



## It's a Wonderful Life: A Live Radio Play

### Group discussion:

- What makes a life 'wonderful'?
- Can happiness only come from following your dreams?
- How important is 'community'? How do you think community is different now to the pre-internet era?

### Background knowledge:

1. **Building Society** – George's father runs the local Building & Loan, a building society. This is where people can invest their money as a community, similar to the German institutions of "Bausparkasse" or "Baugesellschaft". They have strict rules about how long they have to stay open, and that they have to show where all the money is either invested in houses or in a bank.
2. **Bank run** – this is what happened with the Silicon Valley bank in March 2023. A bank run happens when all its customers panic and take out all their money at the same time. As the banks have this money invested in things like buildings or shares, usually people want to take out more money than the bank can get in cash. This usually results in the bank being forced to close, and people only getting part of the money they should have got. The main problem is, the earlier a customer takes their money out, usually, the more they get, which is why people "run" to do it.



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### Teaser:

"It's a Wonderful Life" is set in upstate New York during the first half of the 20th century, and tells the story of a young man who had big dreams: to travel, have adventures, go to college, and be an architect in a big city.

But George Bailey's responsibilities to his family and to his community kept him from leaving the small town where he grew up. He held down a responsible job, raised a family, treated people decently, and helped out whenever he could. But one Christmas Eve, thanks to the evil magnate, Henry Potter, it all *comes crashing down around him, and he is about to give up*, until he is shown how much he has meant to those around him and that happiness can be found in family, friends and fulfilling a responsibility, right in your own home town.

### Quick check:

1. What does "kept him from leaving" mean? Is there an easier way to say it?
2. The expressions "come crashing down around him", and "to give up" both use opposite directions but both mean negative things. Match the following to their meaning:

- |                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. come crashing down        | a) work                        |
| 2. to give up                | b) assist/do things for people |
| 3. hold down a job           | c) fall apart/ break,          |
| 4. help out                  | d) doing what you have to do   |
| 5. be found in               | e) stop trying                 |
| 6. fulfilling responsibility | f) exists/comes from           |

Which ones of these do you think are negative, and which ones are positive?



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### Story:

Head angel Joseph gives trainee angel Clarence a job to do – rescue a man called George Bailey who is about to give up on life. Joseph tells Clarence that if he does a good job, he will graduate from being a trainee angel, and get his wings. But before he can do that Clarence must learn about George's life, and the events that brought him to where he is:

- George rescues his little brother when he falls through the ice and into the lake – George loses the hearing in one ear as a result
- He stops his boss from accidentally sending someone poison – he bravely stands up to his boss, even though his boss is very angry and slaps him
- He is mean to Mary – even though she is in love with him, because he wants to follow his dreams and get out of town
- He saves his father's company from being closed – even though it means he can't go on the holiday he had planned
- He keeps working at his father's company when his brother gets work elsewhere – even though it means he can't go to college to study
- He saves his father's company again – even though he has to use all the money he had saved for his honeymoon
- He turns down a job working for Potter, the rich man who does not value other people – even though it means he stays poor

### How would you rank his character?

|                 | very | some | a bit | not at all |                      |
|-----------------|------|------|-------|------------|----------------------|
| responsible     |      |      |       |            | irresponsible        |
| arrogant        |      |      |       |            | humble               |
| selfless/caring |      |      |       |            | selfish/narcissistic |
| tenacious       |      |      |       |            | irresolute           |
| loyal           |      |      |       |            | disloyal             |
| considerate     |      |      |       |            | mean                 |



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After all this, George is faced with a terrible situation when all the money in his building society has been lost, and it looks like he will have to go to jail, and leave his wife and children with nothing.

Clarence has to think quickly, and is inspired by George saying he wished he had never been born. As an angel, Clarence can make that wish come true. But, as they walk through the world that never had a George Bailey, George begins to see all the positive things that resulted from his life, and wishes he could go back. At the end, we hear that Clarence passed his test to become a proper angel.

### **Final Discussion:**

Do you think George is a good role model? Do you think we spend more time today talking about positive or negative role models?

How can we build strong communities today? Are the pressures all the same? Have some gone away? Are there new ones we are dealing with?

### **Improv:**

#### **In teams of 3-5 people:**

Choose one of the events in George's life, and imagine the scene for a radio play/podcast. What happens? Who is speaking? Where would the scene take place? How can you use sound effects to let an audience "see" what is happening?

Write your script, and make a list of the sounds you need, then try to find things that make that noise – i.e., crumpling up cellophane for fire crackling; or scrunching up leaves for walking through snow; etc. **Perform in front of the others and let them be amazed!!**