

Coyote on a Fence

Audition Information

COYOTE ON A FENCE

Written by: Bruce Graham

Directed by: Todd Thomas

Auditions:

Sunday, February 2nd, 1:00pm

Monday, February 3rd, 6:00pm

**Pit & Balcony Theatre, 805 N. Hamilton Street
Saginaw, MI 48602**

Coyote on a Fence
Performances: April 4-6 & April 11-17, 2025
Fridays and Saturdays 7:30pm, Sundays 3:00pm

Thank you for your interest in auditioning for the Pit & Balcony production of *Coyote on a Fence*. This thought-provoking play by Bruce Graham challenges us with questions we often prefer to ignore around morality, justice, and the human experience. Set primarily within the confines of a prison, *Coyote on a Fence* invites us into the lives of two inmates awaiting their fates on death row—John Brennan, a thoughtful editor and outspoken advocate for prisoners, and Bobby Reyburn, a fervent, misguided young man convicted of a horrific crime. Through these two men, and those around them, the play explores complex questions about truth, redemption, and the impact of life's choices.

Please note:

Before you choose to audition, please be aware that *Coyote on a Fence* addresses challenging themes, including racial tension, moral ambiguity, and strong, explicit and sometimes racist language reflective of the prison environment and the character dynamics. This play is a bold look at humanity, requiring actors ready to embrace and portray the realism and nuanced humor that Graham brings to these characters. With intense dialogue, *Coyote on a Fence* is a challenging production. The play calls on actors to engage deeply with its themes and deliver powerful performances that do justice to the difficult questions it raises. I encourage you to find a copy of the script and read it prior to auditioning. Pit & Balcony has copies of the script available to be read at the theatre.

Synopsis:

Set within a Southern U.S. prison, *Coyote on a Fence* follows the lives of John Brennan, an articulate and complex inmate who edits the prison's newspaper, and his new neighbor, Bobby Reyburn, a fervent racist with a violent past. John's life within the prison revolves around his newspaper, *The Death Row Advocate*. While John's principles are apparent, he is himself a death row inmate and struggles with his own moral contradictions throughout.

Inspired by a true story, *Coyote on a Fence* draws on the life of James Lee Beathard, a death-row inmate in Texas who published a real prison newspaper that gained national attention for its nuanced portrayals of inmates. Like Beathard, John uses his paper to raise awareness and question the ethics of capital punishment, lending a voice to those who are often silenced by society.

When Bobby arrives on death row, his casual racism and disturbing beliefs stand in sharp contrast to John's intellectual idealism, forcing both men to confront their deeply held beliefs and their respective pasts. Their relationship—a volatile mix of tension, disdain, and understanding—forms the narrative of the play, while Shawna DuChamps, a weary but insightful prison guard, and Sam Fried, a journalist drawn to John's story, add further layers to the moral and ethical exploration. The characters of DuChamps and Fried are not unimportant in this story and play very important functions in the audience experience.

Cast:

All performers must be over 18 years old to audition. While Shawna can be any race, John, Bobby and Sam must all be cast as white.

John Brennan – Plays mid-40s. John is intelligent and articulate but with contradicting principles and values. John is the editor of the prison's newspaper, *The Death Row Advocate*, and he uses it to raise awareness about the experiences of inmates on death row. Despite his vehement opposition to the death penalty, John struggles with his own sense of guilt and justice, haunted by the nature of his crime and his own moral contradictions.

Bobby Reyburn – Plays late 20s. Bobby is a fervent, unrepentant racist whose backwoods demeanor hides a disturbing and fanatical belief system. Convicted of a heinous hate crime, Bobby lacks self-awareness and operates with a sense of divine purpose, viewing his actions as righteous. Bobby has had a very hard and disturbing life and requires an actor who can embody both naïveté and conviction, as well as handle a racist dialogue at its extreme.

Shawna DuChamps – Plays late 40s. Should be the same generation as John. Shawna is tough, straightforward, and practical, shaped by years in a demanding and often bleak environment. Though she's weary from the emotional toll of her job, Shawna is grounded in her beliefs and offsets the moral ambiguity of the prison. Her sense of humor and realism often serve as a coping mechanism for her cynicism.

Sam Fried – Plays early 30s to 40s. Sam is a journalist from *The New York Times* who is intellectual and curious, seeking to understand John's story and uncover deeper truths about life on death row. Sam is on a quest to understand life on death row, but more importantly to understand John Brennan. Sam has to navigate the tough questions of the play but at the same time comes clearly from the world outside the prison.

AUDITIONS

For *Coyote on a Fence* you will only be considered for roles you indicate an interest in so please make sure you are accurate in completing your audition form.

Please fill out your form here: <https://forms.gle/dy72WSjBvakEmH6S7>

Auditions will consist of warm readings of the monologues provided at the end of this packet and cold readings of scenes provided at the auditions.

Please familiarize yourself with the monologue(s) of the character(s) you're interested in playing. There's no need to memorize but please be prepared to read a piece more than once, make different choices, or take direction during the audition.

Cold readings will follow the monologue portion of auditions. Scenes and scene partners will be provided at the audition depending on attendance and interest in specific roles.

Casting:

Casting will occur during the week following auditions and you will be notified whether or not you have been cast no later than Friday, February 7.

PLEASE NOTE ANY CONFLICTS YOU MAY HAVE.
CONFLICTS DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY ELIMINATE YOU FROM CONSIDERATION BUT ALLOW US TO PLAN REHEARSALS AS CONVENIENTLY AS POSSIBLE
CONFLICTS AFTER MARCH 17 ARE NOT PERMITTED

February						
SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1
2 Super Bowl Auditions	3 Auditions	4	5	6	7	8
9	10 Read Thru 6-9p	11 Rehearsal 6-9p	12 Rehearsal 6-9p	13 Rehearsal 6-9p	14 Valentine's Day Almost, Maine	15 Almost, Maine
16 Almost, Maine	17 President's Day Rehearsal 6-9p	18 Rehearsal 6-9p	19	20 Rehearsal 6-9p	21 Rehearsal 6-9p	22
23	24 Rehearsal 6-9p	25 Rehearsal 6-9p	26 Rehearsal 6-9p	27 Rehearsal 6-9p	28 Dionysus Fest	
March						
						1 Dionysus Fest
2	3 Rehearsal 6-9p	4 Rehearsal 6-9p	5	6 Rehearsal 6-9p	7 Rehearsal 6-9p	8
9 Carrie Auditions	10 Carrie Auditions	11 Carrie Callbacks	12 Rehearsal 6-9p	13 Rehearsal 6-9p	14 Rehearsal 6-9p	15
16	17 St. Patrick's Day	18 Rehearsal 6-9p	19 Rehearsal 6-9p	20 Rehearsal 6-9p	21	22 Tech Day 10a-8p
23	24 Tech I 6-10p	25 Tech II 6-10p	26 Tech III 6-10p	27 Rehearsal 6-9p	28 TBD Rehearsal 6-9p	29
30 Dress I 2p Call 3p Curtain	31 Dress II 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain					
April						
		1 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain	2 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain	3	4 Show 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain	5 Show 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain
6 Matinee 2p Call 3p Curtain	7	8	9 Brush-up 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain	10	11 Show 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain	12 Show 6:30p Call 7:30p Curtain
13 Matinee 2p Call 3p Curtain STRIKE						

Warm Reads

It is not necessary nor advisable to memorize these, as they are also not necessarily verbatim from the script. However, please prepare and practice them prior to auditions

Warm Read Bobby

(Bobby has just been transferred to his cell on death row from the main lock-up in prison. He is meeting John for the first time in the next cell.)

BOBBY: “Uncle Hew always said stand up for what you believe. Said, ‘For evil to succeed, good men must remain quiet.’ That’s what he always used to say. (A beat.) Perhaps while I was locked up down there I sharpened the senses I already had. Now, you may say, ‘Any man can do that.’ And you’re right. Any man can tell a guard by his footstep, but a pure man hears more. I can tell by his footstep if he had a fight with his wife or drank too much the night before or caught a five-pound catfish on his day off. I am a Nietzschean superman, John. I can see through walls. I can smell an impure man even after he’s dead. And I hear things, John, things even a smart man like you cannot begin to understand. I hear things in heaven and hell, so what makes you think I wouldn’t hear things in the next cell? (A beat.) I hear truths, which are few, and lies—which are many. I know the truth when I hear it. Uncle Hew- he was old but I don’t think he was hangin out with Thomas Jefferson. (laughs). Ol’ Hew, he usta’ always - (Realizing.) Bless my soul, I am talkin’ a blue streak. ain’t I? Sorry, brother. I just . . . lock-up - no talkin’. Nobody ta talk to no-how but . . . I keep yammerin’ you just tell me ta shut up, okay? Just say, “Hey. Bobby - shut your pie hole!” Heck, you never been down Lock-Up-Land I bet. Not enough room ta swing a dead cat. Course I don’t know why any- body’d ever wanta’ swing a dead cat - dumbest darn expression, ain’t it?

(Luxuriating.) Yes sir, this is nice. Six years, forty-four days I was down there. Call them Guinness Book folks! Heck, I’d still be there if it weren’t for . . . (Moves to the bars.) Ever have fleas, John? (A beat.)

Warm Read Sam

(Sam is talking to John during one of his visits. He has done some research on Bobby, on the behest of John)

SAM. The mother was a transient. Did a little time herself: prostitution, public drunkenness, assault. Drunk all through the pregnancy. Got beat up pretty bad when she was seven months. Between the booze and the beating they're pretty sure the fetus suffered a little ... damage. Only time he got any regular schooling was when he stayed with his uncle, Hubert Reyburn. Never made it out of the seventh grade. She'd dump him on the uncle for months at a time. Probably the best thing for the kid. Uncle tried to adopt him a few times but the mother always fought it. She must have been a real ... piece of work. Shame. Seems the uncle was the only stable person the kid knew. He passed away. That's it for family. No trace of the mother. Fire killed thirty-seven people. Fourteen of them kids. Sunday school in the basement. Blocked the door with his truck. That's where they found most of the bodies - trying to get out. The trial was real short. When the cops showed up he was sitting there with the gas can, watching the fire. He didn't just confess, he made a proclamation. Took full responsibility - There was no medical testimony. (Consults notes while this hits John.) Nope. Except for a brief mention about his hip - I assume he walks with a limp because - Mother had him put in the juvenile detention center for running away. He was twelve - other kids were older. Gang rape. Whole dorm - first night. Got a little rough, shattered his hip.

Warm Read John

(John is writing his regular letter to a woman who he's never met, but is in an ongoing letter exchange with. Willie T was the prisoner in the cell next to him ((where Bobby will move shortly))

JOHN. Dear Angela. Silence for a change last night. It always gets quiet when they kill one of us. So, if I have to force some sort of "bright side" on this whole thing, at least, for a while, it gets quiet. Maybe it's age, but the noise level in here is beginning to drive me more than a little insane. A new ruling allows our electric valium to stay on eighteen hours a day. Eighteen hours of soap operas, talk shows, and extremely violent movies. Since majority rules, I'm odd man out. I recently lobbied for a Truffaut film on PBS and received a few death threats. Two to six in the morning is the only real relief, but even then you'll have someone screaming out in his dream, causing a chain reaction. And on the rare nights that doesn't occur, there is still the "Hummmmm." Ever been near a beehive Angela? That's what it sounds like. Lock enough living things together and you get that constant "Hummmmm." (*A beat.*) They murdered Willie T. last night. That's why it was quiet. I violated my own rule, Angela - I got close to someone and let them get close to me. He was bright, angry - profane one minute, gentle the next. Like us all, he was a mass of contradictions. *I will stick by my rule from now on.* Must apologize for the crudeness of this letter. My rare computer privileges have been suspended indefinitely. Seems the superintendent didn't like my last issue of *The Death Row Advocate*, and the BBC special – which they swore *would not* be broadcast in this country - was the proverbial last straw. (*Smiling.*) As always, Angela, your letter was the highlight of my day. (*Looking at a photo.*) The new picture of Jessica has a place of honor on my wall, along with all the other pictures of Jessica. My God, six already. Face of a mischievous angel, and those eyes ... how can you ever discipline someone with a face like that? Could you possibly enclose a picture of yourself sometime? I would like to see if my mental picture of you is at all close. (*Glancing at his chess board*) In closing, please note my move: Bishop to Queen four. Checkmate - again. Angela, I love you, but you're a lousy chess player. Perhaps we should play another game. Monopoly? Twister?

Warm Read Shawna

(Shawna is speaking with a reporter in the bar after an execution)

SHAWNA. They assigned me to the row when I was pregnant -no kiddin', that's procedure. We're safer. They're locked up twenty-three hours a day most'a the time. (*Swigging beer.*) Funny, huh. I'm safer surrounded by a buncha' killers. Word for that ... what the hell is it •. damn! It'll come to me. True though - Most of 'em watch TY. Read. Sleep. Some of 'em sleep sixteen hours a day and - IRONIC! That's the word - ironic! Knew it'd come to me. (*Leaning forward, explaining.*) See, I do that a lot. And the only way I'm gonna' remember is forget about it a couple minutes. Yep... just gotta' ... put it outta' your mind . (*Does her shot.*) Oh yeah, we get protesters alla' time, but not like tonight. This one skinny little bitch - hair down to her ass - not from 'round here, that's for sure - she got in my face ... I mean, we got a job to do, that's all. And if it wasn't me it'd damn sure be somebody else so why shouldn't it be me? And overtime, like tonight - which is strictly voluntary - I'll clear thirty-four bucks. Now that don't sound like a lot to you I bet but damn .. that's dinner at the steakhouse if we got coupons...(*Shakes her head.*) Hey, I do what I'm told - I don't know and I don't care - (*Darkening.*) You're goddamned right I volunteer for it! I can't go sneezin' at thirty-four bucks dear. And that skinny little bitch tryin' ta make me feel like - I'm not doin' anything wrong! I go home tonight I'll sleep just fine. You write that down: *I'll sleep just fine.*