

ATLANTIC
THEATER COMPANY

STUDY GUIDE: STUDENTS & EDUCATORS

DYING FOR IT



Director of Education
HEATHER BAIRD

Designed by Marketing Manager
CECILE ORESTE

Adaptation by
MOIRA BUFFINI

Directed by
NEIL PEPE

Written by Education Coordinator
FRAN TARR

Contributions from
TYLER EASTER Education Associate
ARIELLA SEGAL Education Intern

A free adaptation of
The Suicide by
NIKOLAI ERDMAN



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: THE PLAY

Synopsis, Characters, Setting, Themes

SECTION 2: CAST & CREATIVE

Adaptation, Director & Cast Bios

SECTION 3: YOUR STUDENTS AS AUDIENCE

Theater Vocabulary, Theater Genres & Satire, *Dying For It* Vocabulary, The Russian Revolution, Webbing & Discussion Triggers, Relating Themes To Our Own Lives

SECTION 4: YOUR STUDENTS AS ACTORS

Theater Warm Up Game: Two Truths and a Lie, Reading A Scene For Understanding, Practical Aesthetics Sheets

SECTION 5: YOUR STUDENTS AS ARTISTS

Make Your Own Play, Performing Your Own Satirical Scene, Political Cartoon Activity, Common Core & DOE Theater Blueprint

SECTION 6: THE ATLANTIC LEGACY

Atlantic Theater Company, Atlantic Acting School



SECTION 1: THE PLAY

SYNOPSIS

DYING FOR IT is the story of Semyon, a man down on his luck, married to a nag, and out of options. When he decides to throw in the towel and kill himself, a deluge of sympathetic visitors descends upon him, determined to make him a martyr for their many causes. Swept up in the firestorm of attention, Semyon does take matters into his own hands, but not quite in the fashion that everyone expects. An outrageous satire on the hypocrisy and illogic of Soviet life, this play was banned by Stalin before it ever saw the light of day, and is now regarded as an under-known 20th century classic comedy.

CHARACTERS

Semyon Semyonovich Podsekalknikov - An unemployed man, age 27

Maria Lukianovna 'Masha' - Semyon's wife, a worker, age 25

Serafima Ilyinichna - Masha's mother, a cleaner

Alexander Petrovich Kalabushkin - Their neighbor, a fairground stall holder

Margarita Ivanovna Peryesvetova - Alexander's lover, owner of a coffee shop

Yegor Timovevich - A postman

Aristarkh Dominikovich Grand-Skubik - A member of the intelligentsia

Kleopatra Maximovna 'Kiki' - A romantic

Father Yelpidy - A priest

Viktor Viktorovich - A writer

Stepan Vasilievich & Oleg Leonidovich - Undertakers

Two Beggar Musicians



SETTING

An urban slum. Russia in the late 1920's.

THEMES

Manipulation, self-worth, finding one's purpose, shared values, repression, hypocrisy, role reversal

SECTION 2: CAST & CREATIVE

MOIRA BUFFINI (*Adaptation*)

Plays include *Handbagged* for the Tricycle Theatre; West End transfer and Olivier Award Winner for Best Off West End play. *Welcome To Thebes* and *Dinner* (Olivier Award nomination Best Comedy) for the National Theatre, *Dying For It* (adapted from Nikolai Erdman's *The Suicide*) and *Marianne Dreams* (adapted from Catherine Storr's book) for the Almeida, *A Vampire Story* for NT Connections, *Loveplay* for the RSC, *Silence* for Birmingham Rep (Susan Smith Blackburn Prize), *Gabriel* for Soho Theatre (LWT Plays On Stage Award and the Meyer Whitworth Award) as well as Atlantic Theater Company Off Broadway, *Blavatsky's Tower* for the Machine Room and *Jordan* with Anna Reynolds for The Gate (Writers Guild Award for best fringe play). Screenplays include *Tamara Drewe* directed by Stephen Frears, *Jane Eyre* directed by Cary Fukunaga and *Byzantium*, adapted from her play *A Vampire Story*, directed by Neil Jordan. Next up is *Sutton Hoo*, directed by Susanne Bier starring Cate Blanchett, filming Autumn 2014. Moira recently directed her first short film, *Father*.

NEIL PEPE (*Director*)

Neil Pepe recently staged the acclaimed world premiere production of John Guare's *3 Kinds of Exile* at Atlantic and the Broadway production of the new musical *Hands on a Hardbody*. Other Broadway credits include the acclaimed revival of *Speed-the-Plow* and David Mamet's *A Life in the Theatre*. Off-Broadway: Jez Butterworth's *Parlour Song*, *Mojo* and *The Night Heron*; Ethan Coen's *Happy Hour*, *Offices* and *Almost an Evening*; Harold Pinter's *Celebration* and *The Room*; Adam Rapp's *Dreams of Flying*, *Dreams of Falling*; Joe Penhall's *Blue/Orange*; Hilary Bell's *Wolf Lullaby*; David Pittu's *What's That Smell?*; Howard Korder's *Sea of Tranquility* (all at Atlantic); David Mamet's *American Buffalo* (Donmar Warehouse, Atlantic); *Romance*, *Keep Your Pantheon/School* (Center Theatre Group, Atlantic); Zinnie Harris' *Further than the Furthest Thing* (Manhattan Theater Club); Jessica Goldberg's *Refuge* (Playwrights Horizons); Tom Donaghy's *The Beginning of August* (South Coast Repertory, Atlantic). Frank Gilroy's *The Subject Was Roses* with Martin Sheen (CTG). Also, Eric Bogosian's *Red Angel* (Williamstown Theater Festival). Since 1992, Neil has been the Artistic Director of the award-winning Off-Broadway company, Atlantic Theater Company.



MIA BARRON (*Margarita*)

Recent theater includes Bruce Norris's *Domesticated* (Lincoln Center), Sam Hunter's *A Great Wilderness* (Williamstown Theatre Festival) and Nicholas Martin's production of *The Show Off* (Westport Playhouse). Broadway: *The Coast of Utopia*, *QED*. Off Broadway: *What Once We Felt* (Lincoln Center), *Spirit Control* (Manhattan Theatre Club), *Knickerbocker* (Public Theater), *The World Over*, *She Stoops to Comedy*, *The Pain and the Itch* (Playwrights Horizons), *Hillary* (New Georges), *1001* (PG 73), *Grille Room* (Cherry Lane), *Penetration Play* (13P), Co-Creator/Performer *Big Times* (Leigh Silverman, director). Education: BFA New York University, MFA New York University Graduate acting Program.



BEN BECKLEY (*Yegor*)

Theater: *Peter and the Starcatcher* (First National Tour); *Goldor \$ Mythyka* (New Georges); *The Cocktail Party* (The Actors Company); *The Illusion* (Berkshire Theatre Group); *Not A Creature Was Stirring*, Los Angeles, Cato (Flea); *Salamander Leviathan* (Public Theater/Joe's Pub); *The Sister* (The Brick); *Ghost Box*, *Welcome to Nowhere* (Temporary Distortion); *That Poor Dream*, *HOME/SICK*, *The Three Sisters*, *Clementine and the Cyber Ducks* (The Assembly – company member); *Zinnias* (Peak Performances, workshop), dir. Robert Wilson. Film: *The Onion*, *Crooked and Narrow*, *The Jew of Malta*, *The Revolution*. www.benbeckley.com

SECTION 2: CAST & CREATIVE

**NATHAN DAME** (*Oleg*)

Music Director: *A Little Night Music* (Berkshire Theatre Group); *Pump Boys and Dinettes* (Geva Theatre); *The Lightning Thief* (Theatreworks USA); *Fly Guy and Other Stories* (Theatreworks USA); *Adam Lives* (Goodspeed NMF); Upcoming: *Pretty Filthy* with the Civilians. Music Supervisor: *Mr. Burns* by Anne Washburn, music by Michael Friedman (Playwrights Horizons). Assoc. Music Director: *What's It All About?* (New York Theatre Workshop); *Fly By Night* (Dallas Theater Center); *Triassic Park: The Musical* (Amas Musical Theatre); *Himself and Nora* (NYMF, Tritone Productions); *Nightmare Alley* (NYMF, Tritone Productions). Music Assistant: First National Tour of *The Addams Family*.

**PATCH DARAGH** (*Victor*)

Patch Daragh returns to Atlantic after starring in Rolin Jones world premiere production of *The Jammer*. He recently appeared Off Broadway in Branden Jacobs-Jenkins Obie Award winning play *Appropriate* and Sarah Treem's *When We Were Young and Unafraid*. Broadway: *Our Town*. Off Broadway: *Kin* (Playwrights Horizons), *The Glass Menagerie* (Roundabout, Lortel Nomination Outstanding Lead Actor), *Crimes of the Heart* (Roundabout), *All That I Will Ever Be* (NYTW), *The Ruby Sunrise* (The Public), *Where We're Born* (Rattlestick), *The Grille Room*, *Spin*, *The Secret Agenda of Trees* (Cherry Lane). Film: *Let's Be Cops*, *Loitering With Intent*, *Coach*, *Little Horses*, *Hope Springs*, Upcoming: M. Night Shyamalan's *Sundowning*.

**CLEA LEWIS** (*Kleopatra*)

Clea Lewis returns to Atlantic where she first appeared in the world premiere of Woody Allen's *Writer's Block*. She made her Broadway debut in *Absurd Person Singular*. Off Broadway credits include *Last Easter*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Fuddy Meers* and *Things You Shouldn't Say Past Midnight*. Other theatre includes: E.S.T. One-Act Festival. Regional: *Once in a Lifetime* (Williamstown); *All in the Timing* (Geffen Playhouse); *Pterodactyls* (South Coast Rep). She memorably starred as Audrey in the long running ABC sitcom "Ellen." Ms. Lewis was the voice of Nicky on the ABC animated series "Pepper Ann."

**PETER MALONEY** (*Father Yelpidy*)

Peter Maloney has appeared in 21 plays at the Atlantic Theater Company, where he is a member, including *3 Kinds of Exile*, *The New York Idea*, *Bottom of the World*, *Trumpery* and *The Voyage Inheritance*. At the Irish Repertory Theater he played in *Ernest in Love* and *It's A Wonderful Life* and recently appeared there in Conor McPherson's *Port Authority*. His performance as "Shelley Levene" in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* at the La Jolla Playhouse was critically acclaimed, and he received a Drama Desk nomination and the Richard Seff Award for his characterization of Tony Reilly in John Patrick Shanley's *Outside Mullingar* on Broadway. Member: The Actors Studio, Ensemble Studio Theatre, The Irish Repertory Theatre.

**ANDREW MAYER** (*Stepan/Beggar*)

Recent theater: *The 12 – A New Rock Musical* (Signature Theater, & UPCOMING: Denver Center Theater), *Fiddler on the Roof* (Barrington Stage, & Westchester Broadway Theatre), *Los Valientes* (Core Ensemble), *Fallujah* (TPAC-NYC & Kennedy Center), *In the Jungle of Cities* (Huntington Theater – Studio 210), *Marina* (NYMF). Recent film: "Swing Blues" (Culpepper & Williams Prod), "III.1 – Romeo's Turn" (Lost Light Prod). As a musician, Andrew is a singer and electric violinist in one of the top wedding bands in NYC, the Michael Hart Band. He is also a trained stage combat professional. Training: Boston University School of Theatre (BFA – Acting), Manhattan School of Music, LAMDA.

SECTION 2: CAST & CREATIVE

**MARY BETH PEIL (*Serafima*)**

Mary Beth Peil is an Atlantic Theater Company member and returns to Atlantic following her appearances in *The Threepenny Opera*, *Harper Regan*, *The Room*, *Frame 312* and *Missing Persons*, for which she received an Obie Award. Broadway: *Follies*, *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, *Sunday in the Park with George*, *Nine* (Outer Critics Circle nomination), *The King and I* opposite Yul Brynner (Tony Award® nomination). Off-Broadway: *Domesticated* (LCT), *The Morini Strad* (Primary Stages), *Hedda Gabler* (NYTW), *First Lady Suite* (Transport Group), *As Thousands Cheer* (Drama Dept), *A Cheever Evening* (Obie, Playwrights Horizons), *Sylvia* (MTC), *Finding the Sun* (Signature), *Naked Truth* (Obie Award, WPA).

**JEANINE SERRALLES (*Masha*)**

Jeanine Serralles returns to Atlantic after starring in Rolin Jones world premiere production of *The Jammer*. Off Broadway: *The Muscles in Our Toes* (Labyrinth Theater), *Paris Commune* (B.A.M), *The Maids* (Red Bull Theater), *Maple and Vine* (Playwrights Horizons), *Stunning* (Lincoln Ctr-LCT3), *The Glass Cage* (Mint Theater), *The Misanthrope* (New York Theatre Workshop, Drama League nomination), *The Black Eyed* (New York Theatre Workshop, Drama League nomination); *Hold Please* (Working Theater, Drama Desk Nomination-Featured Actress), *Phoebe in Winter*, *Vendetta Chrome* (Clubbed Thumb). MFA: Yale School of Drama.

**JOEY SLOTNICK (*Semyon*)**

Joey Slotnick is an ensemble member of Chicago's Tony Award® winning Lookingglass Theatre Company where he has performed in many productions including *Our Town*, *Wants & Needs*, *Great Men of Science Nos. 21 & 22* and Mary Zimmerman's *Arabian Nights*. Joey recently starred in *Chapter Two* directed by Marsha Mason at the Bucks County Playhouse. He made his Broadway debut in *The Big Knife*, with Bobby Cannavale, for the Roundabout Theatre Company. He starred in three World Premiere plays by Ethan Coen – all at the Atlantic and directed by Neil Pepe. His most recent features credits include Tom McCarthy's *The Cobbler* and *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty*.

**ROBERT STANTON (*Aristarkh Dominikovich Grand-Subik*)**

Atlantic: *The Bald Soprano*. Broadway includes *A Free Man of Color*, *Mary Stuart* and *The Coast of Utopia*. Off-Broadway: two dozen shows include *Love Child*, written with Daniel Jenkins, and *All in the Timing* (Obie and Clarence Derwent Awards). Recent credits include Arnolphe in *The School for Wives* (Two River Theater), *The Killer* (Theatre for a New Audience), *Checkers* (Vineyard), Charles Marsden in *Strange Interlude* (Shakespeare Theatre), Boyet and Dull in *Love's Labour's Lost* (The Public), Alarm Will Sound's *1969* (Carnegie Hall), "Orange Is the New Black," "Elementary," "The Good Wife" and Rupert Goold's upcoming film *True Story*.

**C.J. WILSON (*Alexander Petrovich Kalabushkin*)**

Atlantic Theater Company: *Our New Girl*, *Offices* and *The Voyage Inheritance*. Broadway: *Bronx Bombers*, *The Big Knife*, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, *A Steady Rain*, *Festen*, *Henry IV*, *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and Gore Vidal's *The Best Man*. Off-Broadway: *Bronx Bombers*, *Happy Now?* (Lucille Lortel nom. Primary Stages); *Medieval Play*, *The Lady from Dubuque* (Signature); *All-American* (LCT 3); *Race* (CSC); *Home of the Brave* (Jewish Rep); *Stop Kiss* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Public). Television: "The Sound of Music Live!," "The Following," "The Good Wife," "The Americans," "Blue Bloods," "Pan Am," "Onion Sportsdome," "Brotherhood," "Without a Trace," "Law & Order."

SECTION 3: YOUR STUDENTS AS AUDIENCE

“Plays should tell simple, honest stories.”

- David Mamet, American playwright
& noted actor, William H. Macy,
founders of Atlantic Theater Company

The following activities will assist your students in understanding the intentions of the playwright in telling a simple story.

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to the characters, setting, and story of *DYING FOR IT*.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that actors, working together, will simply and truthfully create the story of the play.



THEATER VOCABULARY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To be able to discuss theater through a common, shared vocabulary.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that the most effective way to discuss theater and new ideas is through a shared vocabulary.



Action The events that move along the story of the play and which influence the characters within the play.

Characters Individuals the audience learns about from their actions and reactions.

Ensemble A group of performers working together to create a complete production.

Dialogue The exchange of speech between two characters which reveals the feelings of the character as well as the story of the play.

Monologue A speech by one actor on stage which is intended to reveal the inner thoughts of the character the actor plays.

Character Arc The change produced in a character by the events and other characters in the play.

Musical Theater A twentieth century creation where writers and musicians collaborate to create a play which features song, dance and drama.

Mood The overall feeling the play evokes.

Costume The clothes, boots, etc., worn by the actors based on their character.

Prop Objects used by an actor to enhance their character. For example, wine glasses at a bar for drinks.

Set The constructed environment of a play within which the action takes place.

Sound Noises and music used in the play.

THEATER GENRES & SATIRE

THEATER GENRES

Comedy A light and humorous play that contains a happy resolution of the thematic conflict.

Tragedy A dramatic play that deals with a serious or somber theme. Typically, tragedies depict the stories of a character's flaw leading to their downfall through the overpowering force of fate.

Farce A light play that contains highly improbable plot situations, exaggerated characters, and slapstick comedy resulting in ridiculous and humorous circumstances.

Historical A piece of literary work that takes place during the past. A historical play is characterized mainly by an imaginative reconstruction of historical events.

Satirical The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics.

IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF SATIRE

John Dryden uses the theories of the great thinkers Horace and Juvenal to define two subcategories of satire: comic satire and tragic satire. These subcategories show how the individual reader can see moments of satire from different perspectives.

Comedy Satirist An upright man who is horrified and angered by corruption.

Tragic Satirist An urbane man of the world who sees folly everywhere but is moved to gentle laughter rather than to rage.

Satirical Works Countless plays, films, books and other artistic mediums have used satire as a humorous way to expose the weaknesses or bad qualities of a person, government or society. A few examples of satirical works are:

- Political Cartoons
- *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde (1895)
- *Animal Farm* by George Orwell (1945)
- *Planet of the Apes* (1968 Film)
- *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut (1969)
- Performer "Weird Al" Yankovic (1959 - Present)
- The Onion Magazine (1988 - Present)

DYING FOR IT VOCABULARY

Proletariat A group of workers or working class people. On Bloody Sunday 1905, the Proletariats went on a peaceful march to ask the Tsar to help them, but the Cossacks attacked them.

Marxism An economic and political practice originated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Marxists believe that human institutions are economically determined, that the class struggle is the basic agency of historical change and that capitalism will ultimately be superseded by communism. While Marxism was excellent in theory, it was unsuccessful in practice.

Marxist A follower of Marxism.

Icon A picture or image that represents something of importance.

Intelligentsia A group of well-educated people who guide or try to guide the political, artistic, or social development of their society.

Knackered A British word for exhausted or severely damaged.

Shebeen An unlicensed or illegally operating drinking establishment.

Comrade A fellow socialist or communist.

Egalitarian The principle that all people are equal and deserve equal rights and opportunities, especially in political, economic, and social life.

Tsar An emperor of Russia before 1917.



THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION (1917 - 1918)

OVERVIEW

The Russian Revolution took place in 1917, during the final phase of World War I. The Revolution occurred during a time when there were many problems in Russia. One of the major issues was that the gap between the rich and poor was enormous. The Tsar had all power (autocracy), and ordinary people had no control over their lives. The Revolution removed Russia from the war and brought about the transformation of the Russian Empire into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), replacing Russia's traditional monarchy with the world's first Communist state.

A leader of the Revolution, Vladimir Lenin, said that the enemies of Russians were the rich landowners and capitalism. Lenin called for no private property, no social classes, and Russia's surrender to Germany. In the spring and summer of 1917, peasants were given new rights and began to seize and distribute non-communal properties.

The revolution that Lenin led marked one of the most radical turning points in Russia's 1,300-year history: it affected economics, social structure, culture, international relations, industrial development, and most any other benchmark by which one might measure a revolution.

After Lenin died, Joseph Stalin, a member of the revolution, took control of the party. Once in power, he collectivized farming and had rivals and potential enemies executed or sent to forced labor camps. Joseph Stalin became the dictator of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and ruled from 1929 to 1953. Under Stalin, the Soviet Union was transformed from a peasant society into an industrial and military superpower. However, he ruled by terror, and millions of his own citizens died during his brutal reign.

SOCIAL CLASSES BEFORE & AFTER

One of the main causes of the revolution was poverty in Russia. There were big differences between rich and poor. Peasants in the countryside and workers in the towns suffered from low wages, long hours, and terrible living conditions. The poor wanted to improve their standard of living. Before 1861, peasants were slaves called serfs. Since 1861, they were given land, but they had to pay the government for it and were in great debt because of this. The only rich people in Russia were a few upper-class families and the Russian Orthodox Church.

According to historian Michael Lynch, the 1897 census categorized the population of Russia in these broad class groups:

- UPPER CLASSES: Royalty, nobility, higher clergy, 12.5%
- MIDDLE CLASSES: Merchants, bureaucrats, professionals, 1.5%
- WORKING CLASSES: Factory workers, artisans, soldiers, sailors, 4%
- PEASANTS: Landed and landless farmers, 82%

After the revolution, the country's new rulers were drawn largely from the intellectual and working classes rather than from the aristocracy, which meant a considerable change in direction for Russia. While the revolution took the upper class out of power, the new system was still flawed since just like before the revolution, only a small percentage of people had power.

Joseph Stalin's Five-Year Plan intended to transform the Soviet Union from a peasant society into an industrial superpower. Stalin's plan was centered around government control of the economy and included the forced collectivization of Soviet agriculture. The government took control of farms and the millions of farmers who refused to cooperate with Stalin's orders were shot or exiled as punishment. The forced collectivization also led to widespread famine across the Soviet Union that killed millions, including 10 million peasants; the very people the revolution had initially set out to save.

WEBBING & DISCUSSION TRIGGERS

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To develop critical thinking skills through examining the themes in *DYING FOR IT*.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that the story of the play relates to their own lives.

MATERIALS

Chalkboard, chalk, paper, pens, the webbing ideas and discussion triggers.



Webbing Ideas

Self worth	Shared Values
Finding one's purpose	Repression
Role reversal	Hypocrisy

Discussion Trigger

SEMYON: It's killing me, I swear it. Every job I go for I stand in line with fifty other men who all look just like me and forty nine of us are turned away. I have no dignity, no labour, no value at all.

- Do you believe we are defined by our employment?
- If this sense was prevalent in 1920s Russia, what does it mean in our 21st century society?

Step One

Write the Webbing Ideas on the chalkboard.

Step Two

Have each student add their impressions of the meaning of one of these concepts on the board, and how it relates to their own experiences.

Step Three

Use the students' responses to focus on how unique each student's perception is of these concepts. Why is this true?

Step Four

Ask the students to discuss how their integrity plays out in their own lives i.e. with their families.

Step Five

Share the discussion trigger and questions with the class. How do our definitions of ourselves in conjunction with our employment relate to the webbing ideas and your earlier discussion?

RELATING THEMES TO OUR OWN LIVES

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

Warm-up students to develop their critical thinking skills and expand their ability to take ownership of their individual points of view.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an individual's personal opinion or point of view does not define them as a person. It is simply a window into understanding them as a free thinker.

SPATIAL ORGANIZATION

Clear open space. One side of the room is "completely agree" and the opposite side is "completely disagree."



Step One

Instructor indicates each side of the room to the students.

Step Two

Instructor will read statements to the students. These are some possible statements:

- I have seen a play.
- Plays always have happy endings.
- Plays are accurate portrayals of real life.
- I believe it is always wrong to manipulate another person.
- Personal security can justify any decision, even if it is morally wrong.
- People should do whatever it takes to feel secure or to have a sense of belonging.
- Security is more important than morals.

Step Three

When the instructor reads a statement, students move to either side of the spectrum or anywhere along it. Try to encourage students not to be 100% neutral.

Step Four

After each statement is read and the students move, the instructor should ask certain students to justify their position on the spectrum. The instructor can allow this to spark conversation, or can simply move on to the next statement.

Step Five

After the exercise, in reflection, the instructor can ask the students: "Based on the statements, what themes do you think this show may explore?"

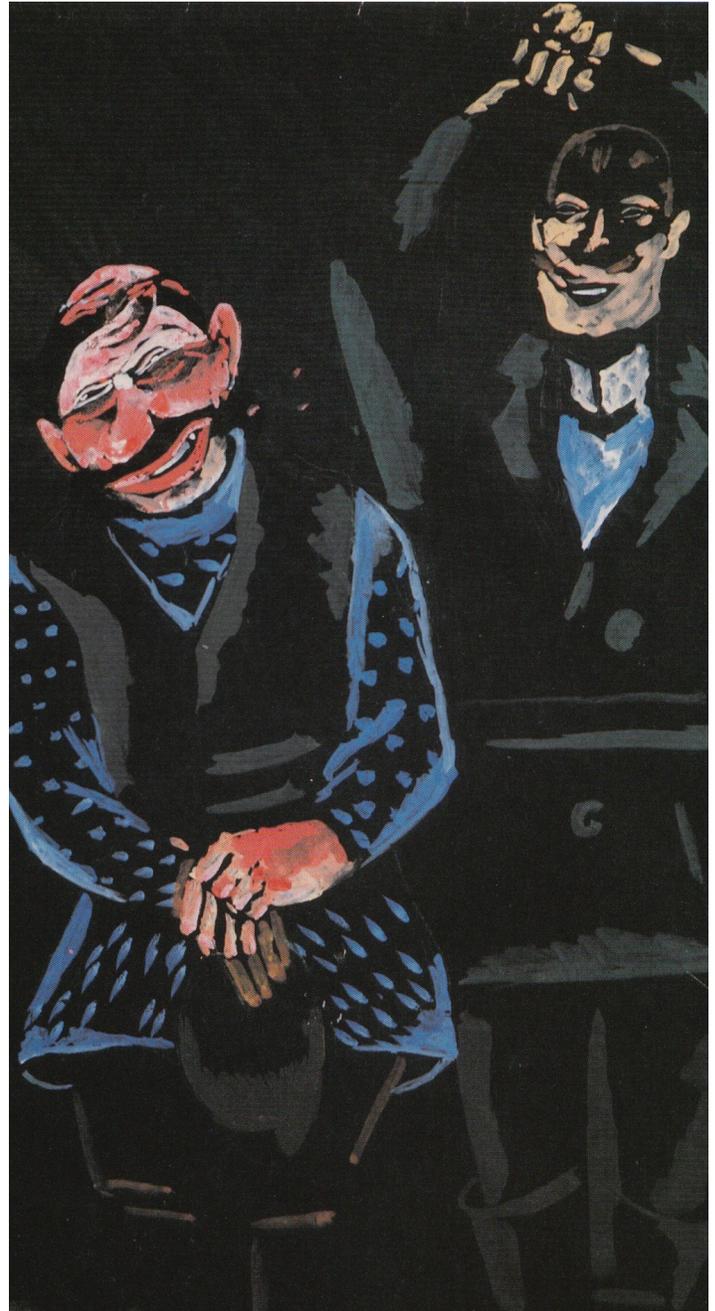
SECTION 4: YOUR STUDENTS AS ACTORS

*“Actors should remain truthful to the story
and their character.”*

**- David Mamet, American playwright
& noted actor, William H. Macy,
founders of Atlantic Theater Company**

The following activities are designed to assist your students in understanding the actor’s “job.” Like every job, even acting has its “tools.”

The Practical Aesthetics acting technique was developed by David Mamet, William H. Macy and the founding members of the Atlantic Theater Company. This technique offers the actor a set of analytical tools to understand the playwright’s intentions and what the characters want. This process of script analysis additionally helps define the actor’s job on stage.



WARM-UP GAME: TWO TRUTHS & A LIE

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

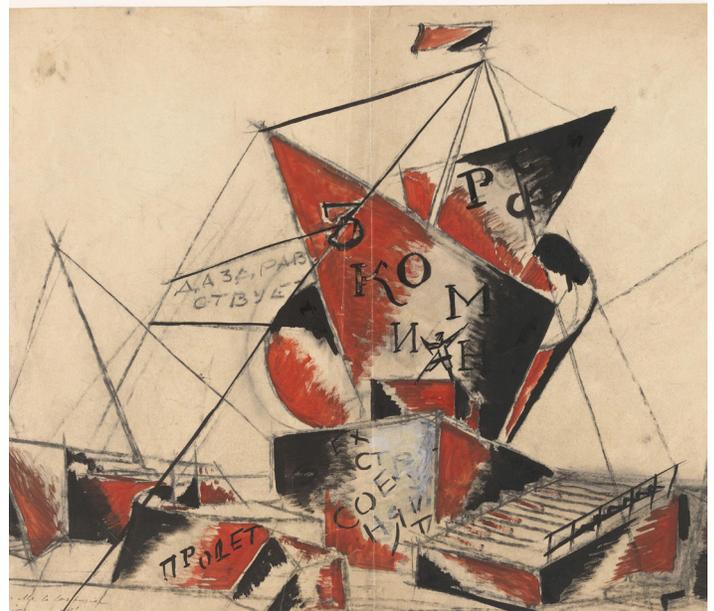
To demonstrate to students how falsehoods can be hidden within truths and the power of manipulation.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand the complex nature of the *DYING FOR IT* characters' truths and falsehoods.

MATERIALS

Sheets of paper and pencils.



Step One

Distribute sheets of paper to all of the students.

Step Two

Instruct students to write down three statements about themselves on their paper. Explain that two of these statements should be truthful and one statement should be a lie. Provide students with an example of your own to help guide the students' responses.

Step Three

Have a student volunteer to share their two truths and a lie.

Step Four

Ask the class to raise their hands if they think that the lie is statement one, two, or three. After the voting is complete, ask the student volunteer to reveal the correct answer.

Step Five

Encourage a few more rounds of volunteers and voting. After different volunteers have read their truths and lies, ask students how the volunteers' tactics differed. How did they lead the group to a certain answer? Did the volunteer manipulate you in any way to believe their false statement was true?

READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To introduce the Practical Aesthetics “tools” for breaking down a scene. To understand the character and the story of the scene by relating the character’s actions to the student’s own life.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that an important part of creating a simple, honest character involves knowing what that character “wants.”

MATERIALS

Pens, pencils, copies of the following scene from *DYING FOR IT*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS EXERCISE

Step One

Divide the students in pairs. Ask the students to select which character they want to portray.

Step Two

Allow the students time to read the scene silently to themselves.

Step Three

Ask the students to read the Introduction to the Practical Aesthetic Acting Technique sheet. Have the students answer the four questions on the Scene Analysis Worksheet.

NOTE: The four questions and the students’ answers to them form the basis for the Practical Aesthetics scene analysis; and enables the actor to create a simple, honest character—they’re simply being honest to their own experiences!

Step Four

After the students have completed the question worksheet, ask each pair of actors to read the scene in the front of the class room for an “Audience.” The students should incorporate the ideas from the worksheet as they read the scene.



READING A SCENE FOR UNDERSTANDING

A SCENE FROM *DYING FOR IT*

Alexander

Life is beautiful

Semyon

Right

Alexander

Life is a miracle, full of wonder

Semyon

What has that got to do with me?

Alexander

Everything. You're alive aren't you?
Here you are, at the dawn of a brave new age
Age of industry and the working man
Age of medicine and electrics

Semyon

Yeh and what kind of age is it when they cut us off because of an unpaid bill?

Alexander

Good question

Semyon

The fucking Dark Age?

Alexander

It's like living in caves isn't it? I spent three weeks standing in line every day just to get them to adjust that bill - their mistake of course. But it doesn't matter whose mistake it is, we're the ones who suffer and you ask yourself finally, is that what I'm living for?

Semyon

Yes

Alexander

Some bureaucrat in a heated office saying this regulation, that regulation and if it's not electric it's the wording on the license for my stall or a travel permit - one form after another and finally as the queue stretches on before you through eternity you find you're tired of living

Semyon

Yes
Yes

Alexander

Tired of fucking living for that
But
Life is beautiful, comrade

Semyon

You know I read that in the paper the other day and I'm sure that they'll retract it soon



PRACTICAL AESTHETICS INTRODUCTION

ANALYSIS

SCRIPT ANALYSIS is the process of breaking down a beat within a scene. We ask four questions in order to do this.

1. What is the character LITERALLY doing?
2. What does the character WANT?
3. What is the essential ACTION?
4. What is that action like to me? It is AS-IF...

Literal

In this step, the actor determines what the character he or she is playing is literally doing according to the text.

PURPOSE: An actor has to travel far—think of this preparation as the road map.

Want

In this step, the actor identifies the goal of the character in the scene, specifically what the character wants from the other character/s in the scene. The given circumstances of the story inform the WANT.

PURPOSE: To focus the actor on the characters' interaction.

Action

Playing an ACTION is the physical pursuit of a goal. Defining the ACTION of the scene allows the actor to determine what result or CAP he or she is looking for from the other actor/s in the scene.

EXAMPLES:

- Put someone in their place.
- Beg someone for forgiveness.
- Get a favor.
- Get someone to let me off the hook.
- Force someone to face the facts.
- Inspire someone to greatness.
- Get someone to see the light.

PURPOSE: Using an action gives the actor a task and a specific point of view. The Atlantic Theater Company teaches that the Action creates character.

As-If

In this step, the actor personalizes the action by finding a real-life situation in which they would behave according to the action they have chosen for the scene.

EXAMPLE: Get a favor.

It's AS-IF I forgot to do my science homework and I'm asking my teacher for an extra day to hand it in.

PURPOSE: To gain personal insight and urgency to the scene or beat.

Tactics & Tools

Different ways an actor goes about getting his action.

EXAMPLE: Plead, flirt, demand, inspire, challenge, level, threaten.

Living In The Moment

Reacting impulsively to what the other actor in the scene is doing, from the point of view of the chosen action.



SCENE ANALYSIS WORKSHEET

IF YOU'RE PLAYING SEMYON

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

What is my character literally doing?

Semyon is literally talking to Alexander about the irony of life being unfair and beautiful at the same time.

Now can you think of another idea of what Alexander and Semyon are literally doing?

What does my character want?

Semyon wants Alexander to see that despite their greatest efforts, they are being held down by forces that are out of their control.

What is the action I'm going to play?

To get someone to concede to defeat.

What other actions might work to create the illusion of the character?

The As-if

It is as if my mom was sick and I thought she needed to be treated by a professional at a hospital, and she refused to believe she needed help.

Now can you remember a time in your own life when you needed to get someone to concede to defeat?

IF YOU'RE PLAYING ALEXANDER

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

What is my character literally doing?

Alexander is literally talking to Semyon about the irony of life being unfair and beautiful at the same time.

Now can you think of another idea of what Alexander and Semyon are literally doing?

What does my character want?

Alexander wants Semyon to understand that struggling through the injustices being thrown at them is worth living.

What is the action I'm going to play?

To get someone to seize a great opportunity.

What other actions might work to create the illusion of the character?

The As-if

It is as if my semi-retired father was offered an amazing job that he had never done in his 40+ years of working, and he wasn't sure that he was up to the task.

Now can you remember a time in your own life when you needed to get someone to seize a great opportunity?

MINI-LESSON VOCABULARY

KEY VOCABULARY

Literal

The process of accessing the basic story-line of the characters in a particular scene or beat.

Want

The process of identifying the goal of the character in a scene or beat.

Action

The actor's physical pursuit of a specific goal.

As-If

A way to determine what this action means to me.

HANDY TOOL KIT FOR THE ACTOR

Acting Tactics & Tools

To Use In The As-If Step

- Laughing to get what you want
- Teasing to get what you want
- Testing to get what you want
- Threatening to get what you want
- Pleading to get what you want
- Flirting to get what you want
- Bartering to get what you want
- Bribing to get what you want
- Begging to get what you want
- Crying to get what you want
- Demanding to get what you want
- Leveling to get what you want
- Inspiring to get what you want
- Challenging to get what you want



SECTION 5: YOUR STUDENTS AS ARTISTS

“Create your own work.”

- David Mamet, American playwright
& noted actor, William H. Macy,
founders of Atlantic Theater Company

The following activities will assist your students in understanding themselves as artists creating original work that connects with their own experiences and world.

MAKE YOUR OWN PLAY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To facilitate the students' exploration of satirical writing.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand the satirical elements of the *DYING FOR IT* triggers and use them to inform their own writing and directing.

SATIRICAL TRIGGERS

Use the following satirical line from *DYING FOR IT* as a prompt:

SEMYON: “I want to make a difference in a way I can't alive.”

Step One

Separate students into groups of two. One student within each group should be the director and one should be the playwright.

Step Two

Give the class Semyon's satirical line to use as a prompt for their scene. It is up to the playwright and director to discuss a location and time period that this line could take place in.

Step Three

The playwright should then write a one page monologue that takes place within that setting. It must be informed by but does not need to include the trigger line.

Step Four

The director then has control of the play and the playwright should act in a different director's play. Assign each playwright (now actor) to a different director and have the director stage and lead a discussion with his/her actor.

Step Five

Each pair should present to the class. This can be a process over one or two lessons, or one or two weeks, depending on how extensive and final the performances are expected to be.

PERFORMING YOUR OWN SATIRICAL SCENE

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To deepen the students' understanding of satire through the use of physicality.

STUDENT GOAL

To recognize the satire in the text and use this understanding to strengthen their scene work.

Step One

Have two students read the scene aloud to the class.

Step Two

As a group, discuss the moments of satire in the scene. What specific lines are satirical? How is the scene satirical as a whole?

Step Three

Have students split up in pairs and rehearse different satirical takes of the scene. After a few minutes, ask if anyone would like to share their scene with the class. How did different students' takes on satire affect their performances? Were some more tragic while others were more comedic?



A SCENE FROM *DYING FOR IT*

Aristarkh

Speak and you're a hero. Men like me will honour you. Your name will become a slogan. I'll make sure that a portrait of your corpse - providing it's not too disfigured - will be on every front page. Russia's intelligentsia will gather round your coffin. Your hearse will be drowning in erudite tokens of respect.

Semyon

What a death.

Aristarkh

I would have such a death myself only alas, I'm needed alive. So, are we agreed?

Semyon

A useful, courageous, meaningful death.

Aristarkh

You need to compose your new suicide note, along the lines that I've suggested. And shall we arrange a time?

Semyon

A time?

Aristarkh

Would tonight at midnight suit you?

Semyon

Oh.

Aristarkh

You are a true Russian hero and you are my equal. In the name of the intelligentsia, allow me to embrace you. I find myself overcome. I didn't cry when my mother died. Oh, my poor mother. But now. Now.

Aristarkh sobs. Semyon comforts him.

Aristarkh

Until midnight.

POLITICAL CARTOON ACTIVITY

TEACHER OBJECTIVE

To develop students' understanding of satire in a different, creative medium.

STUDENT GOAL

To understand that satire can take many forms and can relate to their own daily lives.

MATERIALS

Sheet of paper, markers, crayons, pencils.

Step One

Revisit the definition of satire and ask students to recall satirical moments from *DYING FOR IT*.

Step Two

Instruct students to draw their own political cartoon.

NOTE: Encourage students to use their political cartoon to comment on society, not on any individuals.

Step Three

Ask students to share their political cartoon with the class. Why did they pick their particular issue to comment on? How did they use satire to invoke humor? Does the humor help deepen your understanding of the issue?



COMMON CORE & DOE THEATER BLUEPRINT

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING

Satire is often used in playwriting and other literature to identify and poke fun at society's shortcomings, while using humor to ease political tensions and inspire social change.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

In what ways does society influence our sense of self-worth and the value we place on our own lives?

How much of who we are is determined by the people around us and the relationships we have?

How much of the value we place on our lives is dependent on external factors (jobs, relationships, societal expectations)?

STRAND BENCHMARKS

Theater Making: Acting

BENCHMARK: Students increase their ability as imaginative actors while continuing to participate as collaborative ensemble members. Students demonstrate the ability to reflect on and think critically about their own work.

Theater Making: Playwriting/Play Making

BENCHMARK: Students refine their ability as playwrights to express point of view and personal vision.

Developing Theater Literacy

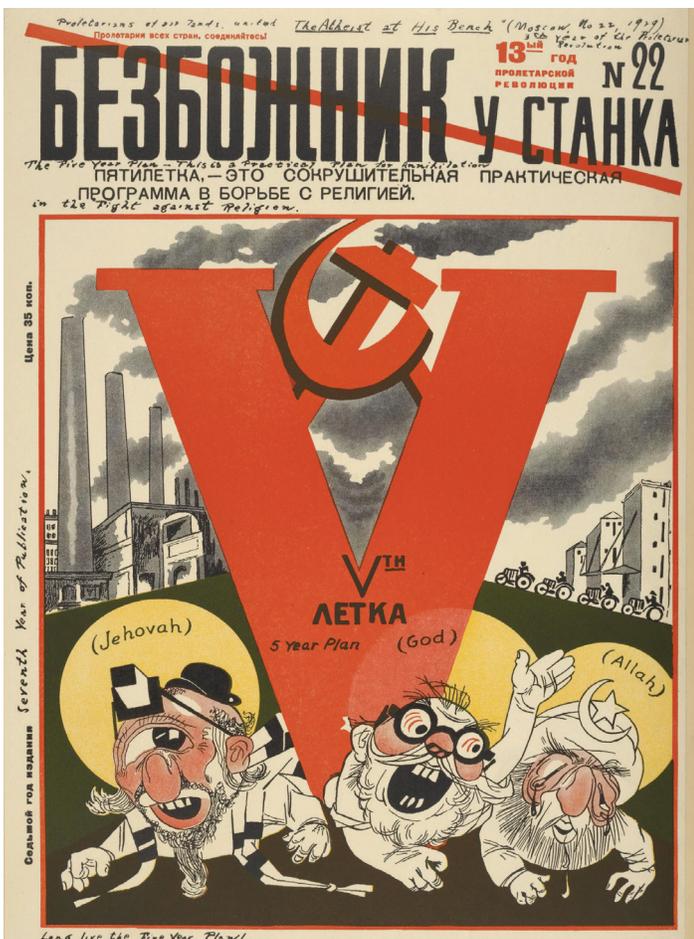
BENCHMARK: Students develop skills as critics by analyzing the critical writings of others.

Making Connections Through Theater

BENCHMARK: Students demonstrate a capacity for deep personal connection to theater and a realization of the meaning and messages of theater.

Working with Community and Cultural Resources

BENCHMARK: Students invigorate and broaden their understanding of theater through collaborative partnerships with theater professionals.



SECTION 6: THE ATLANTIC LEGACY

ATLANTIC THEATER COMPANY & ACTING SCHOOL

76 Ninth Avenue, Suite 537, New York, NY, 10011
Phone: 212-691-5919

atlantictheater.org
atlanticactingschool.org

LINDA GROSS THEATER

336 West 20th Street, New York, NY, 10011

ATLANTIC STAGE 2

330 West 16th Street, New York, NY, 10011

Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company in 1983 with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 11 Lucille Lortel Awards, 15 OBIE Awards, five Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, and three Drama League Awards. Noted productions include: *Spring Awakening*, *Port Authority*, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *Boy's Life*, and *American Buffalo*.

The Atlantic Theater Company's mission is to produce plays simply and truthfully, utilizing an artistic ensemble. Atlantic believes that the story of the play and the intent of its playwright are at the core of a successful theatrical production.

The Atlantic Acting School fosters new generations of actors by passing on the tools learned from Mamet and Macy and by preparing students for all aspects of a career in film, television and theater. The Atlantic offers studies through New York University, a full time conservatory program, part-time programs and summer workshops. Atlantic for Kids offers acting classes in an after school setting as well as summer programs for children ages 4 to 18.

