THE PENITENT

By David Mamet
Directed by Neil Pepe

Heather Baird
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Section I:
The Play
Synopsis
Cast & Characters
Themes
**Teacher Objective**
To introduce students to the characters, setting, and story of *The Penitent*.

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

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**SYNOPSIS**
A renowned psychiatrist is asked to testify on behalf of a young patient. When he refuses, his career, ethics, and faith are thrown into question.

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**CHARACTERS**

**CHARLES**: A middle-aged man. Portrayed by Chris Bauer.

**KATE**: A middle-aged woman, Charles’ wife. Portrayed by Rebecca Pidgeon.

**RICARD**: Their friend. Portrayed by Jordan Lage.

**THE ATTORNEY**: An attorney. Portrayed by Lawrence Gilliard Jr.

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**THEMES**
1. Religious conviction
2. Critical choices
3. Integrity
4. Moral dilemma
5. Manipulation
Section II: 
Creative Team 
Playwright and Director bios
DAVID MAMET
Playwright


NEIL PEPE
Director

NEIL PEPE (Director). Most recently directed the world premiere of George Brant’s Marie and Rosetta and Kenneth Lonergan’s Hold On To Me Darling. Broadway credits include the musical Hands on a Hardbody, the acclaimed revival of David Mamet’s Speed-the-Plow and A Life in the Theatre. Off-Broadway: John Guare’s 3 Kinds of Exile; Moira Buffini’s Dying For It; 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, Quincy Long’s Shaker Heights (all at Atlantic); David Mamet’s American Buffalo (Donmar Warehouse, Atlantic); Romance, Keep Your Pantheon and School (Center Theatre Group, Atlantic); Zinnie Harris’ Further than the Furthest Thing (Manhattan Theatre 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 Theatre Festival). Neil has been the Artistic Director of Atlantic Theater Company since 1992.
Section III: Your Students As Audience

Theater Vocabulary
Vocabulary in The Penitent
Relating Themes to Our Own Lives
Webbing & Discussion Triggers
“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 to tell a simple story.
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.
Penitent: A person who repents their sins or wrongdoings and (in the Christian Church) seeks forgiveness from God.

Aberration: Something or someone regarded as atypical and therefore able be ignored or discounted.

Libel: A statement or representation published without just cause and tending to expose another to public contempt.

Subpoena: A written order that commands someone to appear in court to give evidence.

Zealot: A person who has very strong feelings about something (such as religion or politics) and who wants other people to have those feelings.

Torah, Mishnah, Talmud, Kaballah: Writings on Judaism. The Torah consists of the five books of the Hebrew Bible. The Mishnah is a record of the Oral Torah. The Talmud is the body of Jewish civil and ceremonial law and legend. Kaballah is the ancient Jewish tradition of mystical interpretation of the Bible.
RELATING THEMES TO OUR OWN LIVES

THE PENITENT AND MEDIEVAL MORALITY PLAYS

THE PENITENT AND JEWISH SCRIPTURE: THE STORY OF NADAB AND ABIHU
In David Mamet’s *The Penitent*, echoes can be found from a much earlier theatrical tradition: that of the Medieval Morality Play. Morality Plays were popularized in England during the Middle Ages, from 1400 to 1600.

“These moralities centered on the life of the individual Christian, portrayed as a generalized type figure such as “Mankind” or “Everyman,” and emphasized his fall from grace, his death, and his eventual salvation through the intercession of a divine figure… The morality plays were acted by troops of wandering professional players who performed in innyards or on specially-constructed outdoor stages before paying audiences of country people, sometimes running as large as four thousand.”

**Conflict Resolution in the Medieval Morality Plays:**
By having characters personify human qualities, Morality Plays sought to teach their audiences lessons about their lives and the ways they lived them. One of the most important examples of a Morality Play is Everyman, which was performed in the late-15th century. In it, the character of Everyman is visited by the character of Death, who says he has arrived to take Everyman on a journey to present his bad deeds before God. Everyman, suddenly aware of his own mortality, asks several of his friends to accompany him, but they all refuse.

“Everyman’s overwhelming desire to have others accompany him to the grave only accentuates his isolation; he finds that his friendships with Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, and Goods have limits that were not apparent before Death’s presence” (Paulson 122).

While other friends such as Strength, Discretion, and Beauty initially agree to accompany him, one-by-one Everyman is abandoned by all of them. In the end, it is only Good Deeds that is strong enough to accompany him to his reckoning.

As you watch *The Penitent*, what issues of morality do you see embodied by the characters? What is each character’s vice and virtue? Do you think that there is a lesson that David Mamet, or one of the characters, is trying to teach?
Chere begynmeth a treatyle how s. hye sader of heuen sendeth bethe to solom every creature to come and gyne a counte of theyr lyues in this woride and is in maner of a morall playe.
And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire therein, and laid incense thereon, and offered strange fire before HaShem, which He had not commanded them.

And there came forth fire from before HaShem, and devoured them, and they died before HaShem.

Then Moses said unto Aaron: ‘This is it that HaShem spoke, saying: Through them that are nigh unto Me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified.’ And Aaron held his peace.

And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said unto them: ‘Draw near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp.’

So they drew near, and carried them in their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said.

And Moses said unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons: ‘Let not the hair of your heads go loose, neither tend your clothes, that ye die not, and that He be not wroth with all the congregation; but let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which HaShem hath kindled.

And ye shall not go out from the door of the tent of meeting, lest ye die; for the anointing oil of HaShem is upon you.’ And they did according to the word of Moses.

And Moses spoke unto Aaron, and unto Eleazar and unto Ithamar, his sons that were left: ‘Take the mal-offering that remaineth of the offerings of HaShem made by fire, and eat it without leaven beside the altar; for it is most holy.

And ye shall eat it in a holy place, because it is thy due, and thy sons’ due, of the offerings of HaShem made by fire; for so I am commanded.

And the breast of waving and the thigh of heaving shall ye eat in a clean place; thou, and thy sons, and thy daughters with thee; for they are given as thy due, and thy sons’ due, out of the sacrifices of the peace-offerings of the children of Israel.

The thigh of heaving and the breast of waving shall they bring with the offerings of the fat made by fire, to wave it for a wave-offering before HaShem; and it shall be thine, and thy sons' with thee, as a due for ever; as HaShem hath commanded.’

And Moses diligently inquired for the goat of the sin-offering, and, behold, it was burnt; and he was angry with Eleazar and with Ithamar, the sons of Aaron that were left, saying:

‘Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin-offering in the place of the sanctuary, seeing it is most holy, and He hath given it you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before HaShem?

Behold, the blood of it was not brought into the sanctuary within; ye should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded.’

And Aaron spoke unto Moses: ‘Behold, this day have they offered their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before HaShem, and there have befallen me such things as these; and if I had eaten the sin-offering today, would it have been well-pleasing in the sight of HaShem?

And when Moses heard that, it was well-pleasing in his sight.
**WEBBING & DISCUSSION TRIGGERS**

**Teacher Objective**
To develop critical thinking skills through examining the themes in *The Penitent*.

**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**
1. Religious conviction
2. Integrity
3. Critical choices
4. Moral dilemma
5. Manipulation
6. False accusations
7. Repercussions
8. Power structure
9. Motivation

**Discussion Questions**
The heart of David Mamet’s *The Penitent* is Charles’ journey to identify the boundaries of his own personal integrity. Has there been a time in your life when you needed to stand up to a friend, family member, teacher or community member to defend your personal integrity? If so, who and why?

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**Step One**
Write the Webbing Ideas on the chalkboard.

**Step Two**
Have each student add their impressions of the meaning of one of this concept on the board, and how it relates to their own experiences.

**Step Three**
Use the responses to focus on how unique each student’s perception is of the concepts in *The Penitent*. Why is this true?

**Step Four**
Ask the students to discuss how their sense of “personal legacy” plays a role in their own lives.

**Step Five**
Share the discussion trigger and questions with the class:

What are the facades we create for others in our society, and what do we do when circumstances reveal the horrible truth behind those facades?

What is reality, and can artists ever truly capture it?
Section IV:
Your Students
As Actors

Reading a Scene for Understanding
Practical Aesthetics Exercise
Mini-Lesson Vocabulary
Scene Analysis Worksheet
“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.
**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 *The Penitent*, and copies of the Literal, Want, Action, As-If worksheet and/or Mini-Lesson.

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**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 Aesthetics Acting Technique sheet and 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.
KATH Why does Richard need to talk to you?
CHARLES Well, it would be a “legal matter.”
KATH About some “statement?”
CHARLES What statement?
KATH I don’t know. What is the Legal Matter?
CHARLES (gestures) It’s in the Paper.
KATH (of the Paper) It’s about what you wrote?
CHARLES I never wrote it.
KATH You didn’t write what they said?
CHARLES Of course not.
KATH Why of course?
CHARLES Do you think that’s what I ever felt?
KATH But it’s in the Paper.
CHARLES Well, they’ve taken the side of the Boy, then, haven’t they?
KATH Why would they do that?
CHARLES I told you.
KATH Tell me again.
CHARLES Because that’s their job.
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.
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

- 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
### Scene Analysis Worksheet

Here are your “tools” for understanding your character:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is my character literally doing?</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING KATH...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING CHARLES...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kath is literally talking to Charles about the details of the conversation he needs to have with Richard.</td>
<td>Charles is literally talking to Kath about all the reasons that the way he is being treated is predictable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What does my character want?</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING KATH...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING CHARLES...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kath wants Charles to explain his actions so she can help him.</td>
<td>Charles wants Kath to understand that she can help him most by letting him handle his issue on his own.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the action I’m going to play?</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING KATH...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING CHARLES...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To get a straight answer.</td>
<td>To get someone to face an ugly truth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The As-If...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING KATH...</th>
<th>IF YOU’RE PLAYING CHARLES...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It’s as if my landlord told me my apartment would have to be vacated in one month but wouldn’t tell me why.</td>
<td>It’s as if my brother lost his healthcare but wasn’t willing to take the difficult financial steps to figure out how to get a new plan.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section V: Your Students As Artists

Post-Theater Creative Response Activity
Post-Theater Creative Writing Activity
Common Core & DOE Theater Blueprint
“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.
A peek into the first rehearsal of *The Penitent*. Photos by Ahron R. Foster.
**Post-Theater Creative Response Activity**

**Teacher Objective**
To develop critical thinking skills through examining a theme in *The Penitent* and how to relate that theme to an individual creative response.

**Student Goal**
To understand that an important theme from *The Penitent* forms the truths and messages of the play.

**Materials**
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard.

**Step One**
Discuss the role critical choices play in *The Penitent*.

**Step Two**
Share the following Karen Raven quote:

“Only as high as I reach can I grow,
Only as far as I seek can I go,
Only as deep as I look can I see,
Only as much as I dream can I be.”

**Step Three**
Using first person-present tense (I am), reflect on how you are “reaching,” “seeking,” or “looking” at the critical choices currently facing you . . .

*NOTE: Allow 7-minutes for this free write.*

**Step Four**
Ask the students to share their reflections.
POST-THEATER CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

Teacher Objective
To develop critical thinking skills and emotional literacy through examining the characters in *The Penitent* and how they relate to a student’s own experiences.

Student Goal
To understand connecting the vivid details of an artistic experience to one’s own point of view stimulates individual imagination and confidence.

Materials
Pencils, pens, writing paper, chalkboard.

Step One
Review the storyline of the play, focusing on the theme of moral dilemma in an individual’s life journey.

Step Two
Instruct the students to respond to the following writing trigger in a seven-minute free write:

*Reflect on a time in your life when you stood-up for your personal beliefs.*

Encourage the students to consider how they felt in that moment, how they felt five minutes after the moment, and how they felt two weeks later.

Step Three
Encourage students to share their reflections aloud. Follow each share with positive feedback on what is working well in their creative writing piece.
Enduring Understanding
Theater conveys the significance individuals place on their life choices. For example: Jobs, relationships, hopes for the future.

Theater conveys the meaning behind an individual’s struggle to have his or her life choices validated by family, friends and society/community.

Essential Questions
Does the direction and staging reinforce the themes of moral dilemma and manipulation, the ability to rise above a given circumstance for transformation?

Do you accept the concept put forward in The Penitent that we are the product of our decisions and choices, but we can sometimes transform ourselves, even in the face of adversity?

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.
Inspired by the Group Theater, Stanislavsky, and a passion for ensemble acting, David Mamet and William H. Macy formed the Atlantic Theater Company with a select group of New York University Undergraduate drama students. Since its inception in 1985, Atlantic has produced more than 100 plays and garnered numerous awards, including: 12 Tony Awards, 15 Lucille Lortel Awards, 16 OBIE Awards, six Outer Critics Circle Awards, seven Drama Desk Awards, three Drama League Awards, three New York Drama Critics Circle Awards and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama. 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.

Linda Gross Theater
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Atlantic Stage 2
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