

# Spotlight on Learning Study Guide

## Wingfield Lost and Found

by Dan Needles  
starring Rod Beattie  
directed by Douglas Beattie



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# Wingfield Lost & Found

## About the Playwright

Dan Needles spent half of his childhood in the city and half on the family farm at Rosemont, Ontario. After university, he went to work as editor of the local newspaper in Shelburne where he created the character of Walt Wingfield, the retired stockbroker turned farmer, who told about his adventures on the farm in a series of weekly letters to the editor. In 1985, Dan drew from these columns to write his first play, *Letter from Wingfield Farm*. *Wingfield's Progress* followed in 1987, *Wingfield's Folly* in 1990, *Wingfield Unbound* in 1997, *Wingfield On Ice* in 2001, *Wingfield's Inferno* in 2005 and *Wingfield Lost and Found* in 2009.

In 2003 Dan was the winner of the Leacock Medal for Humour for his book, *With Axe and Flask, The History of Persephone Township from Pre-Cambrian Times to the Present*. Dan's latest book, a novelization of Wingfield plays four, five and six, entitled *Wingfield's Hope*, is currently available in bookstores everywhere. Its companion volume, a book version of the first three *Wingfield* plays, called *Letters from Wingfield Farm*, was short-listed for the Leacock award in 1989. Dan's seven-character play, *The Perils of Persephone*, premiered at the Blyth Festival the same year.

These days Dan writes columns for two publications, "Petunia Valley Sideroad" for *Country Guide Magazine* and "True Confessions from the Ninth Concession" for *Harrowsmith Country Life*.

## About the Actor

Rod Beattie is a veteran of 15 seasons with Stratford Festival. He has become one of the most respected and versatile actors in Canadian theatre. His extensive credits include radio, television, film and live performances across Canada; featured roles include Bill in *The Lovelist* and Greg in *Sylvia* at the Belfry Theatre, John Proctor in *The Crucible* and Father Gustave in *Blessings in Disguise* at Manitoba Theatre Centre, the professor in *Oleanna* at The Grand Theatre and the National Arts Centre (opposite Sandra Oh) and Andy Ladd in an Ontario tour of *Love Letters* (opposite his wife Martha Henry).

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Over the past 20 years, Rod's name has become synonymous with the *Wingfield* series which has brought him acting awards, rave reviews and sold-out houses in Toronto, London, Stratford, Victoria, Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Saint John, Fredericton and a host of smaller communities across Canada. Rod and Walt made their American debuts to great acclaim at the Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park in 1994.

Rod is the winner of the 1991-92 Dora Mavor Moore Award for best performance by an actor in a leading role for his performance in the first three *Wingfield* plays. He has the ability to morph from one identity to another among the familiar gallery of past characters and the many newly added characters both animal and human, and continues to astound. Many practitioners of the one-man show could learn from him how to keep multiple characters distinct through simple but significant changes in voice, posture, and gesture. Timing as perfect as his, though, must surely be innate.

## About the Director

Douglas Beattie became an independent producer and director in 1979. His association with Dan Needles goes back to childhood summers spent on the farm. In addition to heading the *Wingfield* team, Doug has been guest director at the Stratford Festival, the Belfry Theatre, Lighthouse Festival, Theatre Orangeville, the Blyth Festival, the Piggery Theatre, Thousand Islands Playhouse, Gryphon Theatre, and The Grand Theatre.

In 1991 Douglas was consultant to Primedia's television production of *Letter from Wingfield Farm* which won the Gemini Award for best performing arts program. He is co-executive producer of the *Wingfield* TV series, founding Artistic Director of Touchmark Theatre in Guelph, Ontario, and President of Douglas Beattie Theatrical Productions Ltd. which markets the audio and video recordings of the *Wingfield* plays.

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## About the Play

*Wingfield Lost and Found* is the seventh play in a series by Dan Needles. Other plays in the *Wingfield* series are *Letter from Wingfield Farm*, *Wingfield's Progress*, *Wingfield's Folly*, *Wingfield Unbound*, *Wingfield on Ice* and *Wingfield's Inferno*.

Rod Beattie who plays Walt Wingfield has the amazing ability to transform into different characters throughout the play and he simply does this by changing his face, voice or by adding or removing a small piece of clothing. Though he is the only actor, Rod along with the wonderful directing of Douglas Beattie, they are able to make Rod's transitions very clear and allow the audience to follow along with the story and experience life through the multiple characters that appear throughout the play.

The central theme in *Wingfield Lost and Found* revolves around new beginnings and how something must end in order for something greater to begin.

## Play Synopsis

**Setting:** The play takes place in a series of letters from Walt Wingfield, a stock broker turned farmer. Walt's letters to the editor of the *Larkspur Free Press and Economist* recount a summer at Wingfield Farm during one of the worst droughts the area has ever seen.

### ACT I

In Walt's first letter to the editor of the *Larkspur Free Press and Economist*, he tells the story of his return to the farm from his two days a week stock brokerage job to find that his new herd of grass-fed beef cows has escaped. Everyone in town has been trying to herd the cattle back to Wingfield Farm, but they are having a difficult time. Walt meets up with his neighbour, brother-in-law and nephews to try to plan how they will retrieve the cows. The group plans to communicate via text messaging in order to stay organized. Unfortunately, instead of focusing on driving, the men focus on texting and end up causing a few accidents. The cows are eventually herded thanks to Walt's wife Maggie who coaxes them in with the feed bucket.

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It is almost Walt and Maggie's third wedding anniversary. In his second letter, Walt talks about his first anniversary with Maggie and their trip to Tuscany. While they were there, Walt bought Maggie a beautiful gold bracelet with stones cut in the shape of animals which they called "The Farm on the Arm". During the hullabaloo with the cattle, the bracelet went missing. Walt goes out to the pasture to look for it and overhears his neighbour, Don, playing a song on his trumpet that he plays over and over. Everyone in town knows of the song, but no one seems to know what it is called. Walt talks about Pluto Township, just west of his area, and how they have just approved a water bottling plant that would pump thousands of gallons of water out of a marsh into the factory to be bottled and sold. Walt thinks that this plan is ridiculous, especially in the midst of such a terrible drought. He talks it over with Maggie while she makes breakfast. She turns on the tap but it splutters and no water comes out. The water level has dropped in their well so low that they can't access it anymore. As such, Walt decides to have a new well dug. His friends and neighbours are shocked by this announcement; it's been years since anyone has dug a well on their road. They tell Walt that he should consider bringing in a water witch, someone who can find water before anyone is hired to drill the hole. When the well was first dug, a water witch named Delbert McNabb showed them where to find water. Delbert is Don's father, and he lives in a nursing home in town. Walt decides to pay him a visit to see if he can help.

In his next letter, Walt tells about his visit to the nursing home to visit Delbert and try to get some help with the water situation (it has now been 70 days without rain). Upon his arrival, Walt discovers that Delbert is a little bit odd. He worries about the movement of the tectonic plates and poisonous emanations from electrical outlets. Nonetheless, he is a talented water witch and amateur meteorologist. Walt asks him to come out to the farm to help him dig the well, but Delbert refuses – he says that his talent is gone and he would not be able to find the spring. Walt goes home and calls AAA Well Drilling who comes to the farm and drills 200 feet, finding no water. Walt becomes desperate for Delbert's

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help. He asks Don if he would be willing to speak with his father about coming to Wingfield Farm, but unfortunately, Don and his father have not spoken for several years.

In his next letter, Walt talks about Maggie's plan to fence off an area of grass by their pond so their animals can graze, which Walt thinks it's a bad idea. They compromise and decide to try it for a couple of weeks and Walt, along with his brother in law Freddy, goes out to build a fence. While setting things up, they come across a huge nest of yellow jackets that they unfortunately have to destroy before they can start building. After a few tries, lots of bee stings and some burns (after trying to blast the bees out of the nest), they give up and nurse their wounds in the kitchen. Don comes over and announces that he is also without a working well and is consequently without water. He is not too surprised however; he announces that his well was hooked up to Walt's, as are several other farms in the area. Without water, Don can't run his farm or support himself, so he announces that he will be selling his cattle and moving out west.

## **ACT II**

It's been 85 days with no rain, and Walt is getting desperate. He decides to go back to the nursing home to try to convince Delbert to come to the farm and look for water. Delbert agrees to visit but insists that his water witching days are over. He inspects the hole that AAA Well Drilling made, and tells Walt some secrets about drilling; if there's no water at 30 feet, there won't be any water. Delbert remembers which way the underground spring went when he drilled the first well, and tells Walt where to drill next. He drives Delbert back to the nursing home and during the trip, Delbert starts whistling the same tune that Don plays on his trumpet. Walt calls AAA Drilling as soon as he gets home and they're at the farm the next morning. He tells them to drill in the exact spot that Delbert told him they would find water. After 30 feet, there is no water, and so Walt tells them to stop. Unsure of what to do, Walt decides to consult three other water witches and see where they suggest he drill. Each of them turns out to be a fake, and Walt is still without water on the farm.

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In his next letter, Walt shares with Ed his plan for his upcoming anniversary with Maggie. Since she lost the bracelet he bought her from Tuscany, he plans to order a brand new one from the same store. Unfortunately, there's a language barrier and some problems with international banking and Walt is unable to order the new bracelet. He decides to make one last trip to the nursing home. While he's there, he sees Gertrude, his daughter's babysitter, at the piano, practicing for a concert she will be playing the next day. Walt talks about his frustration with the well, and Gertrude insists that Delbert will be able to find water. She tells Walt that in his younger days, Delbert not only had a golden touch when it came to finding water, but he also used to be very outgoing and a great talent on the piano. When his wife died, however, he was devastated and never played the piano again. He left the farm to itself, and Don had to quit school to take care of the family. Gertrude begins to play the piano; she plays the song that Don is always playing on the trumpet. Apparently, Delbert wrote the song for his wife Melissa when she was sick. Don has no idea that his father wrote the song for his mother or that he cared so much about her. Walt and Gertrude plan to mend the relationship between the two at the concert the next day.

Walt and Maggie bring Don to the concert at the nursing home. Gertrude is warming up by playing the song Delbert wrote for Melissa. She plays it incorrectly on purpose so Delbert will show her the proper way to play it. As he sits down to play, Don recognizes the song. Gertrude tells him that his father wrote the song for his mother when she was sick. This touches Don deeply, and he goes to speak with his father for the first time in years. At that moment, Delbert announces that the old feeling is back – he knows where to find water at Wingfield Farm. Everyone rushes over to the farm and Delbert tells them exactly where to drill. They use his old drill rig and they find water at 28 feet. From that spring, they can supply water to Wingfield Farm as well as Don's farm and the other wells connected to Wingfield.

Over the next few days, Don moves his father out of the nursing home and into his house. Walt and Maggie sit on the patio one

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## Characters

night and find Maggie's bracelet in one of the flower pots by the house, just in time for their anniversary. And to top it all off, the municipal government shut down the water bottling company at Pluto Marsh due to the drought.

**Ed** – Editor of the *Larkspur Free Press*

**Walt Wingfield** – A stockbroker turned farmer

**Don McNabb** – Walt's dairy farming neighbour to the south

**Squire** – Walt's neighbour across the road

**Freddy** – Maggie's brother, Walt's best friend

**Willy** – Nephew of Maggie and Freddy

**Dave** – Another nephew of Maggie and Freddy

**Maggie** – Walt's wife

**Hope** – Walt and Maggie's daughter

**Mariella** – Elderly Italian woman who works with Maggie at the dress shop

**Spike** – The Wingfield's dog

**Gertrude Lynch** – Retired obstetrical nurse, Hope's babysitter

**Delbert McNabb** – Don's father, legendary "water witch"

**Nurse** – Nurse at Myra Connor Lodge

**Foreman** – AAA Well-drillers

**Dr. George** – Ornithologist – local bird expert

**Water Witch 1**

**Water Witch 2**

**Water Witch 3 (Lefty)**

**Cassandra** – Bank teller

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## Groundwater in Canada

Groundwater is an essential and vital resource for approximately a third of all Canadians, especially the Maritime Provinces. In fact, about a third of the planet's fresh water comes from groundwater. Groundwater is water that is found underground in the cracks and spaces in soil, sand and rock. Groundwater is stored in--and moves slowly through--layers of soil, sand and rocks called aquifers.

Aquifers typically consist of gravel, sand, sandstone, or fractured rock, like limestone. These materials are permeable because they have large connected spaces that allow water to flow through. The speed of groundwater flows depend on the size of the spaces in the soil or rock and how well the spaces are connected.

Groundwater actually provides nearly all of the water used to raise livestock in Canada, so a reliable well is vital to the survival of a farm, as Walt learns in *Wingfield Lost and Found*.

Many people actually refuse to start to dig a well until they have consulted a water witch or "diviner" to tell them where they are likely to find water. A water witch will use a steel divining rod or a stick and walk back and forth over the property. When the rod twitches or vibrates over a certain spot, it tells the water witch that there is groundwater below and will therefore be a good spot to dig.

Modern scientists have conducted several experiments to test if water witching is a legitimate and effective method of finding groundwater, but they have no conclusive proof. Most people believe that water witching is strictly a game of luck.

## Something Interesting...

The very first play in the *Wingfield* series *Letter from Wingfield Farm*, had its official opening right here in the McManus Studio Theatre located downstairs in The Grand Theatre in 1985.

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## Questions & Activities

1. Walt consults a water witch to help him find water on his farm. He also considers asking the witch for help to find his wife's lost bracelet. What are some other ways he could use to find something he's lost?
2. How is life in the country different from life in the city?
3. Pretend you are a reviewer for a newspaper. Write a review of *Wingfield Lost and Found*. You can talk about any aspects of the play (costumes, props, sets, acting, etc.).
4. Imagine you lived on a farm during a drought. What are some ways you could conserve water?
5. Rod Beattie is the only actor in the whole play yet manages to play all the characters, male, female and animal. Pick a scene from a short story or fairytale and act out the scene transforming from one character to the next.
6. In the play Walt is faced with many obstacles and feels defeated while trying to find water for his farm. Think of a time in your life where you felt overwhelmed. Describe the situation, what it felt like and how you overcame it.
7. Who's your favorite character? Give a detailed reason for your choice.
8. If you were going to play one of the characters, which would it be? Why would you be suited to that part?
9. A play that is created mainly for entertainment may also have serious issues and themes addressed in it. Themes are messages the writer gives us to think about. Name two themes you have discovered in this play.
10. In the play, Walt Wingfield tells his whole story through letters to the editor of a newspaper. Write a letter to a friend that tells them a story of a recent experience you had. Try to be as descriptive as Walt is in the play. Feel free to add in dialogue.

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