

Inspired by true events, D.W. Gregory's *Radium Girls*, playing October 20th, 21st, 27th and 28th at Serra High School's Gellert Auditorium, is a fast-moving, highly theatrical ensemble piece that offers a wry, unflinching look at the American obsessions with health, wealth, and moral responsibility. When the girls who work at the U.S. Radium Corporation's watch dial factories start getting sick from some unknown poison could radium, the world's newest miracle cure, be the culprit?

In a time when Nobel Prize winner Mme. Marie Curie became a celebrity and toured the world, "My beautiful radium," as Curie referred to it, was the discovery the world needed as it stepped into the 20th century. Physicians soon learned that the application of radium salts to a tumor would shrink the cancer; "radium therapy" was introduced into hospitals shortly after. There were bottles of radium water (guaranteed to make the drinker sparkle with energy), radium soda, radium candy, radium-laced facial creams to rejuvenate the skin - health spas even took to dumping Uranium ore into their hot springs in order to capture radium's magic. The world was riding high on the health bounty of the radioactive element, but for the girls working as dial painters in the the U.S. Radium Corporation's factory in Orange, New Jersey, radium meant something else entirely.

It was their way out of poverty and up towards a bright, shining future. Many of the girls were as young as 15. Girls like Grace Fryer, portrayed by Notre Dame senior Keira Cruickshank and Kathryn Schaub, played by Klara La Guardia, a sophomore at Mercy, were quitting school to go work in the U.S. Radium Corporation's watch dial painting factory. They made almost three times what their fathers or husbands made and would leave the factory each night literally basking in the glow of their work, painting glow-in-the-dark watch dials for American soldiers during WWI. In order to get the point of their paint brushes just right, they were instructed to point the tips with their lips. What harm could come from swallowing a little Radium, the medicine used by doctors and scientists alike?

"The story brings up so many relevant issues: cultural gender bias, corporate malpractice, and worker exploitation, to name a few. We don't hear enough stories of

strong women fighting back and it has been a dream to be able to share this one,” says Keira Cruickshank. “Culturally, we have this idea that female role models have to behave a certain way: they have to be strong, confident, outspoken. We unfairly expect them to be more than human. What I have learned from playing Grace is that she is not perfect. There are times she is neither strong nor confident nor outspoken. Often female characters aren't given the luxury of being human in the same way male characters are, but in this play, they gets their chance.”

In the play, The U.S. Radium Corporation is represented by their figurehead and leader, Arthur Roeder, played by Serra senior Kevin Castellanos. When asked about his character, Kevin says “One of the main ideas stressed is how humans may prioritize the efforts to achieve validation from others over principled and ethical behavior. Arthur wants the people around him to see him as a righteous individual which ultimately, and ironically, overshadows his sense of moral obligation. Playing a morally complex character in a realistic world has taught me so much about humanity and myself.”

The show delves into the media as an important weapon for all sides of the fight. “The power that the media has to persuade the public can be frightening; especially now with poor reporting tainted by bias and spin.” Says Kat McGee, Mercy senior, who sees a direct link to the shows depiction of the media and the world of today. “It makes it nearly impossible to know the truth about politics when politicians lie between competing news stations.”

*Radium Girls* is about the world confronting the fanciful claims made by scientists, advertisers, and corporate executives. It is about how America fell prey to the snake oil promise of good science and a miracle cure-all. But most of all this show, and the students involved, aim to reveal how the truth that hides itself away can be the most dangerous of all.

Radium Girls plays October 20th, 21st, 27th & 28th at 7:30pm in the Gellert Auditorium at Serra High School. For tickets, visit [www.trischoolproductions.com](http://www.trischoolproductions.com).