



# WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA

BY MELISSA JAMES GIBSON



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World premiere presented by  
Atlantic Theater Company  
New York City, 2012.

WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA was presented by Atlantic Theater Company in New York City, opening on December 12, 2012. It was directed by Daniel Aukin; the set design was by Laura Jellinek; the costume design was by Emily Rebholz; the lighting design was by Matt Frey; the original music and sound design were by Ryan Rumery; and the production stage manager was Kyle Gates. The cast was as follows:

HANK ..... Chris Bauer  
MARLENE ..... Aimee Carrero  
LYDIA ..... Seana Kofoed  
SHERYL ..... Da’Vine Joy Randolph

## CHARACTERS

HANK — 40s

MARLENE, his daughter — 16 and a half

LYDIA — 40s

SHERYL — late 30s

**About the Language:** The line breaks, internal capitalizations, and lack of punctuation in general are intended as guidelines to the characters' thought processes, in terms of emphasis, pattern, and rhythm; they should be honored, but should not feel enslaving.

When a line is indented, it indicates a continuation of the previous line. When there is no indentation, it indicates a line break. When a forward slash ("/") appears within the dialogue, it indicates that the next line should begin, creating an overlap with the previous line.

# WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA

*Hank stands in a hallway, outside an apartment door. He wears a raincoat. Marlene is inside the apartment, on the other side of the door.*

HANK  
Open the door

MARLENE  
She told me not to

HANK  
(?)  
Open the door  
I have a key

MARLENE  
She changed the locks

HANK  
I wouldn't have used it Marlene It wasn't a/ threat for crying out loud

MARLENE  
Please don't yell Dad

HANK  
Who's yelling

MARLENE  
You/are

HANK  
Nobody's yelling

MARLENE  
What am I supposed/ to do

HANK  
You shouldn't be put in this/ position is all

MARLENE  
Please don't say bad things about her

HANK  
I didn't it's just  
You Shouldn't Have To Choose

MARLENE  
I'm not it's just  
I live with her so/ it's hard

HANK  
It Is Hard  
It's not right  
*(Slight pause.)*

MARLENE  
That's between you guys  
*(Pause.)*

HANK  
I didn't say bad things about her

MARLENE  
I didn't say you did I said please/ don't

HANK  
I won't I don't  
*(Slight pause.)*  
I love her

MARLENE  
Don't Say That

HANK  
What am I supposed to say/ Marlene

MARLENE  
Just  
regular things Say regular/ things

HANK  
How's life Marlene

MARLENE  
Okay

HANK  
(?)  
Really  
Everything

MARLENE  
Well I don't I mean is that  
statistically possible

HANK  
(?)  
School

MARLENE  
It's okay

HANK  
Do you like your teachers

MARLENE  
They're okay

HANK  
Do you have a favorite

MARLENE  
Teacher

HANK  
Uh-huh

MARLENE  
No

HANK  
(?)  
No one No one inspiring

MARLENE  
Inspiring no I mean no I mean  
no one you'd  
make a biopic about or anything  
(*Slight pause.*)  
Do you have a favorite neighbor

HANK  
What

MARLENE  
Isn't that the same They're just  
Neighbors They're just/ teachers

HANK  
I don't have neighbors

MARLENE  
You have neighbors of course you have/ neighbors

HANK  
I don't know them

MARLENE  
But they live there



HANK

They're only neighbors if you know them

MARLENE

That's not/ true

HANK

It is/ true

MARLENE

They're still there

whether you know them or not

You should get to know them

HANK

It's a temporary situation/ Marlene

MARLENE

(?)

It is

HANK

(?)

What

MARLENE

(?)

Is it

*(Slight pause.)*

(?)

Are you moving

HANK

What

MARLENE

Are you moving

HANK

I hope so

# WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA

by Melissa James Gibson

1M, 3W

A father and his teenage daughter stand on either side of a closed door. Life is unraveling for him, and it is entirely uncertain for her. So begins Melissa James Gibson's poignant, funny play about estrangement and the partially examined life. With her spare style, mordant wit, and compassionate insight, one of the most emotionally penetrating and unique voices in theatre today wonders WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA.

*"This touching, sorrowful comedy [is] ... full of compassionate wonder at the innumerable ways in which lives can go wrong."* —**The New York Times**

*"Gibson writes fluidly and beautifully for that Impatient Age, slowing down our emotional metabolism for deeper scrutiny while speeding proficiently through her scenes, each a sketchlike contrivance, but none of them sketchy."*  
—**New York Magazine**

*"People in Melissa James Gibson's enchanting, tough-minded, 85-minute play, WHAT RHYMES WITH AMERICA, feel their way around life with an off-balance neediness that is both morose and unexpectedly engaging ... [Gibson] makes us identify with people who struggle on the sides of what they see as the center of things."*  
—**Newsday**

*"Desperation, poor timing, denial, miscommunication, estrangement, insecurities. All the stuff of comedy — thanks to Melissa James Gibson's gift of quirky, intellectual writing ... There may not be a word that rhymes with America, yet Gibson expertly illuminates the non-rhyming poetry within ordinary people desperate to figure out how to move forward."*  
—**Associated Press**

**Also by Melissa James Gibson**

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