THE REALISTIC JONESES TALKBACK NOTES

**Will Eno**

Eno grew up in Massachusetts and was a competitive cyclist from the age of 13 until his early 20s. He did not consider becoming a writer until, in his late 20s, he took a creative writing from Gordon Lish. There Lish recognized and encouraged Eno’s “remarkable ability to see the world in anguished terms that apply.” Eno says that he writes plays because he likes “hearing people in pain in rooms with good acoustics.”

Eno made his Broadway debut in 2014 with *The Realistic Joneses*, which starred Toni Collette, Michael C. Hall, Tracy Letts and Marisa Tomei. The play received several awards, as have his other plays, including *Middletown*, *The Flu Season* and *Thom Pain (based on nothing).*

Despite his success, as of 2014, Eno was still working part-time as a handyman.

**Eno and Language**

Eno is often compared to Samuel Beckett, a writer whose influence Eno readily acknowledges, because they both highlight the difficulty of true communication and, despite the wit and clarity of their prose, they both find language an inadequate means of true communion. In fact, Charles Isherwood of the *New York Times* called Eno “a Samuel Becket for the Jon Stewart generation.” Isherwood may be referring to the Eno’s delight—and, perhaps, the occasional glibness—in the way he plays with the gaps between language and meaning and between attempts at communication and real connection. Unlike Beckett, Eno finds something other than despair in the fact that language is incommensurate with profound feelings. He says, "What's really positive and interesting to me is that there are things that are beyond the realm of this incredibly effective communication tool that we invented. I think of them as shimmering, strange, mysterious things rather than a sort of interior pain that someone has that they can't express. And it seems all right to me that there are things that can't be expressed … 'cause shouldn't there be?”

**Eno on The Realistic Joneses**

Eno said he wrote the Realistic Joneses because: he “wanted to really just write a naturalistic and realistic play.” The play also reflects his on-going fascination with the essential fact of all human experience: that we live simultaneously in the quotidian world of work, family, daily chores and in the mystical world of nature, death and the unknowable. Eno says that he is struck over and over with the knowledge that we all operate under a death sentence.

**Possible Discussion Questions**

Did Eno achieve his goal of writing a realistic play? Is the dialog realistic? Are any of the Joneses more realistic than the others?

How did the set contribute to the realism or lack of realism in the play?

Is this play a comedy?

Do the characters change by the end of the play?

Is liking mints enough?