

**STUDY GUIDE**  
for  
**Playhouse on the Square's**  
production of:

# THE SEAGULL

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BY ANTON CHEKHOV

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## INTRODUCTION

*The Seagull* (Russian: Чайка, Chayka) is a play by Russian dramatist Anton Chekhov, written in 1895 and first produced in 1896. The Seagull is generally considered to be the first of his four major plays. It dramatises the romantic and artistic conflicts between four characters: the famous middlebrow story writer Boris Trigorin, the ingenue Nina, the fading actress Irina Arkadina, and her son the symbolist playwright Konstantin Tréplev.

Though the character of Trigorin is considered Chekhov's greatest male role, like Chekhov's other full-length plays, *The Seagull* relies upon an ensemble cast of diverse, fully developed characters. In contrast to the melodrama of mainstream 19th-century theatre, lurid actions (such as Konstantin's suicide attempts) are not shown onstage. Characters tend to speak in ways that skirt around issues rather than addressing them directly; in other words, their lines are full of what is known in dramatic practice as subtext, or text that is not spoken aloud.

A common Seagull, the bird from which the symbolism and metaphor of the title of the play is based on



# 1

# THE PLAY

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## SYNOPSIS

### Act I

It is after sunset and a make-shift, homemade stage stands in the outdoor setting of Sorin's provincial, Russian estate and farm. A lake serves as natural scenery behind the stage. Medvedenko, a poor schoolteacher, believes he would be a happier man and a more attractive suitor to Masha if he had more money. Masha, the daughter of the estate manager, Shamrayev, fixates on her love for Treplev and does not agree. Snorting snuff, Masha openly acknowledges that she knows Medvedenko loves her but explains that she cannot love him back.

Treplev is nervous and busy as he gets things ready for the first performance of his play. Treplev tells Sorin that Arkadina is jealous of his play and hates it before she has seen it. Treplev picks a flower and pulls off its feathers saying, "She loves me, she loves me not," etc. He concludes that Arkadina does not love him. He longs to be accepted by her peers, the writers, actors and other artists who comprise the Russian intelligentsia and artistic elite based on his own work, not because he is the son of famous actors.

Nina arrives. She tells Treplev that her parents are afraid she will want to become an actress if she spends time with the bohemians at Sorin's estate. She says that it is the lake that attracts her to the estate, "as if I were a seagull." Nina and Treplev kiss. Treplev tells her he loves her, but Nina does not return his affectionate talk. Workers and guests interrupt their intimate moment.

We learn that Paulina loves Dorn and that they are involved in a romantic relationship but he is mostly apathetic about her affection. Arkadina shows off to the group by reciting lines of Gertrude in Shakespeare's play, Hamlet. Treplev responds by reciting

Hamlet's lines back to her. His lines compare Arkadina's relationship with Trigorin to Gertrude's tainted relationship with Claudius. Treplev's play begins and recites a long monologue about a universal soul and man's place on earth into infinity. It is abstract and symbolic. Arkadina rudely interrupts the performance several times by talking out loud to her friends in the audience. When a special effect of red lights in the form of two eyes and the smell of sulphur rises in a cloud from the stage, Arkadina makes such a fuss that Treplev ends the play and closes the curtain. He runs off.

Nina meets Trigorin for the first time. Arkadina laughs at Nina's awe of Trigorin's role as a creator. Treplev desperately desires Nina but learns that she has already left. He runs off. Masha takes a pinch of snuff. Dorn criticizes her. She admits to him that she is in love with Treplev. Dorn sighs over the abundance of unrequited love in his presence.

### Act II

Shamrayev and Arkadina argue about the use of the horses. Arkadina wants to use them later in the day to go into town. Shamrayev has them out in the field. He stubbornly will not allow her to use them later. She threatens to leave the estate and return to the country. Nina gives Dorn a bouquet of fresh picked flowers. Paulina takes the flowers from him and destroys them.



Zoe Kazan as Masha and Peter Sarsgaard as Trigorin

Nina is the only one left onstage. She comments that she is surprised that Arkadina and Trigorin act like normal people even though they are famous. Treplev enters with a rifle and a dead seagull in his hands. He puts the seagull at Nina's feet. He tells her that he shot the bird in her honor and that one day he will be like the seagull. Nina and Treplev fight about their relationship. She accuses him of talking in symbols. He laments her change from warm to cold. Treplev expresses his conclusion that Nina stopped loving him because his play was a failure. He compares Nina's faded love for him to the lake disappearing into the ground.



Romola Garai as Nina- holding the dead seagull

Treplev exits bitterly when he sees Nina's fondness for Trigorin. Trigorin brings up the news that he and Arkadina are leaving the estate to go back to town. Trigorin explains the obsessive-compulsive behavior that forces him to document everything he observes in his memory and on paper for future use in a story. Trigorin sees the seagull that Treplev shot. He writes down a note about Nina, saying that she has inspired him to start a new story about a girl who is ruined by a man just like the seagull that Treplev destroyed, because he has nothing better to do. Arkadina interrupts Trigorin and Nina when she calls to Trigorin announcing that she has been convinced to stay on the estate.

### Act III

Contrary to the conclusion of Act Two when Arkadina decides to stay, Act Three begins with Trigorin eating lunch in Sorin's dining room, surrounded by packed luggage. Masha keeps Trigorin company, confessing her plan to marry Medvedenko. Nina gives Trigorin a parting gift of a medallion with his initials inscribed on one side and the title of his book, "Days and Nights" on the other. She asks him to give her two minutes more before he leaves. Trigorin discovers that inscribed on

the medallion is a page and line number from his book. As he goes off stage to find the book in order to read the quote to which Nina's gift refers, Arkadina argues with her brother, Sorin about his joining them into town. Sorin falls ill for a few moments and Arkadina becomes frightened. She screams for help.

Treplev asks Arkadina to change the bandage on his head. They share some tender moments of lightheartedness but their conversation disintegrates into name-calling, insults, and competitiveness. Treplev ends up crying because he mourns the loss of Nina's affection. Arkadina tries to cheer him up and tells him that Nina will soon come back to him because Arkadina is taking Trigorin away from the estate. Trigorin enters, mumbling the line from Nina's inscription, "If you ever need my life, come take it." He muses over the line and it means something to him. He asks Arkadina if they can stay.

Arkadina challenges Trigorin about his interest in Nina, bringing to the forefront, the tension that has existed only in silence. Trigorin portrays himself as a man who missed out on the splendors and excitement of youthful love because he spent his youth writing to make a name for himself. Fearing the loss of the man she loves, Arkadina pleads, kisses, flatters, and begs on her hands and knees for Trigorin to leave with her. Her persuasive talk convinces Trigorin to leave, but, when Nina and he catch a few private moments before he leaves, Nina tells Trigorin her plan to move to Moscow at once and to try her luck at an acting career. Trigorin tells Nina to stay at the Slavyansky Bazaar Hotel. He asks her to let him know as soon as she gets there. Before he rushes off to get in the carriage, he steals a long passionate kiss from Nina, sealing their promise to meet again.

### Act IV

It is two years later than Act Three. On a stormy night, Medvedenko and Masha discuss Sorin's request to see Treplev as his health fades. Medvedenko pleads with Masha to go home with him to their baby. Masha refuses. Masha makes a bed for Sorin on the divan. Paulina comments that no one thought Kostya would become a genuine writer, but now he is making money writing and looks handsome. Masha tells her mother that Medvedenko has been offered a teaching job in another district, and they are to move away in a month.

Dorn asks Treplev about Nina's life now. Treplev tells Dorn that Nina had an affair with Trigorin and became pregnant. But, the baby died and Trigorin left her for

Arkadina whom he was with while he impregnated Nina, cheating on them both. Treplev recounts how Nina played starring roles in summer theater plays outside of Moscow that moved to the provinces but that she played her parts badly. He used to visit her on the road and see her perform, but Nina refused to see him. Treplev eventually gave up on following her around. Nina would send Treplev troubled letters and sign them, "The Seagull." Treplev compares Nina's signature to a character in a Pushkin play who signs his name, "The Raven." Treplev reveals the information that Nina is staying nearby in town at a hotel. Masha went to see her, but Nina refused to talk to her and Medvedenko swears that he saw her walking through a nearby field. Nina's parents have hired armed guards to keep her away from their house next door to Sorin's estate.

Trigorin brings him a copy of the latest magazine in which a story of his is published. Arkadina begins a game of lotto. She recalls her family's tradition of playing the game to pass the time. Treplev notices that Trigorin read his own story in the magazine but did not bother to read Treplev's.

Shamrayev tells Trigorin that he stuffed the seagull that Treplev shot for him. Trigorin does not remember asking Shamrayev to stuff and mount it. Arkadina calls everyone to dinner and asks Treplev to stop writing.

Treplev is left alone in his study. He looks over his writing and criticizes himself out loud for being cliché. He compares his writing to Trigorin's with envy and despair. He hears a knock on the window. It is Nina. Nina enters the house paranoid about Arkadina finding her there and asks him to lock the door. Treplev props a chair against the door. Nina and Treplev admit to each other that they have sought each other. Nina's speech becomes fractured and confusing. She cuts off her own thoughts. She says she is "the Seagull" and compares herself to a homeless wanderer in a Turgenev story. She cries. She says she feels better because she has not cried in two years. Nina acknowledges that Treplev is now a writer, and she became an actress but her life is difficult. She thinks nostalgically about their youth and their youthful love.

Treplev professes his love to Nina and recounts his torment when she left him, how nothing he has accomplished has been meaningful to him because she was not present to share in his successes. Nina tells

Treplev about the depression she suffered when she realized she was a bad actor. Her story breaks down, and she repeats Trigorin's idea for a story about a girl who is destroyed like the seagull by a man who has nothing better to do. She concludes that what is important for an artist is not how successful you are but that you persevere. Nina becomes weaker. Treplev asks her to stay. Nina confesses to Treplev that she still profoundly loves Trigorin. She remembers the innocence and hope that she and Treplev felt the summer they put on their play. She recites lines from the play. Nina hugs Treplev and then runs out of the door.

Treplev proceeds to tear up his manuscripts and throws them under his desk. Arkadina and the rest of the household come back from dinner and start another game of lotto. Dorn pushes in the door that Treplev propped closed with a chair. Shamrayev presents Trigorin with the stuffed seagull. Again, Trigorin says he does not remember asking for it to be stuffed. A shot goes off in a loud bang, offstage. Arkadina becomes frightened. Dorn calms her down presenting the thought that the sound was probably only a popped cork in a bottle in his medicine bag. Dorn goes to check on the sound and comes back to the group. He takes a magazine and brings Trigorin aside, pretending he is interested in discussing an article on America. Dorn tells Trigorin that he needs to get Irina Arkadina out of the house quickly because Treplev has shot himself. Arkadina does not hear Dorn's sad news before the play's end.



Mackenzie Crook as Constantin and Kristin Scott Thomas as Arkadina as Arkadina changes his bandage

## THE CHARACTERS

**Konstantin Gavrilovich Treplev** - One of the play's four protagonists, Treplev is Arkadina's only son. He struggles to find his voice as a writer in the shadow of his successful actress mother and her lover, the writer Trigorin, both of whom are members of the elite Russian intelligentsia and artistic community. Treplev is impatient, self-defeating and childish. His need for love and approval torments him. He attempts to create new forms in dramatic writing and literature that reflect the new wave of symbolist writing that emerged in Russia during Chekhov's time. His writing parodies Chekhov's own work. Treplev is a dreamer and a compassionate soul who fills the void of affection in his life with self-doubt.

**Irina Nikolayevna Arkadina** - Arkadina, a protagonist of *The Seagull* is a renowned Russian actress who stars in grand, melodramatic plays. She is the mother of Treplev, the lover of Trigorin, and the sister of Sorin. Her arrival at Sorin's country estate is the highlight of the year for the workers there and her family. She is a member of the intelligentsia and artistic community in Russia to which her son, Treplev longs to belong. Stubborn, vain, stingy, and beautiful, Arkadina is a selfish mother and doting lover. She loves attention and is not afraid to ask for it. Her competitive spirit selfishly discourages Treplev's creative spirit and contributes to her obsession with looking and feeling young.

**Nina Mikhailovna Zarechnaya** - Nina is a nineteen-year-old neighbor of Sorin's estate who grew up in an estate bordering the same lake that acts as a backdrop for the play. She is one of the four protagonists of the play. Nina's mother died when she was young and left her fortune to her husband, Nina's father, without leaving any inheritance for Nina. Her father remarried and put all of the money in her stepmother's name, contributing to Nina's insecure future. The play characters talk about how cruel Nina's father is to her and how Nina can only be in the company of Sorin's family when her father and stepmother do not know she is in their company. Nina is in love with Treplev or perhaps in love with the idea that Treplev can bring her close to his mother, an actress, which is what Nina wants

to become. Naïve, smart, idealistic, and willing to take risks, Nina is a hopeless romantic who longs for a stage career. Her pursuit of Trigorin's heart reveals her overestimated innocence by those around her and her ambitious side.

**Boris Alexeyevich Trigorin** - Arkadina's lover, Trigorin, one of the four protagonists, is an esteemed Russian writer of fiction stories and novels. Like Arkadina, Trigorin is a member of the elite Russian intelligentsia and artistic community. He begins as a dutiful lover to Arkadina but becomes tempted by the youthful beauty, optimism, and flattery of Nina. Trigorin's favorite hobby is fishing. He is an obsessive-compulsive writer and somewhat aloof to the family and friends on the estate, preferring to observe the surroundings for details for his stories or fishing in the lake than gossiping, bragging, philosophizing, or playing parlor games. Trigorin feels that he lost out on his youth and on youthful romantic experiences because he was so busy trying to seek out a writing career for himself in those days. He uses this as an excuse for having the affair with Nina. Trigorin is not directly competitive with the jealous Treplev, but does not encourage him either. Trigorin often seems like a reluctant but acquiescing member of the clan.

**Sorin** - Sorin is the sixty-year-old landowner of the estate where the play takes place. He spent his life working for a government office and retired to his country farm. Sorin is the brother of Arkadina and the uncle to Treplev. His health deteriorates during the course of the play. Sorin is a patient listener, a confidant, and a compassionate admirer of both his nephew and sister's talents. He is disappointed with his life's decisions its outcome; he once wished to find love and be a successful writer and never acquired either wish. Sorin sees himself in the young Treplev and asks his sister Arkadina to be easier on Treplev's vulnerable confidence. Sorin can be wistful, nostalgic and wise.

**Yevgeny Sergeyevich Dorn** - Dorn is a local doctor who was once a popular and handsome ladies' man. Dorn often provides an outsider's perspective to the play for he functions almost as an audience member on stage. He is less vital to the desires and distresses on stage, but he is important as a fluid observer and commentator, confidant, and witness

to the events. He has known Arkadina, Sorin, and the rest for many years. Dorn has affections for Paulina but does not seem to be in love with her. Like Sorin, Dorn is a compassionate presence who respects Treplev's talent and attempts to soften the blow of Arkadina's ego on her depressed son, Treplev's, spirit.

**Masha** - Masha is the daughter of Paulina and Shamrayev, the managers of Sorin's farm. She wears all black all of the time because she is depressed and hates her life. A heavy drinker and snuff addict, Masha's repressed, unrequited feelings for Treplev torment her. She is pursued by the poor schoolteacher, Medvedenko, who has a mediocre, obsequious personality, which complicates the situation. Masha is critical and unsympathetic to her admirer, Medvedenko even though she herself is in his same, unrequited position in her love triangle with Treplev. She feels sorry for herself and her undramatic life. Masha marries Medvedenko but keeps her love for Treplev burning strong. Like many Chekhovian characters, Masha gives in to the disappointments in life and accepts them, surviving the unfulfilled dreams with the hope of change and renewal in moving and forgetting.

**Ilya Afanasyevich Shamrayev** - Shamrayev is father to Masha and husband to Paulina. He acts as the manager of Sorin's farm and household year round. Shamrayev adores Arkadina's fame and fortune and close ties to Russian artists. He flatters her and attentively listens to her boasts and the details of her life in the theatre. But when it comes to the horses and running the farm, Shamrayev is argumentative about his control. He is cruel and unsympathetic to his daughter's admirer and later, husband, Medvedenko, and unattentive and embarrassing to his wife, Paulina.

**Semyon Semyonovich Medvedenko** - Medvedenko is a local schoolteacher who is poor and must support his family at home while later supporting his new family with Masha. He is a boring conversationalist because he spends most of his time complaining about his poverty. Medvedenko pursues the melancholy Masha, eventually winning her hand in marriage, out of convenience and a hope of change, not love.

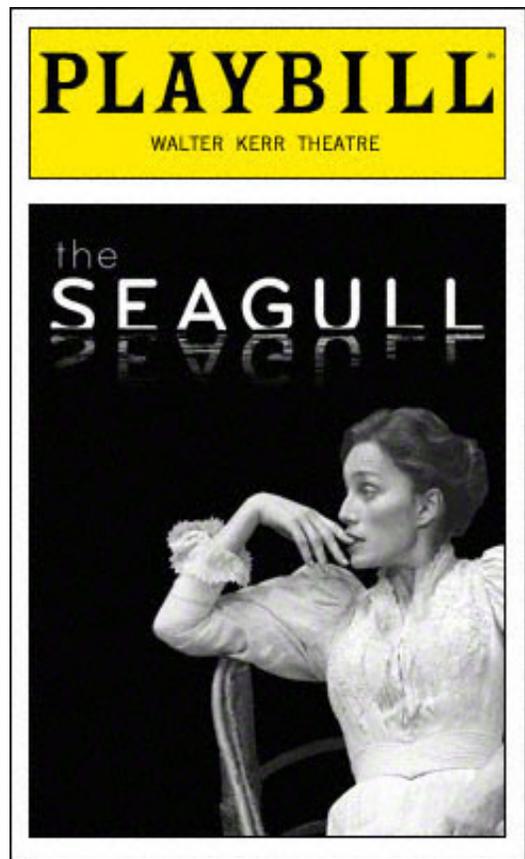
**Paulina Andryevna** - Paulina is the mother of Masha and the wife of Shamrayev, who mages Sorin's estate. Unhappy in her loveless marriage, she is often embarrassed by Shamrayev's arguments with the Arkadina, their employer's famous sister. She loves Dorn but is jealous and unsatisfied by his aloof affection for her. Paulina sees her own misery in her daughter, Masha's unrequited love for Treplev and compromising marriage to Medvedenko, that she encourages Treplev to pay attention to Masha out of pity.

**Yakov** - A hired workman.

**The Cook** - A worker on Sorin's estate.

**The Maid** - A worker on Sorin's estate.

**The Watchman** - A worker on Sorin's estate who carries a warning stick at night.



The Playbill for The Seagull on Broadway 2008- The same translation was used for this production as the one at Playhouse!

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# BACKGROUND

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## THE PLAYWRIGHT

**Anton Chekhov**, in full Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (born Jan. 29 [Jan. 17, Old Style], 1860, Taganrog, Russia—died July 14/15 [July 1/2], 1904, Badenweiler, Ger.), major Russian playwright and master of the modern short story. He was a literary artist of laconic precision who probed below the surface of life, laying bare the secret motives of his characters. Chekhov's best plays and short stories lack complex plots and neat solutions. Concentrating on apparent trivialities, they create a special kind of atmosphere, sometimes termed haunting or lyrical. Chekhov described the Russian life of his time using a deceptively simple technique devoid of obtrusive literary devices, and he is regarded as the outstanding representative of the late 19th-century Russian realist school.



Anton Chekhov

### Boyhood and youth

Chekhov's father was a struggling grocer and pious martinet who had been born a serf. He compelled his son to serve in his shop, also conscripting him into a church choir, which he himself conducted. Despite the kindness of his mother, childhood remained a painful memory to Chekhov, although it later proved to be a vivid and absorbing experience that he often invoked in his works. After briefly attending a local school for Greek boys, Chekhov entered the town gimnaziya (high school), where he remained for 10 years. In the autumn of 1879 Chekhov joined his family in Moscow, which was to be his main base until 1892. He at once enrolled in the university's medical faculty, graduating in 1884 as a doctor. By this time he was already the economic mainstay of his family, for his father could obtain only poorly paid employment. Chekhov began his writing career as the author of anecdotes for humorous journals, signing his early work pseudonymously. By 1888 he had become widely popular with a "lowbrow" public and had already produced a body of work more voluminous than all his later writings put together.

### Literary maturity

Chekhov's literary progress during his early 20s may be charted by the first appearance of his work in a sequence of publications in the capital, St. Petersburg, each successive vehicle being more serious and respected than its predecessor. Finally, in 1888, Chekhov published his first work in a leading literary review, *Severny vestnik* ("Northern Herald"). With the work in question—a long story entitled "Steppe"—he at last turned his back on comic fiction. By the late 1880s many critics had begun to reprimand Chekhov, now that he was sufficiently well known to attract their attention, for holding no firm political and social views and for failing to endow his works with a sense of direction. Such expectations irked Chekhov, who was unpolitical and philosophically uncommitted. *His Wood Demon* (1888–89) is a long-winded and ineptly facetious four-act play, which somehow, by a miracle of art, became converted—largely by cutting—into *Dyadya Vanya* (Uncle Vanya), one of his greatest stage masterpieces. The conversion—to a superb study of aimlessness in a rural manor house—took place some time between 1890 and 1896; the play was published in 1897. Other dramatic efforts of the period include several of the uproarious one-act farces known as vaudevilles: *Medved* (The Bear), *Predlozheniye* (The Proposal), *Svadba* (The Wedding), *Yubiley* (The Anniversary), and others.

### **Melikhovo period: 1892–98**

After helping, both as doctor and as medical administrator, to relieve the disastrous famine of 1891–92, Chekhov bought a country estate in the village of Melikhovo, about 50 miles (80 km) south of Moscow. This was his main residence for about six years, providing a home for his aging parents, as also for his sister Mariya, who acted as his housekeeper and remained unmarried in order to look after her brother. The Melikhovo period was the most creatively effective of Chekhov's life so far as short stories were concerned. Undistinguished by plot, his short sequence of brilliant sketches created more stir in Russia than any other single work of Chekhov's, partly owing to his rejection of the convention whereby writers commonly presented the Russian peasantry in sentimentalized and debrutalized form. As has often been recognized, Chekhov's work provides a panoramic study of the Russia of his day, and one so accurate that it could even be used as a sociological source. In a later trio of linked stories, "The Man in a Case," "Gooseberries," and "About Love" (1898), Chekhov further develops the same theme, showing various figures who similarly fail to realize their full potentialities. As these pleas in favour of personal freedom illustrate, Chekhov's stories frequently contain some kind of submerged moral, though he never worked out a comprehensive ethical or philosophical doctrine.

Chayka (The Seagull) is Chekhov's only dramatic work dating with certainty from the Melikhovo period. First performed in St. Petersburg on Oct. 17, 1896 (O.S.), this four-act drama, misnamed a comedy, was badly received; indeed, it was almost hissed off the stage. Chekhov was greatly distressed and left the auditorium during the second act, having suffered one of the most traumatic experiences of his life and vowing never to write for the stage again. When Chekhov wrote of The Seagull, "I can't say I'm not enjoying writing it, though I'm flagrantly disregarding the basic tenets of the stage. The comedy has three female roles, six male roles, four acts, a landscape (a view of a lake), much conversation about literature, little action and five poods (1 pood=36 pounds) of love;".

### **Yalta period: 1899–1904**

In March 1897 Chekhov had suffered a lung hemorrhage caused by tuberculosis, symptoms of which had become apparent considerably earlier. Now forced to acknowledge himself a semi-invalid, Chekhov sold his Melikhovo estate and built a villa in Yalta, the Crimean coastal resort. From then on he spent most of his winters there or on the French Riviera, cut off from the intellectual life of Moscow and St. Petersburg. This was all the more galling since his plays were beginning to attract serious attention. Moreover, Chekhov had become attracted by a young actress, Olga Knipper, who was appearing in his plays, and whom he eventually married in 1901; the marriage probably marked the only profound love affair of his life. But since Knipper continued to pursue her acting career, husband and wife lived apart during most of the winter months, and there were no children of the marriage.

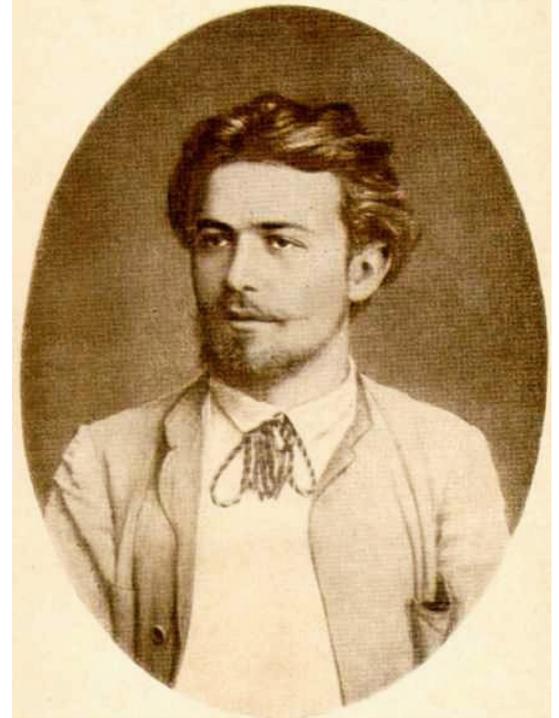
Never a successful financial manager, Chekhov attempted to regularize his literary affairs in 1899 by selling the copyright of all his existing works, excluding plays, to the publisher A.F. Marx for 75,000 rubles, an unduly low sum. In 1899–1901 Marx issued the first comprehensive edition of Chekhov's works, in 10 volumes, after the author had himself rejected many of his juvenilia. Even so, this publication, reprinted in 1903 with supplementary material, was unsatisfactory in many ways.

Chekhov's Yalta period saw a decline in the production of short stories and a greater emphasis on drama. His two last plays—Tri sestry (1901; Three Sisters) and Vishnyovy sad (1904; The Cherry Orchard)—were both written for the Moscow Art Theatre. But much as Chekhov owed to the theatre's two founders, Vladimir Nemirovich-Danchenko and Konstanin Stanislavsky, he remained dissatisfied with such rehearsals and performances of his plays as he was able to witness. He repeatedly insisted that his mature drama was comedy rather than tragedy. The Cherry Orchard was "a comedy, in places even a farce;". Chekhov offered in this last play a poignant picture of the Russian landowning class in decline, portraying characters who remain comic despite their very poignancy. This play was first performed in Moscow on Jan. 17, 1904 (O.S.), and less than six months later Chekhov died of tuberculosis.

# HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Under Tsar Nicholas II (1894–1917), Russia: 1892-1917 slowly industrialized and yet repressed political opposition from the center and the far left. It recklessly entered wars with Japan (1904) and with Germany and Austria (1914) for which it was very poorly prepared, leading the to utter collapse of the old regime in 1917 and an era of civil war.

During the 1890s, Russia's industrial development led to a large increase in the size of the urban middle class and the working class, which gave rise to a more dynamic political atmosphere and the development of radical parties. Because the state and foreigners owned much of Russia's industry, the working class was comparatively stronger and the bourgeoisie comparatively weaker than in the West. The working class and peasants were the first to establish political parties because the nobility and the wealthy bourgeoisie were politically timid. During the 1890s and early 1900s, bad living and working conditions, high taxes, and land hunger gave rise to more frequent strikes and agrarian disorders. These activities prompted the bourgeoisie of various nationalities in the empire to develop a host of different parties, both liberal and conservative.



Chekhov in his 20s

## Political Parties

Politically, these opposition forces organized into competing parties: The liberal elements among the industrial capitalists and nobility, who believed in peaceful social reform and a constitutional monarchy, founded the Constitutional Democratic party or Kadets in 1905. Radical factions had their own parties. The workers in major cities revolted in 1905, with widespread strikes and mutinies. The Tsar barely kept control; he promised an elective parliament (the Duma) and the revolt subsided. The Tsar then dissolved the Duma. He turned to Peter Stolypin to reform the huge but sluggish economy.

## Foreign Policy

Foreign policy was built around an alliance with France, and increased meddling in Balkan affairs. Russia proclaimed a role as military protector of Orthodox Christians, notably those in Serbia. Efforts to expand control in the Far East led to a short war with Japan in 1904-5, which ended in humiliating defeat. The Russians blundered into full-scale war in 1914 without realizing the risks. With few exceptions the government proved incompetent and the army lost heavily. Finally the liberal elements overthrew the Tsars and the entire regime in early 1917, as the radicals under Lenin waited their turn to seize power using soviets in the factories and the army.

## Russia's Agriculture Influence Revolution

Russia's systems for agricultural production influenced the attitudes of peasants and other social groups to reform against the government and promote social changes. "At the beginning of the twentieth century, agriculture constituted the single largest sector of the Russian economy, producing approximately one-half of the national income and employing two-thirds of Russia's population". This illustrates the tremendous role peasants played economically; thus making them detrimental to the revolutionary ideology of the populist and social democrats. At the end of the 19th century, Russian agriculture as a whole was the worst in its European caliber. The Russian system of agriculture lacked capital investment and technological advancement. Livestock productivity was notoriously backwards and the lack of grazing land such as meadows forced livestock to graze in fallow uncultivated land. Both the crop and livestock system failed to be adequate to withstand the Russian winters. During the Tsarist rule, the agricultural economy diverged from subsistence production to production directly for the market. Along with the agricultural failures, Russia had a rapid population growth, railroads expanded across farmland, and inflation attacked the price of commodities. Restrictions were placed on the distribution of food and ultimately lead to famines. Agricultural difficulties in Russia limited the economy, influencing social reforms and assisting the rise of the Bolshevik party.

## The First Performance

The first performance of *The Seagull* was performed in the Alexandrinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg. It was a disgrace. It was poorly rehearsed, the audience booed and the then-famous actress, Vera Komissarzhevskaya (portraying the role of Nina), was so upset that she lost her voice. Anton Chekhov left the audience and stayed backstage for the last two acts. He wrote these letters the day following the performance on October 17, 1896: Petersburg, October 18, 1896. To A. S. Suvorin, Chekhov's Publisher: I am off to Melihovo. All good wishes.... Stop the printing of the plays. I shall never forget yesterday evening, but still I slept well, and am setting off in a very tolerable good humour. Write to me.... I have received your letter. I am not going to produce the play in Moscow. I shall never either write plays or have them acted.

Petersburg, October 18, 1896. To his brother Mihail: The play has fallen flat, and come down with a crash. There was an oppressive strained feeling of disgrace and bewilderment in the theatre. The actors played abominably stupidly. The moral of it is, one ought not to write plays.

But in spite of the disastrous opening in St. Petersburg, the play began to be well received. Despite Chekhov's statement that *The Seagull* would not continue to Moscow, the play was performed at the new Moscow Art Theatre<sup>2</sup> (MAT) two years later, directed by Konstantin Stanislavski, who is known for his realistic systems of acting. Stanislavski's directing genius combined with Chekhov's linguistic artistry made the play a raging success. The premier of *The Seagull* in 1898 was so monumental for the Moscow Art Theatre, in fact, that even today the emblem for MAT is a seagull.



Alexandrinsky Theatre stage in St. Peter'sburg Russia where the original production of *The Seagull* was presented

# TRANSLATIONS

The *Seagull* was first translated into English for a performance at the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow, in November 1909. Since that time, there have been numerous translations of the text—from 1998 to 2004 alone there were 25 published versions. In the introduction of his own version, Tom Stoppard wrote: “You can’t have too many English *Seagulls*: at the intersection of all of them, the Russian one will be forever elusive”. However, some early translations of *The Seagull* have come under criticism from modern Russian scholars. The Marian Fell translation, in particular, has been criticized for its elementary mistakes and total ignorance of Russian life and culture. Renowned translator and author of the book *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English Translation* Peter France wrote of Chekhov’s multiple adaptations: Proliferation and confusion of translation reign in the plays. Throughout the history of Chekhov on the British and American stages we see a version translated, adapted, cobbled together for each new major production, very often by a theatre director with no knowledge of the original, working from a crib prepared by a Russian with no knowledge of the stage.

## Playhouse Production

**Translator: Christopher James Hampton**, (born 26 January 1946) is a Portuguese British playwright, screen writer and film director. He is best known for his play based on the novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and the film version *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988) and also more recently for writing the nominated screenplay for the film adaptation of Ian McEwan’s *Atonement*.

So in revising *The Seagull*, Hampton tells NPR’s Robert Siegel, he sat with a Russian who guided him through the piece, which he calls the “best play that exists about writers and actors.” “What we’re looking for is to really try to fathom exactly what Chekhov’s intentions were and to reproduce them,” Hampton says. “To make the audience laugh when he wanted them to laugh and to make them cry when he wanted them to cry.” In revising the play, Hampton says, he paid attention to the number of words in the sentences to meter the language and make it more concise. For instance, the mother and son trade a series of one-word insults, which he says is very powerful and had been translated differently in previous versions. “Somehow we have a tendency to dilute what in Chekhov is always very crisp and quite blunt, actually,” Hampton says. “Chekhov used to be thought of as a lyrical, melancholy kind of writer, and he isn’t. He’s a very muscular, energetic, clear, lucid writer.” When *The Seagull* was first performed in Russia, it was received so poorly by audiences — because it was so edgy, says Hampton — that Chekhov fled and vowed never to write for the theater again. “Fortunately it was [Constantin] Stanislavsky who rescued and remounted it, and persuaded Chekhov to come back to see it properly done,” says Hampton, referring to the Russian theater director. “And the play was a huge success and to that we owe the other three plays, the three later great plays ... and the theater might easily have lost him.”



Christopher Hampton, the Translator for this version of *The Seagull*

Hampton is trying to get back to that edgy interpretation that he believes Chekhov intended. And to channel Chekhov, Hampton went to his house last week in Yalta, Ukraine, where he died at 44 of tuberculosis. “It was sort of extraordinary to be there ... and see the desk on which he had written *Three Sisters*, and the cherry orchard, looking out at the sea through the trees,” he says. “And I felt very close to him.”

# 3

# CURRICULUM TIES

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## **Grades 9-12 Theatre Standards**

Content Standard 6.0: Theatrical Presentation

6.1 Examine dramatic production as a synthesis of all the arts.

Content Standard 7.0: Scene Comprehension

7.1 Respond to a variety of theatrical experiences as an effort to interpret, intensify, and ennoble human experience.

7.2 Expand the depth and scope of aesthetic judgment by experiencing informal and formal theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions and theatre of diverse styles, periods, and genres.

7.3 Understand the role of the audience in creating a theatrical experience.

Content Standard 8.0: Context

8.2 Discover and explore historical motifs and themes.

## **Grades 9-12 English Standards**

Content Standard 2.0: Reading

2.08 Determine the effectiveness of figurative language in various texts.

2.09 Determine the impact of literary elements on texts.

2.10 Analyze persuasive devices found in various texts.

# 4

# A CLOSER LOOK

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## BEFORE SEEING THE PLAY

1. Go over the plot synopsis, historical context, and background information from the guide with your students.
2. Discuss with your students the etiquette of being an audience member at a live theatrical performance. Items for discussion: don't talk during the play, turn off cellphones & electronic devices, appropriate responses, no chewing gum, going to the bathroom before the performance, etc.

## THEMES

### The Role of an Artist in Life and in Love

Chekhov does not simply write about artists and love, he creates the embodiment of art and love on stage. Through his characters' particular personalities, Chekhov portrays the various manners of being an artist and particularly, an artist in love. All four protagonists are artists in love. Arkadina, Trigorin, Treplev, and Nina have divergent relationships with their craft and their lovers. Arkadina and Nina romanticize acting, placing it on a pedestal higher than the everyday affairs of life. Arkadina places herself on this same pedestal using her identity as an actress to excuse her vanity. Nina exalts acting as well, but, contrary to Arkadina, she endows acting with nobility, sacrifice, and privilege. In writing, Treplev compulsively paralyzes himself in the pursuit of perfection, while Trigorin obsessively gathers details from his life and the lives around him for his work without allowing the work to affect his life.

Chekhov does not present an opinion about the artist or the artist's role in life and in love. No one character is all good or all evil, and Chekhov depicts these protagonists so that we sympathize and question their actions and words. He presents several takes on love and the artist, allowing his audience to take what they will from the examples that may or may not mirror their own lives and those of their loved ones. All four characters pursue

art to some degree because it boosts their ego to be admired and respected for their work. Treplev in particular longs equally for admiration for his talents and for his self. His ego is wounded by his mother and by Nina. Success in love and in writing are equally important to him though he is successful in neither arena. Trigorin has the satisfaction of success in his writing, though he is never satisfied, and as he says, always starts a new story once the old one is finished. In love, Trigorin pursues Nina because he feels he might substitute the satisfaction and sense of completion that he lacks in his work with a love that would fulfill the void he felt as a youth. In some sense the satisfaction these characters obtain from being artists becomes equivalent with their feeling of being loved.

### Evaluating the Self

A distinction can be made about characters in *The Seagull* as either self-aware or completely devoid of self-consciousness. Chekhov's setting on Sorin's estate provides an inactive backdrop for his characters to dramatically explore their thoughts and opinions on life and themselves as they pass the time telling each other stories and dreams. With next to nothing to do, the characters explore their lives and their selves. Treplev most harshly criticizes his life to the point of ruining it with his high standards for acceptance and his vulnerability in the wake of his failures. Sorin playfully assesses his life as well, and he reflects on a life quickly fading and expresses his own regrets to Dorn and to the others as he witnesses Treplev's struggle. Masha mourns her life, feeling sorry for herself without the eloquence

of Treplev, nor the ability to laugh at herself as Sorin does, but with the matter-of-fact simplicity of disappointment and boredom. When challenged by Sorin who enviously accuses Dorn of having it all, Dorn expresses aggravation for spending his life as a doctor always on call, without a vacation, and at the mercy of others' needs. Dorn expresses regret without self-pity.

Nina too evaluates herself and her goal to become an actress. At first in awe with fame and the theater, Nina believes she will love herself and find happiness if she can acquire fame and fortune. Later when she returns in Act Four, she exhibits less hope than when we first meet her, but she has been enlightened with the knowledge that her life is well lived as long as she perseveres, not if she fails or achieves greatness.

### **Existentialism and Life's Meaning**

The existential thought of the purpose of life with imminent death puzzles a few characters in *The Seagull*. Masha first brings our attention to this theme in the beginning of Act One when she claims, "I am mourning for my life." She transfers the purpose of mourning for death to life. This point of view sets the tone for the play. Masha bemoans her boredom and dissatisfaction with her life as she secretly hopes it will be turned around with the love of Treplev. If Treplev loved her, her life would suddenly have a purpose and meaning. Without the love of someone she loves in return, Masha views life as pointless and death-like, a punishment that must be fulfilled. Later in the play, Masha changes her mind and marries Medvedenko out of boredom, not love. Her life still depresses her, and she still yearns for Treplev. But being a wife and a mother give her new things to do and think about to pass the time until her death or Treplev's change of heart.

Sorin also wonders why he goes on living. He and Dorn debate the quality of their respective lives. Sorin sympathizes with Treplev because he observes Treplev struggling to fulfill goals like being a writer and a lover that Sorin himself once held as his own goals. Sorin describes the title of a story about him as "The Man Who Wanted." Sorin cannot figure out the meaning of his life. He spent most of it working in an office and he does not know why or how that came to happen. "It just happened," he says. Sorin never had anything that he set out to get. To Sorin, a life without fulfilled goals is an empty meaningless life.

Treplev and Nina also pursue meaning in their lives, believing they will find their identity through their work. Nina longs to become an actress and Treplev,

a writer. Both believe that accomplishing their goals will give more meaning and opportunity to their lives. Both associate a meaningful life with the admiration of others. Nina changes her mind about this in Act Four. After she settles into a mediocre career, she comes to terms with a new belief that endurance is nobler than success.

## **MOTIFS & SYMBOLISM**

Ironically, unrequited love is the structural glue that sticks most of the characters in *The Seagull* together. Medvedenko loves Masha, but Masha loves Treplev. Treplev does not love Masha back, he loves Nina. Nina loves Treplev briefly but then falls madly in love with Trigorin. Arkadina loves Trigorin but loses his affections to Nina. Paulina loves Dorn though she is married to Shamrayev. Dorn sometimes shares an affection for Paulina, but his apathy for her appears to have begun before the play started and continues to fade during the course of the play. The couples and the unrequited lovers resonate and reflect off of one another, serving as parallels and mirrors of each other in the play. They represent different stages of life and of love. The clearest parallel involves Paulina and Masha. Masha's unrequited love for Treplev and decision to marry Medvedenko seems to mirror her mother's unhappy marriage to Shamrayev and her unrequited love for Dorn.

### **Existential Crisis**

Masha, Sorin, Treplev, and Trigorin have existential crises in *The Seagull*. Masha hates her life and does not know why she goes on living a boring, unhappy life. She sniffs snuff and drinks heavily to hide from her pain and disappointment. Sorin encounters something of a mid-life crisis and an existential crisis though his life is more than half over. He questions what he did with his life and regrets his lack of attempting to meet his goals in youth. Treplev lacks direction in his life. He thinks he is talented and creative, possible of greatness, but does not have a precise goal in mind or point to make. He allows his ambition to overwhelm his ability. His loss of Nina's love, his failure at impressing his mother, and his life in the shadow of Trigorin's success eat away at his spirit and will to live.

Trigorin has an existential crisis when he becomes excited in the prospect of an affair with young Nina. Trigorin was not actively questioning his life or his life choices at the beginning of the play and seemed content. But Nina's interest in his work and in a relationship with him force him to think about his life and its present meaning. Nina represents a second chance at youth to Trigorin. He selfishly pleads with Arkadina to allow him to be with Nina so that he can relive his youth that was spent seriously writing, not frolicking with young girls. Trigorin wonders what he missed in life as a youth because of his writing and what else he missed. Nina's love for Trigorin opens his eyes and creates a new sense of awareness about himself that he had not experienced before meeting Nina. Once he recognizes his loss in the past, Trigorin cannot believe in a future that does not include the risk of a new experience. His life in the past loses meaning and his future threatens to only have meaning if he attempts to have an affair with Nina.

### **The Banality of Existence**

Chekhov emphasizes the mundane in life repeatedly throughout the play. This pattern of routine emphasizes the life-altering events that happen amidst ordinary experience and the ordinary experiences common to us all. Moments like going to dinner, playing cards, reading out loud, putting on a bandage, asking for a drink of water etc, continuously emphasize the everyday customs of being human and the uniqueness of moments that are not mundane but change our lives forever.

### **The Seagull**

The seagull is the first symbol Chekhov used to title a play, written before *The Cherry Orchard*. The image of the seagull changes meaning over the course of the play. First, in Act One, Nina uses a seagull to describe the way she is drawn to the lake of her childhood home and her neighbors on Sorin's estate. In this case, the seagull represents freedom and security.

In Act Two, Treplev shoots a seagull and gives it to Nina. Treplev tells her that one day he will be dead in Nina's honor just like the seagull. Later, Trigorin uses the seagull as a symbol for Nina and the way he will destroy her, as Treplev destroyed the seagull. Treplev mentions that after Nina had the affair with Trigorin, she has written him letters signed, "The

Seagull." In Act Four, Nina returns to the estate and calls herself the seagull then corrects herself, describing herself as an actress. The seagull changes its meaning from freedom and carefree security to destruction at the hands of a loved one. It symbolizes freedom at first and then dependence. The seagull also serves as a foreshadowing device. Nina fulfills Trigorin's prophesy of destroying her just like the seagull and Treplev kills himself in Nina's honor at the end of the play when she still does not love him.

### **The Lake**

Chekhov's setting of the play around a lake repeats and emphasizes its purpose with Treplev's setting of his play by the lake in Act One. The lake represents both Treplev and Chekhov's desire to move to a more naturalistic theater not limited by three walls. The lake means several different things to the play's characters. The lake is a place of reflection, respite, and escape. Trigorin goes there by himself to fish. Treplev goes to the lake to mope and reflect, perhaps also, to get attention for his bruised ego. To Nina, the lake magnetically draws her to it. It is a place to roost, to feel secure and at home when there is no home to be found. To Nina the lake also represents curiosity and exploration of childhood. She tells Trigorin that she knows all of the little islands on the lake. Treplev tells Nina that losing her love feels like the lake sunk into the ground. To him, losing her affection feels like losing a recognizable place, a place of peace and renewal. Treplev's metaphor describes a life-source—the lake—drying up and disappearing. This is how Treplev feels about his own life in relation to his loss of Nina.

### **Weather**

Chekhov uses weather to create the tone for his stories and in his plays. The weather reflects the characters' state of mind and foreshadows upcoming events. For instance, before Nina returns to visit Treplev the weather is stormy and windy as if the storm conjured up Nina and brought her to the estate. Storms usually reflect a change in temperature and likewise, weather is a signal for change in *The Seagull*.

## POST-DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & ESSAY TOPICS

What major events happen offstage? What kind of play would *The Seagull* become were these events to occur on stage? Why do you think Chekhov chose to keep these events offstage? What effect does his choice create?

Is Arkadina a sympathetic character? Why or why not?

How does Nina change over the course of the play?

### Suggested Essay Topics

How does the weather reflect the events of the play at three different, specific moments?

Is Treplev a tragic, comic, or tragi-comic figure? Provide evidence from the play to support your choice.

Why is Masha in the play? What does her character contribute to the story and our understanding of the major characters?

Is Trigorin a villain? Why or why not?

What types of relationships are repeated in the play? What effect do the parallel depictions create?

Is this a play of ideas or of actions? How does everyday language change characters' lives in the play?

Compare and contrast *The Cherry Orchard* and *The Seagull*. How does Chekhov employ the symbol of the title in each of these plays? What themes and motifs resonate between the plays? Has Chekhov's point of view about life and existence changed between *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*?

Search the letter grid below and circle the theatre terms listed.

How many can you find?

Words may be listed left-to-right, right-to-left, top-down, bottom-up, and diagonally up-or-down.

T	A	L	F	P	T	V	V	Q	G	N	M
H	O	U	N	O	R	P	A	L	R	U	S
E	G	P	A	C	R	O	U	E	I	O	S
S	N	S	S	J	V	L	D	N	D	T	M
P	I	T	G	W	G	R	E	U	H	W	X
I	K	A	N	X	O	C	V	G	C	J	S
A	C	G	I	B	S	L	I	X	S	E	T
N	O	E	W	O	V	L	L	A	Q	J	R
A	L	B	R	X	T	Q	L	O	G	E	I
A	B	P	H	O	U	S	E	A	F	K	K
J	P	D	O	W	N	S	T	A	G	E	E
C	V	F	E	G	A	T	S	K	C	A	B

APRON	FOOTLIGHTS	PROSCENIUM
BACKSTAGE	GEL	SET
BLOCKING	GRID	STRIKE
BORDER	HOUSE	THESPIAN
DOWNSTAGE	LOGE	UPSTAGE
FLAT	PIT	VAUDEVILLE
FOLLOWSPOT	PRODUCER	WINGS

## ACTIVITY:

### WRITE A PLAY REVIEW

#### HEADING

1. Title, playwright, and type of play
2. Date, place, and name of performing group
3. Include a play program with review

#### ESSAY OUTLINE

- I. Theme of play (main subject or message)
- II. Atmosphere (how it was expressed in the scenery, lighting, and sound)
- III. Brief summary of story or plot
- IV. Technical evaluation
  - A. Setting/Scenic design
  - B. Lighting
  - C. Costumes
  - D. Sound design
- V. Acting evaluation
  - A. Were actors convincing in their roles?
  - B. Did all characters work together to create an ensemble?
  - C. How did voice/movement impact believability?
  - D. Did actors underplay/overplay the parts?
  - E. Any outstanding performances? Be specific.
- VI. Directorial evaluation
  - A. Did the stage stay balanced?
  - B. Did all the aspects communicate the same concept or were some distracting?
  - C. Did the production interpret the script to your satisfaction?
  - D. Was the director true to what you think the playwright intended?
  - E. Were any aspects of the show confusing?
- VII. Personal opinion (Discuss any aspect of the play you wish, but give reasons to justify your beliefs.)

# 5

# THE THEATRE

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In the summer of 1965, Jackie Nichols was a rising senior at Overton High School. He teamed up with fellow students to form a troupe of actors to perform shows in churches and civic centers. They called themselves The Circuit Players, and for the next four years, they performed a variety of musicals and straight plays wherever they could.

Circuit Playhouse, Inc. was born on November 20, 1969 near the University of Memphis when the company rented a former home that had been converted to a ballet academy. In 1971, the space was sold, and the company relocated to 1947 Poplar across from Overton Park. When Circuit Playhouse, Inc. moved to this larger building, it rented an adjacent building to be used for a costume shop and a new performance space known as Workshop Theatre. It was a venue for new, original, and one-act plays. Two years later, another adjacent building was used to create Theatre II; a space for producing little known plays. This helped to spearhead a widespread revitalization of Midtown Memphis. For the next several years, the three theatres operated on an annual budget of approximately \$30,000 with no paid staff.

Recognition of the organization's well-established position in the community came at this time with the first funding grant from the Greater Memphis Arts Council.

In 1975, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. acquired a building in Overton Square in Midtown Memphis. With \$30,000 provided by Overton Square Investors for renovation, and with increased funding from the Greater Memphis Arts Council, Playhouse on the Square was born. It was an offspring of Circuit Playhouse, Inc. which continued to produce the kind of adventurous theatre its audience had come to expect. Playhouse on the Square opened on November 12, 1975 with a production of *Godspell*. It also had a resident company of professional actors and a paid staff. The first season was graced with the performances of many fine actors including Larry Riley and Michael Jeter, who would later achieve notable careers in New York and Hollywood.

In 1979, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. bought and moved to the former Guild Movie theatre at 1705 Poplar. It was a 10,000 square foot building and included space for a larger costume shop, its first dedicated scene shop, rehearsal space, improved dressing facilities, and storage for costumes and props. The two theatres contin-



ued to pursue their own directions. The Circuit Playhouse initiated the Mid-South Playwright's Contest, offered a Foreign Film Series,

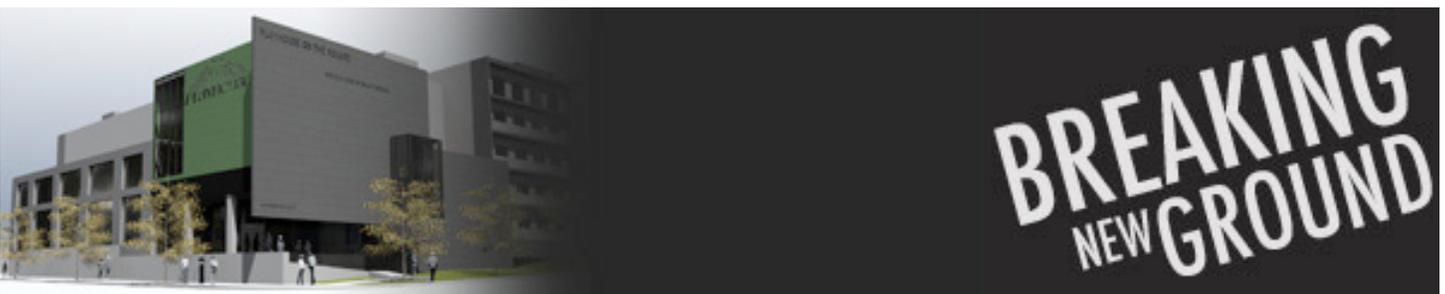
and staged Off-Broadway and experimental works. Playhouse on the Square began to offer weekday matinees for school groups in addition to its regular season.

In 1981, Playhouse on the Square initiated the Intern Program. The program was begun to enable emerging theatre artists to explore every avenue of the profession and apply their education in the real world. Today it includes twelve college graduates hired to assist in all phases of production.

By 1985, Playhouse on the Square was again feeling growing pains. The student matinee series had outgrown the theatre's capacity, and seating for many productions was limited. The Memphian Movie Theatre just down the street (a favorite after-hours screening facility for Elvis) was available. Circuit Playhouse, Inc. purchased the building and solicited three-year pledges from individuals and corporations and was able to complete a \$150,000 renovation of the building.

1986 saw the inception of the Playhouse on the Square's Theatre for Youth program, which expanded into a full-scale Summer Youth Conservatory, TnT (Teens in Theatre), a touring program, and a full season of school matinees. In 1990, Playhouse on the Square instituted the city's first independent Theatre School with theatre classes for children, teens, and adults. From the five classes offered during the first season, the school has expanded to a total of twenty courses.

Having been concerned for some time that arts events were beyond the financial means of the city's poorest citizens, Jackie Nichols suggested to the Arts Council that they arrange some way of making art, theatre, music, and dance available to the disadvantaged. In January 1990, Arts Access came into being making free tickets to arts events available to those on food stamps. In addition, Jackie Nichols instituted the Pay What You Can program in 1991. Every show produced at both The Circuit Playhouse



and Playhouse on the Square has a Pay What You Can night, ensuring that those who cannot afford the full price of a ticket will not be denied the pleasures of an evening at the theatre.

In 1992, Playhouse on the Square acquired an adjoining building adding 6,000 square feet in which to build a new scene shop, a large multi-purpose room with bar, a meeting room, and wheelchair-accessible restrooms.

To finance this expansion and ensure the financial stability of the theatres into the 21st century, Jackie spearheaded the Silver Challenge, a \$350,000 fund-raising effort. Again, the Memphis community responded by producing the needed revenue in a matter of months.

In 1994, construction began on Theatre-Works, a building near Playhouse on the Square which was built to house a variety of small performance groups unable to afford quarters of their own. The following year saw the inception of a program that has had national impact in the theatre world—the Unified Professional Theatre Auditions. In February 1995, Playhouse on the Square hosted twenty-five theatres and two hundred actors from around the country. Since then, the growth has been phenomenal. 90 theatres and nearly one thousand actors and production personnel attended in 2014.

With a view to ensuring a new generation of theatre patrons, Jackie Nichols launched the After School Acting Program (ASAP) in 1997. Several months were spent developing this program for 7-12 year-olds. Churches, schools, and community centers all over the metropolitan area host sites for troupes of children for the twice-weekly activity, which, under the guidance of a director, creates an original theatrical piece to be performed at a festival at the end of each semester.

In December 1997, longtime supporters of the theatre donated to Circuit Playhouse, Inc. a building adjacent to The Circuit Playhouse. This building, now known as the Jeanne and Henry Varnell Theatre Arts Education Building, was refurbished to house all of our Theatre For Youth programs. In order to refurbish the building, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. created the 21st Century Challenge: Building for Generations, a capital funds drive that raised \$600,000.

The growth in artistic capability and maturity of the theatres has resulted in an expanded awareness and appreciation in

the local community and beyond. This is reflected in the numerous Memphis theatre awards presented to Circuit Playhouse, Inc. in recent years. In December 1990, Circuit Playhouse, Inc. was honored by the Tennessee Arts Commission with the Governor's Award in the Arts. In October 1993, Jackie Nichols was awarded the Gordon Holl Award for Outstanding Arts Administration at the Governor's Conference on the Arts, and in June 1999, Jackie Nichols received the Rotary Club Community Service Award. Circuit Playhouse, Inc. celebrated its 35th anniversary in 2004.

In 2005, Playhouse on the Square received an unrestricted \$25,000 Stanford Group Financial Award in partnership with the Greater Memphis Arts Council recognizing fiscal stewardship of the organization.

In 2004 the Board of Trustees recognized that the Playhouse on the Square's current renovated 1920s movie theatre was inadequate for the full array of artistic capabilities and talent available and expected by audiences. They undertook a fifteen million-dollar capital campaign that has led to the completion of our new Playhouse on the Square at 66 S Cooper. The new theatre is complete with all the modern stage machinery necessary to present the very best in theatre. The new facility will have rehearsal space, administrative offices, and costume and scenic facilities. Pippin, the first show in the new theater opened January 29, 2009.

## OUR MISSION

To produce a challenging and diverse repertoire of theatrical work that speaks to the intelligence, the soul, and the imagination of the Memphis community;

To provide a nurturing artistic home for actors, directors, designers, and staff in which they can practice their craft and share their talent; and

To make all of our productions available through access, outreach, and educational activities to everyone in the community regardless of financial circumstances.

Since 1969, more than 5,500 people have acted, taught, staffed, ushered, "teched," and struggled to bring forth the 777 shows produced at our theatres.

With the continued generous support of our audience members, our sponsors, and our board; and with the dedication of our actors, technicians, and staff, we can celebrate 40 years of great theater and make our next forty years even more exciting.

## DID YOU KNOW?

**Playhouse on the Square** is proud to be Memphis' Professional Resident Theatre Company. That means that the artists you encounter in our theatre, onstage and off, are professionals.

Nearly all of the actors, the designers, technicians, and administrators do this as a full-time job. People interview from all over the country to be hired for these coveted career opportunities. Nearly all of the artists have been to college, trained, and earned degrees specializing in their field.

Together, we work very hard to produce season after season of quality work; serving our community with art, as well as education and outreach programs.

Most importantly, this is our home. We are honored to open our doors to you and share the excitement of the performing arts. To show respect for our home, we ask that teachers prepare students for their theatrical experience, aided by the use of our free study guides.

The skills and guidelines herein enhance students' cultural literacy. We encourage educators to integrate these principles into further study throughout their curriculum. Thank you for supporting the arts!

# ELEMENTS OF PRODUCTION

## Creative Team

No musical would be possible without the imagination and inspiration of its **authors**. Many times, the idea for a show grows from an existing book, play, article, or movie. Other times, authors write musicals from an original idea or concept. Once an idea is developed, **composers** and **lyricists** begin to write the songs. The music needs to not only fit the overall tone and pace of the musical, but also contain lyrics that help the audience understand the story and its characters. The **choreographer** designs the dance sequences for the performers. The dances are intricate movements that allow the performers to express the meaning of each song. The **director** works with all of them to help guide the overall artistic vision of the show.

## The Cast

The director works to cast both the **principle performers** and the **ensemble** or **chorus** members. Each performer must have a well-trained singing voice, acting skills, the ability to dance, and fit the look of his/her character. These elements are all evaluated during the audition process. Actors are asked to bring a **headshot** as well as perform two songs, one **uptempo** and one **ballad**, as well as one or more monologues. Once the actors are chosen for the principal roles and for the ensemble, they become the cast, and begin working with the director during the rehearsal process.

## The Rehearsal

The cast will do an initial **readthrough** of the script, without singing or dancing, followed by additional practices with the **rehearsal pianist**. The **music director** teaches and rehearses the music with the orchestra and is responsible for the musical aspect of the production. The **dance captain**, sometimes together with the **choreographer**, teaches and rehearses the dance sequences with the performers. During rehearsals, the director coaches the actors' reading of the lines and emotions and also gives them their **blocking**, line by line, scene by scene. Next, the cast does a **sitzprobe**, where they sit and sing with the orchestra before incorporating any staging, scenery, costumes, or props. Eventually, the cast does a **wanderprobe**, where they run through the show, including movements and dancing, while the orchestra plays. The **technical rehearsal** is when the full cast and crew walk through the entire show, ensuring every light cue, sound effect, microphone, etc. works as planned. This rehearsal is mainly for the tech staff. The cast and crew will also go through a **dress rehearsal** many times to bring all the different elements (costumes, music, dance, lights, sound) together.

**Crew:** The **set designer** creates the locale and period in which the musical occurs. While some sets are very simple and focus the audience's attention on the show itself, some are lavish and extravagant providing visual appeal. The **master carpenter** is responsible for building the actual set. The **lighting designer** decides where the lighting instruments should go, how they should be colored, and which ones should be on at any particular time. The **master electrician** implements the lighting designer's work and makes sure the lights are set properly and safely. The **property (props) master** is in charge of obtaining or making and maintaining all props used in the show. He or she also sets the props in their proper places before the show begins. The **stage manager** is responsible for the overall integrity of a production. He or she assists the director, and "**calls the show**," making sure each performance runs as smoothly as possible.

**Sound:** The **sound designer** plans the layout of all sound playback and equipment for the show and adjusts the pitch, volume, duration, and overall quality of the music to meet each specific scene's needs. The **sound operator** executes the sound designer's plans and handles the mixing equipment for the show. Music and sound must fit the context in which they are used. The adjustments are made using the **soundboard**.

**Costumes and Make-up:** The **costume designer** first researches the setting of the musical. Costumes must be appropriate for the time period and culture of the show, beautiful and elaborately designed, while also practical enough for movement and dance. He or she then decides which styles and fabrics to use, and draws the costumes in **renderings**. Through costume fittings, the costumes are adjusted to fit each individual performer. During dress rehearsals and performances, actors have **dressers** to help put on and/or change their costumes. The **make-up artist** is responsible for applying cosmetics to each performer's face and body to increase visibility, enhance certain features, and modify the actor's look to resemble his or her character. In addition to make-up, certain roles call for a specific hairstyle. The **wig master/mistress** obtains the wigs, styles and shapes them, and helps the actors put them on.

# Q: What Makes Theatre Magical?

## A: The Audience!

Going to see a production at the theatre is an exciting experience! You will be watching live actors perform onstage. This makes each performance very special. No two shows are alike, due to the spontaneity of live performance.

Each time you come to the theatre, it is like making a promise to come inside the world of the play we have made for you. We agree to create a theatrical world for you to visit, and you agree to step inside it for awhile. That agreement is the last step in the process of making a play happen!

So, when you walk into a theatre, you can feel a sense of impending discovery. Something important is about to happen. It's exciting to be in the room. That stage holds the secret of what is about to come to life as you find the seats reserved for you. Sometimes, it is so thrilling you want to get wiggly, laugh, and shout. But remember that once the play begins, everybody in the theatre has a responsibility. Everybody is part of the play - including you.

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. As members of the audience, **you play an important part** in the success of a theatrical performance. Audience reaction strongly affects the actors.

They certainly don't want a passive audience; they thrive on the audience's response - the laughter and the applause. When appropriate, such reactions "fuel the fire" - but that response must be in co-operation with the action onstage, or it is off-putting and distracting for the performers and other audience members.

Students accustomed to watching television in their homes or attending movies are used to eating snacks, moving around, getting in and out of their seats, or sharing comments aloud during a show. Movies and TV shows are not affected by the audience, **but theatre performances are!** Students may not be aware of how disturbing such behaviors can be in live theatre. As a courtesy, prepare students for their theatre experience. Discuss behaviors that are problematic and why they are a problem.

You are connected with the other people in the audience as well as the ones onstage. They can **see** you, **hear** you, and **feel** you; just as you see, hear, and feel them. Your laughter, your responses, your attention, your imagination, and most especially your energy are important. They are a real part of the performance, and the wonderful truth is that the play can be better because of YOU!

- *Theatre is entertaining, as much as it is educational, mirroring society in all its complexity artistically through conflict and resolution.*
- *Audiences are able to observe and celebrate society's heroes who overcome life's obstacles to a prosperous or detrimental end.*
- *Audiences enjoy live theatre because it provides an escape from the outside world. Within the walls of the theatre, moral dilemmas are more easily grasped, and its characters can be scrutinized according to society's mores.*
- *Delving into moral dilemmas elicits an emotional response from the audience for any one of the particular characters, thus encouraging the audience to critically become aware of their own prejudices and suppositions of human behavior.*



**The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee 2009, Playhouse on the Square**

# A GLOSSARY OF THEATRICAL TERMS

## A

**Act** (v) to perform or play a role; (n) a division of a drama

**Action** the core of a theatrical piece; the sense of forward movement created by a sense of time and/or the physical and psychological motivations of characters

**Articulation** clear pronunciation of words

## B

**Blocking** the pattern actors follow in moving onstage, usually determined by the director.

**Box Office** where ticket sales are handled, usually located in the theatre's lobby

## C

**Cast** (v) to choose the actors to play specific roles in a play; (n) the group of actors who take the roles in a play

**Catharsis** an emotional purification or relief (Greek)

**Character** one of the people who figures in a play; a part played by an actor

**Choreographer** an artist who designs (choreographs) dances for the stage

**Climax** the turning point in a plot when conflict comes to an emotional crest

**Conflict** struggle between opposing ideas, interests, or forces in a play. The existence of conflict, either external (between two or more characters) or internal (within one character), is central to drama.

**Costume** any clothing an actor wears onstage for a performance

**Costume Designer** the person who decides what the actors will wear, he/she designs costumes to build or chooses costumes to rent, borrow, or buy for a production

**Cue** a final line or action that signals an actor to begin the next speech

**Curtain call** the return of the cast to the stage after the end of the performance, when the actors acknowledge applause

## D

**Denouement** the final resolution of the conflict in a plot

**Dialect** language features specific to the speech of a particular region

**Dialogue** the lines of the play spoken by the actors in character

**Director** the person who oversees the entire production

**Downstage** the part of the stage closest to the audience

**Dramatic conflict** the conflict in which the main character in a play engages. There are four types of dramatic conflict: 1) person vs. person; 2) person vs. society; 3) person vs. self; 4) person vs. nature/fate

## E

**Ensemble** the interaction and blending of the efforts of the many artists involved in a

theatrical production

**Exposition** the beginning of a plot that provides important background information

## F

**Falling action** the series of events following the climax of a plot

**Fight director** a movement and combat specialist who choreographs both armed and unarmed fight scenes and stunts onstage

**Fourth wall** an imaginary wall between the audience and actors in a representational play

## G

**Gesture** an expressive movement of the body or limbs

## H

**House** the auditorium or seating of a theatre

## I

**Improvise** to speak or to act without a script

**Inciting incident** the event that sets in motion the action of the plot

## L

**Lighting Designer** the person who develops a lighting concept and design for a production, he/she oversees installation and operation of lighting for the production

## M

**Monologue** a story, speech, or scene performed by one actor alone

**Motivation** a character's reason for doing or saying things

## O

**Objective** a character's goal or intention

**Obstacle** something that stands between a character and his/her ability to meet an objective or achieve a goal

**Open** to keep the face and front of the body visible to the audience as much as possible

## P

**Pantomime** to act without words through facial expression and gesture

**Performance** a representation before an audience; entertainment

**Playwright** a person who writes plays

**Plot** the sequence of events; the structure of a play

**Producer** the person or company who oversees the business details of a theatrical production

**Project** 1) to make your voice fill the performing space; 2) to cast an image or patterned light onto a screen or other surface

**Property or Prop** anything that an actor handles onstage as well as furniture and other items used to enhance the set

**Proscenium stage** performance space in

which the audience views the action as if through a picture frame

**Protagonist** the main character of a play; the character with which the audience identifies most strongly

## R

**Rising action** the middle part of a plot, consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict

**Role** a part in a play that is written by the playwright; the basis of an actor's characterization

## S

**Scene** the basic structural element of a play; each scene deals with a significant crisis or confrontation

**Scenery** onstage decoration to help establish the time and place of a play

**Script** the text of a play

**Set** the onstage physical space and its structures in which the actors perform

**Set Designer** the person who develops the design and concept of the set

**Sound Designer** the person who determines the kinds of sound needed for a production, recorded or live

**Stage Manager** director's technical liaison backstage during rehearsals and performances

**Stage Picture** the succession of tableaux created by a director through blocking

**Strike** 1) to remove something from the stage; 2) to take down the set

**Symbol** a concrete image used to represent a concept or idea

## T

**Tableau** a silent and motionless depiction of a scene, often from a picture

**Theatre** 1) the imitation/representation of life, performed for other people; 2) the place that is the setting for dramatic performances

**Theme** underlying meaning of a literary work

**Thespian** an actor (named after the first actor, "Thespis")

**Tragedy** a play that ends in defeat or death of the main character

## U

**Understudy** an actor who learns the part of another actor playing a major role, able to replace the original actor in case of emergency

**Upstage** 1) (n) the stage area away from the audience; 2) (v) to stand upstage of another actor on a proscenium stage, forcing the downstage actor to turn away from the audience; 3) (v) to steal the focus of the scene

## W

**Wings** the sides of a stage just outside the scenery, unseen by the audience



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