writing some short stories and novels
  - Jokes that he switched to plays because there was less text on each page so they were easier to correct
- Enrolled in NYU’s dramatic writing program and worked closely with a group of young actors and playwrights
- Many of the characters in *This Is Our Youth* are based on friends he had in real life

## Quotes

- “Talking about people’s personalities, and why people do things, is a big part of my life, and has been since I was little.”
- “Meaning. Behavior.”
- “Everyone wants to rush the words, but under the words there are *another* ten thousand words—we only see one pop up to the surface.”
- “I know there is no God, so I don’t have to worry about why he allows things to happen. But it must be nice to feel taken care of like that.”

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TO SEE THE FULL PACKET