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Theatre Performance
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Adapting and staging Salinger's novel, *Franny and Zooey*

My senior thesis will be an adaptation for the stage of J.D. Salinger's novel, *Franny and Zooey*, using a small cast of four actors. I will act in the production, as Franny, as well as cast and direct it.

Franny and Zooey is a story about the relationship between a brother and sister, and how they view their own artistic lives. I am intrigued by the characters' personal struggles to experience and appreciate art without the pretention and phoniness that too often comes with it.

Franny and Zooey Glass are unsettled beings: She is lost, he is restless. They are both in a confusing and vulnerable time in their young lives. Franny has nearly driven herself crazy with her new obsession, the books *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, which were written by an anonymous 19th century Russian peasant. The books chronicle a pilgrim who seeks salvation but does not know what he should do so that he might be saved. Along his travels, he is told about the concept of "ceaseless prayer": Praying all day and all night long, so that eventually the prayer and the heartbeat become one, and just being alive is a prayer in and of itself. The prayer that the pilgrim is instructed to repeat is called the Jesus Prayer, or the Prayer of the Heart: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on my soul!"

Until recently, Franny had been an acting student in college, and had a nice boyfriend and a comfortable life. She now spends her time on the couch in the family home, praying and crying. She struggles to find importance and meaning in theater, and is intolerant of the self-satisfaction and pompousness of her fellow actors. She desperately seeks any sort of solid and constant purpose to her life. Zooey, the only person who really understands his sister, struggles to find a means to comfort her. On top of it all, they are still processing the death of their beloved older brother Seymour, who took his life seven years before this story is set. By the end of the novel, Zooey helps Franny understand that once she finds peace in the fact that not everything and everyone in the world is truthful and beautiful, she may find peace within herself.

The final product will be performed in the Black Box Theatre in spring. In Act 1, the stage will be set up to be a restaurant and a bathroom, and in Act 2, a living room. as possible, to stay true to justice to Salinger's precise mannerisms that Salinger

We, the cast of *Franny and Zooey*, will work on our own during Intersession to explore the period in which this story takes place (New York in the mid-1950s), and become familiar with the social norms and behaviors of the era. The story has many references to plays, philosophers, books, and religion that the actors need to recognize in order to tell the story truthfully. The reading list I am compiling for myself and for my fellow actors includes works by Sappho, Epictetus, Stendhal, T.S. Eliot, and Emily Dickenson. I also want the cast to read another Salinger novel, *Nine Stories*, which includes further details about the Glass family.



bathroom, and in Act 2, a living room. I want to cut as little of the text as possible, to stay true to the tone of the story, and to do justice to Salinger's precise mannerisms that Salinger writes for his characters.

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I have read *Franny and Zooey* and *Nine Stories* countless times, and this summer I read *The Way of a Pilgrim* and *The Pilgrim Continues His Way*. I've gone through the latter books and highlighted passages and insights that touched Franny especially, so that I may truthfully embody the role of this young, troubled woman who is only looking for some comfort and peace.

Franny and I have a lot in common: We are both twenty-year-old women, studying acting in college, who question what role, if any, the ego does and should play in art. I relate to Franny on many levels, not least of all in trying to find truth where there may be none, and how that in and of itself may be a beautiful thing. Staging *Franny and Zooey* will give me the opportunity to communicate the messages about life, art and ego so gracefully conveyed in the book, in a way that is utterly unique to theater. I want to bring these brilliantly complex and dynamic people to life on the stage, who as of yet only exist within the pages of the book.

Franny and Zooey is the truest book I have ever read. The characters are incredibly sympathetic, and the way that the scenes are written is amazingly theatrical. I want to express the same message in my thesis that is expressed in the novel: That human beings are, by nature, pilgrims, searching for our own perfection and truth. By staging *Franny and Zooey*, I will have the opportunity to work with other artists to put on a play which truthfully embodies what it means to be a young artist in any generation.