

Brief Encounters

Still Life • We Were Dancing • Hands Across the Sea
by Noël Coward



SHAW THEATRE
FESTIVAL 09 SEASON

CONNECTIONS Shaw Festival Study Guide

The Shaw Story	2
The Players	3
The Story	4 – 5
The Playwright	6
Director's Notes	7
Designer's Notes	8 – 9
Production History	10
World of the Play	11-15
Did You Know?	16 -17
Say What?	18
Sources	19
Activities	20 - 36

THE SHAW STORY

MANDATE

The Shaw Festival is the only theatre in the world which exclusively focuses on plays by Bernard Shaw and his contemporaries, including plays written during, or about the period of Shaw's lifetime (1856 – 1950).

The Shaw Festival's mandate also includes:

- Uncovered Gems – digging up undiscovered theatrical treasures, or plays which were considered major works when they were written but which have since been unjustly neglected
- American Classics – we continue to celebrate the best of American theatre
- Musicals – musical treats either from, or set during the period of our mandate
- Canadian Work – to allow us to hear and promote our own stories, our own points of view about the mandate period.

MEET THE COMPANY – OUR ENSEMBLE

- *Our Actors:* All Shaw performers contribute to the sense of ensemble, much like the players in an orchestra. Often, smaller parts are played by actors who are leading performers in their own right, but in our “orchestra,” they support the central action helping to create a density of experiences that are both subtle and informative.
- *Our Designers:* Every production that graces the Shaw Festival stages is built “from scratch,” from an original design. Professional designers lead teams who collaborate with each production's director to create set, costumes, and lighting designs that complement the play's text.
- *Our Music:* Music played an important role in Bernard Shaw's life – in fact, he wrote music criticism for several years under the pseudonym Corno di Bassetto. Just as the reach of musical theatre is vast and manifold, so is The Shaw's approach - presenting Brecht and Weill, Rodgers and Hart, and everything in between.
- *Our Play Development:* The goals of Shaw's Play Development Program include: 1) to develop new adaptations and translations that will tell classic stories in a contemporary way; 2) to produce new plays alongside those of Shaw and his contemporaries.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

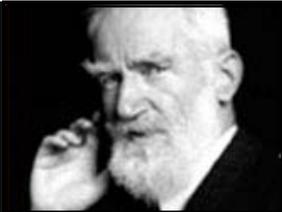
As Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell says, “We all know the man can talk, but Bernard Shaw is also one of the most prescient, provocative, sparkingly articulate writers in the English language. His words and ideas, expressed in plays that are well-known, such as this season's *The Devil's Disciple*, or in plays that are not so familiar but no less interesting, have extraordinary relevance today. It is a joy to draw attention to those ideas and bring them to life on our stages.”

OUR THEATRES

The Shaw Festival presents plays in three distinctive theatres. The Festival Theatre with 869 seats is The Shaw's flagship theatre; the historic Court House where The Shaw first began performing seats 327; and the Royal George Theatre, modeled after an Edwardian opera house, holds 328.

THE SHAW'S COAT OF ARMS

In 1987, on the occasion of our 25th Anniversary, the Shaw Festival became the second theatre company in the world to be granted a Coat of Arms by the College of Heralds. A large painted sculpture of our Coat of Arms adorns the lobby of the Festival Theatre.



WHAT MAKES SHAW SPECIAL



Festival Theatre



Court House Theatre



Royal George Theatre

A practical, hands-on resource for the classroom which contains background information for the play, suggested themes for discussion, and Ontario curriculum-based activities. Designed by educators and theatre professionals, the activities and themes for discussion are organized in modules that can be used independently or interdependently according to the class level and time availability.

Brief Encounters is recommended for students in grade 6 and higher.

This guide was written and compiled by Suzanne Merriam and Amanda Tripp. Additional materials were provided by Jackie Maxwell and Bill Schmuck.

Cover: Fiona Byrne and Patrick Galligan
Photo by Shin Sugino

Previews April 11
Opens May 20
Closes October 24

THE PLAYERS

Bill/lappaga	PRINCE AMPONSAH
Mildred/Guest	BERYL BAIN
Old Man/Major Blake	MICHAEL BALL
Johnnie/Guest/Mr Burnham	WADE BOGERT-O'BRIEN
Beryl/Eva/Walters	KRISTA COLOSIMO
Alec/Karl/Peter	PATRICK GALLIGAN
Laura/Louise/Piggy	DEBORAH HAY
Myrtle/Guest/Mrs Wadhurst	CORRINE KOSLO
Albert/Hubert/Wadhurst	THOM MARRIOTT
Stanley/George/Bogey	GRAY POWELL
Guest/Ala.stair	DAVID SCHURMANN
Dolly/Clara/Clare	GOLDIE SEMPLE

THE ARTISTIC TEAM

Director	JACKIE MAXWELL
Designer	WILLIAM SCHMUCK
Lighting Designer	KEVIN LAMOTTE
Musical Arrangements/ Sound Design	JOHN GZOWSKI
Projection Design	ADAM LARSEN
Choreography	VALERIE MOORE

SYNOPSIS

Repressed love after a chance meeting at a train station; flaming passion from a single dance across the floor; mistaken identity following a passing holiday acquaintance - three different stories inspired by three brief moments in time. Each is a miniature delight only possible from the pen of Coward.

Brief Encounters

3 plays from Noël Coward's *Tonight at 8:30*

Still Life, We Were Dancing, Hands Across the Sea

Noël Coward's ten play collection called *Tonight at 8:30* is a celebration in many ways. For Coward it was an opportunity to revive the one-act play – a form for which he had great affection. In his introduction to a published edition of the plays he writes, "A short play, having a great advantage over a long one in that it can sustain a mood without technical creaking or over padding, deserves a better fate, and if, by careful writing, acting and producing I can do a little towards reinstating it in its rightful pride, I shall have achieved one of my more sentimental ambitions." He also wrote the plays as a vehicle for himself and his favourite actress, Gertrude Lawrence. "In the year 1935", explains Coward, "I wrote the *Tonight at 8:30* plays as acting, singing, and dancing vehicles for Gertrude Lawrence and myself. The success we had had with *Private Lives* both in London and New York encouraged me to believe that the public liked to see us playing together, and this belief, happily for us both... turned out to be fully justified."

Each of the plays was written especially for this event, "There has been no unworthy scuffling in cupboards and bureau drawers in search of forgotten manuscripts, and no hurried refurbishing of old, discarded ideas", Coward assures us. They were written so that they could be combined in any number of orders to make three programmes consisting of three plays. The first programme was presented in January, 1935 (with the matinees sometimes called *Today at 2:30*) and over the next six months, new plays were added to the mix. By May, 1936 all the plays (with the exception of *Star Chamber* which was only produced once in this original run) which make up the entire *Tonight at 8:30* series were complete.

The plays being presented in *Brief Encounters* include three of perhaps the best known plays in this series – *Still Life, We Were Dancing* and *Hands Across the Sea*. Although there is no clear thematic 'link' between these plays, they demonstrate the great range of Noël Coward's writing – from drama to comedy to music.

Still Life, a drama, is also well-known for the film version made in 1945 called *Brief Encounter*, starring Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson, directed by David Lean. Set in a "refreshment room" in a train station, a pleasant but ordinary married woman sits having tea and gets a bit of grit in her eye. A man sitting at another table jumps up to help her and she thanks him and boards her train. A seemingly ordinary encounter. But Alec and Laura continue to meet, at first accidentally and then they agree to a light lunch, then a movie. They're both married but their relationship continues to grow. Over time, their chance meeting becomes a love affair that neither of them can deny:

Alec: Listen, my dear. This is something that's never happened to either of us before. We've loved before and been happy before, and miserable and

contented and reckless, but this is different – something lovely and strange and desperately difficult. We can't measure it along with the values of our ordinary lives.

And while their affair continues to unfold in the train station, we also witness the lives of the people who run this café who bring a comic but equally moving layer to this love story.

In *We Were Dancing* we move to a country club in the fictional country Samolo (a place that Noël Coward often used in his plays, it's a generalized South Sea island). Music can be heard as a couple dance across the floor. Coward describes them as "both in their thirties, soignée and well-dressed, and they dance together as though they had never been apart." When her husband and his sister appear, despite the fact that this couple seems to not even know each other's names, they declare that they have fallen in love. Just in that one dance.

Karl: I know that suddenly, when we were dancing, an enchantment swept over me. An enchantment that I have never known before and shall never know again. It's obvious that you should think I'm mad and that she's mad too, our behaviour looks idiotic, cheap, anything you like, but it's true, this magic that happened, it's so true that everything else, all the ordinary ways of behaviour look shabby and unreal beside it...

When the practicalities of Louise leaving her husband for Karl and setting sail with him for Australia are discussed, and the cold light of day is cast upon them, their dreams of love begin to fade while other loves are just beginning.

In the final play, *Hands Across the Sea*, Lady Maureen "Piggie" Gilpin, and her husband Commander Peter Gilpin, return home to their Mayfair flat to find a phone message that the Rawlingsons are in town. Piggie explains that she stayed with them while travelling the Far East and now feels bound to return their hospitality. Everyone leaves to get ready for their arrival so when Mr and Mrs Wadhurst arrive they are left alone. Mrs Wadhurst convinces her husband that they are expected, having spoken to Lady Maureen earlier in the week. But when Piggie appears, it's clear that she believes the Wadhursts are the Rawlingsons. As more people come and go and telephone calls are answered and drinks are served, more confusions abound. When Mrs Rawlingson telephones, Piggie realizes these are not the people she thought they were – but then who are they?

This threesome is directed by Artistic Director Jackie Maxwell with set and costumes designed by the Shaw Festival's Head of Design, William Schmuck. Their previous collaborations include last season's production of *The Stepmother* and *Rutherford and Son* in 2004.

The Playwright

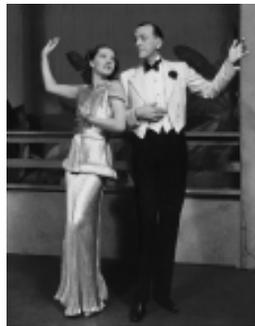


NOËL COWARD (1899-1973)

Noël Coward entertained theatre-goers for over half a century with what he called this "talent to amuse" – as an actor, playwright, director, composer, and singer. He is best known for the witty and sophisticated comedies of manners written from the 1920s through the early '40s, which delighted and sometimes shocked audiences with their satiric portrayals of the English leisured classes between the wars. In addition to writing, performing in and directing many of his plays, Coward composed the music and lyrics for numerous songs made popular in hit revues, sketches and musicals.



Coward was born at Teddington, South London, just before the last Christmas of the 1800s – hence the name Noël. A child actor, he made his first stage appearance in the 1911 fairy play called *The Goldfish* and subsequently apprenticed with Charles Hawtrey, a popular actor-manager. Coward appeared in London as the lost boy Slightly in *Peter Pan*, and toured in *Charley's Aunt*. In July 1920, *I'll Leave It To You* became the first play with which he reached the West End as both author and actor.



With *The Vortex* in 1924, Coward began to gain critical acclaim and personal celebrity. In 1925, four additional Coward productions were running simultaneously in London: *Hay Fever*, *Fallen Angels*, *Easy Virtue* and *On With the Dance*. Coward ended the decade with his most popular musical play, *Bitter Sweet* (1929), and he began the next with his most popular comedy of manners, *Private Lives* (1930), in which he starred with Gertrude Lawrence and Laurence Olivier. For the next decade, he enjoyed enormous popularity, with such hits as *Cavalcade* (1931), *Design For Living* (1933), *Tonight at 8:30* (1936) and *Blithe Spirit* (1941) which ran for almost 2000 performances.



Coward travelled extensively during World War II, entertaining Allied troops, opening such plays as *Present Laughter* and *This Happy Breed* (both in 1943), and directing the patriotic film *In Which We Serve*. After the war he continued to write plays, music, and verse, and to collaborate on film productions of his work. In the 1950s and '60s, as his plays declined in popularity, Coward became one of America's favourite nightclub entertainers. He produced three volumes of autobiographies (published posthumously). Coward was knighted in 1970 and died at his home in Jamaica in 1973.



**Jackie Maxwell talks about directing
*Brief Encounters***

When I decided to stage Noël Coward's complete set of ten one-act plays—*Tonight at 8:30*—I had several reasons, but there was no doubt that the main one was to let our audiences see the members of our extraordinary acting company, well, frankly, show off!

The three plays in *Brief Encounters* may be short, but they are complete worlds that we must explore in great detail in order to present them fully. Each one is vastly different in genre, geography, class and tone, and demands a range of skills from the actors, most of whom play in all three plays. Be it in a railway station café, on the fantasy island of Samolo, or the Mayfair flat of an upper crust socialite and her naval husband; from repressed love to outrageously bad behaviour to martini-fuelled bon mots, not to mention a little song and dance, each character in each play must be carefully built, deeply inhabited and then tossed off in less than a moment to make room for the next.

And just when you get the feeling that it may actually be impossible, you do a run in the rehearsal hall where the actors hurl themselves in with that wonderful mixture of bravery and skill that really great ones have, and with only a few chairs, a line on the floor to represent a sunset or a railway line, they give us a glimpse of how dazzling and delightful this theatre experience could be.

By the time you see it, they will be surrounded by all the design skill and technology that we will also bring to the piece, but in the end, it's our actors spinning Coward's worlds, like acrobats with plates, that will be the true centre of the evening—I think as Coward would have wanted.

Designer's Notes



John Gzowski talks about sound design

Q: Can you describe your vision for this production of *Brief Encounters*?

A: I'm excited to work with Noël Coward's music as much as possible, the goal is to find as many ways to quote Coward's own compositions within the three plays we are doing. We are putting Coward on the radio, re-arranging a song for gamelan, taking fragments of melodies for transitions and putting his own text for the play in as substitute words for another of his songs. The *Tonight at 8:30* series is a celebration of Coward's work, and we hope to show how rich his writing is.

Q: Have you ever worked with this Director before? If so, please tell us about that experience.

A: I've worked with Jackie before she came to Shaw and once since she's been here. She is a joy to work with, a director who has a clear vision and an easy way of communicating her concepts. That makes it easy and fun for me to find ways to help make the plays as good as we can.

Q: Tell us about designing for this playwright? Anything in particular about their writing that inspires you or is a particular challenge for designers?

A: Coward's work, both music and text, is very wordy, witty and intelligent. His music is full of unexpected harmonies, melodies and phrasing. His music is rich with harmonic content, and a challenge to translate into a more modern setting without losing some depth.

Q: What do you find most "striking" about this play?

A: The fact that this play is three different plays. They all come from a similar world and a world view that speaks to me in ways I did not expect.

Q: What about your design approach or style do you want us to convey to the public?

A: Try to see how many Noël Coward songs you can recognize through this presentation and all the others in the *Tonight at 8:30* series.



Bill Schmuck talks about designing three productions in one

Each of the plays that make up *Brief Encounters* require a different setting, beginning with a refreshment room in a British train station for *Still Life*, a colonial country club in Indonesia for *We Were Dancing*, and a smart Art Deco drawing room in Mayfair, London for *Hands across the Sea*. The design approach that we used began with a focus on linking each of the three plays and designing effective transitions in and out of each play. We have done this by creating a unit set that provides quick, cinematic scene changes. Ultimately it is our intention to move away from presenting three separate little plays with intermissions between them, to creating one large Festival Theatre - sized play with one intermission. We will be using the transitions between each to express the collective themes that link all three plays.

All of the plays that make up *Brief Encounters* are set in the mid 1930s. We are utilizing a video component in each piece, as well as during the scene changes to create a cinematic feel that echoes the escapist fare offered by Hollywood and British films of the era, used by people to blunt the pain and hardship of this depressed decade.

I read *Hands Across the Sea* while we were working on *After the Dance* last season, and I was very sensitive to the mood and themes prevalent in pre-WWII Britain. The taste for the appeasement of Hitler and the vulnerability of the British aristocracy in the wake of the Abdication made me increasingly aware of the biting satire in a piece, that I had previously thought was just a hilarious farce. I also reached for a favourite movie of mine, *Hope and Glory*, to steep myself in the War experience in London. I remembered loving these strange balloons that hung over London in profusion during the war. They were used as an anti-aircraft weapon that would ensnare low flying German bombers, bringing the planes down in a fiery explosion. Although the prolific use of Barrage Balloons predates the war in terms of their prevalence in the landscape, they were being deployed as early as 1936 in and around London. They were invented in WWI and were further developed between the wars.

The image of the barrage balloons is buoyant, playful and Monty Python-like, but they become very ominous and full of foreboding when there are so many hanging there in the sky.



TONIGHT AT 8:30

Six of the plays (*We Were Dancing*, *The Astonished Heart*, *Red Peppers*, *Hands Across the Sea*, *Fumed Oak*, *Shadow Play*) in the ten-play cycle of *Tonight at 8:30* were first performed in Manchester in October 1935. A seventh play (*Family Album*) was added on the subsequent provincial tour, and three more (*Ways and Means*, *Still Life*, and *Star Chamber*) were added for the first London run, which took place at the Phoenix Theatre from 9 January to 20 June 1936. *Star Chamber*, however, was given only one performance (21 March 1936) and was not included in the collection first published in 1936. Written as "acting, singing, and dancing vehicles for Gertrude Lawrence and myself," said Coward, the plays were presented in alternating groups of three plays, all directed by Coward himself. The full cycle has not been revived in Britain, but major productions of parts of the cycle were mounted at the Lyric Theatre, London, in 1981 (with John Standing and Estelle Kohler in *Shadow Play*, *Hands Across the Sea*, and *Red Peppers*) and at the Chichester Festival in 2006 (six plays: the Lyric Theatre selection and *Family Album*, *Fumed Oak*, and *The Astonished Heart*).

Coward took *Tonight at 8:30* to New York in 1936, where he again directed and starred with Gertrude Lawrence. Nine of the plays—*Star Chamber* was not included—ran (in groups of three) at the National Theatre from 24 November for 118 performances. In a brief Broadway revival in 1948 (again at the National Theatre, and then on tour) Gertrude Lawrence played opposite Graham Payne. The ANTA Playhouse in New York mounted a short run of *Fumed Oak*, *Still Life*, and *Ways and Means* in May 1967. The American première of the full ten-play cycle of *Tonight at 8:30* did not take place until a production by the Antaeus Company in Los Angeles in October 2007.

The Canadian première of *Tonight at 8:30* was at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto in an American touring production led by Bramwell Fletcher. Nine plays (*Star Chamber* again being omitted) ran during the week of 7 March 1938. The production moved to Montreal the next week, playing at His Majesty's Theatre. There have been several revivals in Canada of the plays in different configurations, but the 2009 Shaw Festival production is the Canadian première of both the full ten-play cycle and *Star Chamber*.

We Were Dancing, *Family Album*, and *Shadow Play* were produced at the Shaw Festival in 1971, directed by Eric House, the first of numerous Festival productions of Coward's work. Plays from *Tonight at 8:30* have also been popular choices for the annual Directors Project at the Festival (*Astonished Heart* in 1997; *Shadow Play*, 1998; *Ways and Means*, 2003; and *Hands Across the Sea*, 2007).

There have been several film adaptations of plays from *Tonight at 8:30*. Coward himself adapted *Still Life* for a 1945 film called *Brief Encounter* (directed by David Lean, starring Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard) and *Red Peppers*, *Fumed Oak*, and *Ways and Means* for a 1952 film called *Meet Me Tonight* (released in the U.S. as *Tonight at 8:30*), with Valerie Hobson, Nigel Patrick, Jack Warner, and Stanley Holloway. Coward appeared as Christian Faber in a 1950 release of *The Astonished Heart* (also starring Celia Johnson and Margaret Leighton), and Norma Shearer and Melvyn Douglas starred in an MGM release of *We Were Dancing* in 1942.

Compiled and written by Shaw Festival Corresponding Scholar Leonard Conolly

THE INTER-WAR YEARS

During the years between the end of World War I and the start of World War II, however desperately people wished to return to normalcy, there was just no possibility of going back. The shadow of World War I continued to loom over peoples' lives and it became increasingly clear that another catastrophe was approaching.

Ivor Brown characterized the attitude of the period in *The Observer*:

"We had grand hopes of peace and plenty, of democracy fired by a common sympathy, of a new and kindly social order. People trumpeted the word 'Reconstruction' as if it were magic. We had our disillusion. Reconstruction withered where it grew...Bravery of thought was replaced by bitterness of mood. It was easy to doubt everything, hard to find acceptable faiths. The younger generation may have been dismayed; but at least it could dance. It turned its back on solemn creeds. It was light of toes, light of touch. Of that period and temper, Mr. Coward is the dramatist".

"After the war, some people celebrated the return to civilian life with a whirl of wild pleasure-seeking as an affirmation that they were glad to be alive. Others were beset by a vague, nagging sense of guilt because they had survived while many good friends and comrades lay dead and on their way to being forgotten. Some people wanted to forget the trauma of war as quickly as possible, and others missed the excitement, the comradeship and sense of purpose of the war years and found the unsatisfactory and disquieting peace an inadequate substitute. No strong, new, absorbing philosophy emerged to replace liberalism; the blandly uninspiring political leaders provided no heir the newly enfranchised could worship with their votes, and while some longed for the satisfactions and the security of the old world, others began to feel that an entirely new one should be founded...

The mourning for youth lost in the war developed into an unprecedented indulgence and adulation for the young which was, perhaps, compounded by guilt and/or gratitude...Because they were admired and indulged and because they were more in tune with many of the new forces of change, young people became important social pace-setters at this time and were on their way to forming what would come to be called a youth sub-culture in the middle years of the century...This produced new codes of behavior and new amusements, a whole new way of looking at things". (*The Making of Modern English Society*)

A group known as the Bright Young Things emerged and put the 'roar' into the roaring twenties. They were young, wealthy and adopted drinking and socializing as a lifestyle. Refusing to acknowledge the approaching catastrophe, they hid their emotions - enthusiasm for anything serious was frowned upon - and they dramatized the trivialities of their lives.

20th Century Blues A Song by Noël Coward

Why is it that civilized humanity
Must make the world so wrong?
In this hurly-burly of insanity
Our dreams cannot last long.
We've reached a deadline -
The Press headline - every
sorrow,
Blues value
Is News value
Tomorrow.
Blues,
Twentieth Century Blues,
Are getting me down.
Who's
Escaped those weary
Twentieth Century Blues.
Why,
If there's a God in the sky,
Why shouldn't he grin?
High
Above this dreary
Twentieth Century din,
In this strange illusion,
Chaos and confusion,
People seem to lose their way.
What is there to strive for,
Love or keep alive for? Say -
Hey, hey, call it a day.
Blues,
Nothing to win or to lose.
It's getting me down.
Blues.
I've got those weary
Twentieth Century Blues.

“...the least we can do when people are kind to us in far-off places is to be a little gracious in return”

Piggie Gilpin
Hands Across the Sea

The World of the Play

MANNERS

Manners are a social code that tell us how we are expected to behave toward others and how we can expect others to behave toward us. These codes of behavior vary from culture to culture and even between social classes and cliques. For example, when meeting someone for the first time it is customary in North America to shake their hand. Knowing this provides us with a guidepost as to how to behave when we meet someone new. In other cultures, it might be customary to kiss or bow in greeting.

Knowing the rules of conduct for a particular time and place helps us to navigate successfully through social situations. Manners tell us when a handshake is more appropriate than a hug; how close to stand next to someone and even what it is appropriate to wear.

Knowing what kind of behavior is expected helps us to feel comfortable and can help us to make others comfortable. When proper manners are unknown, and people behave in ways we can't predict, it can be very disconcerting.

BRIEF ENCOUNTERS:

THE HUMOUR AND THE HORROR OF SOCIAL IMPROPRIETY

Coward said that he had been "brought up by mother in the tradition of good manners" (*Coward the Playwright*). This understanding of what constitutes "good manners" allows him to demonstrate the humour and the horror that results from the sort of social impropriety that we find in the plays that make up *Brief Encounters*. Good behaviour and the world of manners get turned upside down - and the stories that unfold are sometimes hilarious, sometimes absurd and sometimes downright depressing.

If Coward was holding up a mirror to the manners of his age, he was showing us an upper class that was very much aware of the rules of propriety - but too self-absorbed to uphold them.

To illustrate: In *We Were Dancing*, Hubert catches his wife, Louise, kissing another man on a dance floor.

HUBERT: *I detest scenes and I am finding this very unpleasant. I don't know who you are or where you come from, but if you have any sense of behavior at all you must see that this situation is intolerable. Will you kindly leave the club immediately and never speak to my wife again in any circumstances whatever?*

LOUISE: *It's more important than that, Hubert, really it is...I know you hate scenes and that you're trying to be as dignified as possible, and that I'm apparently behaving very badly, but it's true, this thing that's happened, I mean— we have fallen in love —*



HANDS ACROSS THE SEA: BRITISH COLONIALISM

At its peak, the British Empire was the largest formal empire the world has ever seen. The 19th and 20th centuries saw an unprecedented pursuit to acquire overseas territory.

By 1922, the British Empire held sway over a population of about 458 million people, one-quarter of the world's population, covering approximately one quarter of Earth's total land area. At the peak of its power, it was often said that "the sun never sets on the British Empire" because its span across the globe ensured that the sun was always shining on at least one of its numerous territories.

During the remainder of the 20th century, most of the territories of the Empire became independent as part of a larger global decolonization movement by the European powers, ending with the return of Hong Kong to China in 1997. After independence, many former British colonies joined the Commonwealth of Nations, a free association of independent states. Fourteen territories remain under British sovereignty, the British overseas territories.

Alongside the formal control it exerted over its own colonies, Britain's dominant position in world trade meant that it effectively controlled the economies of many nominally independent countries, such as China, Argentina and Siam, which has been characterized by some historians as an "informal empire".

Though Britain and the Empire emerged victorious from the Second World War, the effects of the conflict were profound, both at home and abroad. Much of Europe, a continent that had dominated the world for several centuries, was now literally in ruins, and host to the armies of the United States and the Soviet Union, to whom the balance of global power had now shifted. Britain itself was left virtually bankrupt, with insolvency only averted in 1946 after the negotiation of a \$3.5 billion loan from the United States, the last installment of which was repaid in 2006.

At the same time, anti-colonial movements were on the rise in the colonies of European nations. The situation was complicated further by the increasing Cold War rivalry of the United States and the Soviet Union, both nations opposed to the European colonialism of old, though American anti-Communism prevailed over anti-imperialism, which led the US to support the continued existence of the British Empire.

The "wind of change" ultimately meant that the British Empire's days were numbered, and on the whole, Britain adopted a policy of peaceful disengagement from its colonies.

ELEMENTS OF A PLAY

What Is a Play?

A play tells a story through dialogue and action. A central conflict usually drives the story. Groups of dialogues or episodes are called a scene. Scenes are used to show when time or place change. Large shifts in time or place are marked by acts, which are usually composed of several scenes.

The One-Act Play

When Noël Coward wrote the series of one-act plays that make up *Tonight at 8:30*, one-act plays were very much out of fashion. One-act plays were often used as curtain-raisers, allowing the audience to arrive fashionably late and find their seats without missing anything of real importance. *Tonight at 8:30* was Noël Coward's attempt to restore respectability to the one-act play and make it the subject of an entire evening.

The one-act is theatre in its sparest form. Due to its limited length, it is virtually impossible to cram a complex plot into a one-act play. Like a short story, it contains only the most essential elements. It tells the story, illustrates its characters, presents its theme and ends rather quickly. As a result, most one-act plays present straightforward stories, emphasizing a 'slice of life'.

Elements of the modern play:

Plot - the series of events that give a story its meaning

Initiating Action - the event that triggers the other events of the play, the basic conflict, tension, predicament, or challenge that propels a story's plot

Rising Action - a series of events that heightens the conflict between the protagonist force and antagonist force.

Turning Point - the most dramatic scene where either the protagonist or antagonist gains advantage.

Falling Action - series of events in the plot after the turning point but before the climax. The results of the rising action.

Climax - the peak of the play, resolves the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist forces, as one of them "wins".

Conclusion - plot is completed and the loose ends are tied up.

Theme - the main idea that the plot develops. It gives the purpose to the action.

Style - the way the piece is written is called the style. Style may be sparse, descriptive, humorous or sarcastic.

Setting - where and when the play occurs.

Characters - the people that power the plot of a play.

THE WIT OF TWO WORDSMITHS...

Both George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward were famous for their wit.

What is wit?

It is a form of intellectual humour. Someone who is described as a 'wit' is skilled in using intellectually amusing language that surprises and delights, usually making a pointed statement of some kind.

Coward witticisms

"My body has certainly wandered a good deal, but I have an uneasy suspicion that my mind has not wandered enough."

"The higher the buildings—the lower the morals."

"Good Heavens, television is for appearing on—not for watching."

"I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me."

"Wit ought to be a glorious treat, like caviar. Never spread it about like marmalade."

Shaw witticisms

"You use a mirror to see your face but art to see your soul."

"My specialty is being right when others are wrong."

"The test of a person's breeding is how they behave in a quarrel."

"Assassination is an extreme form of censorship."

"There is only one religion but over a hundred versions of it."

"The quality of a play is the quality of its ideas."

"A government which robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support of Paul."

REAL LIFE: A GOOD BASIS FOR COMEDY

The main characters in *Hands Across the Sea*, Commander Peter Gilpin and his wife Piggie, were caricatures of Coward's real-life friends Lord Louis "Dickie" Mountbatten and his wife Edwina. According to Coward, the Mountbattens used to give cocktail parties and people used to arrive, somebody Dickie had met somewhere, or somebody Edwina had met – and nobody knew who they were. Coward stated "We all talked among ourselves, and it was really a very very good basis for a light comedy."

Mountbatten, in mock indignation, called it "a bare-faced parody of our lives" with Gertie Lawrence playing Edwina and Noël Coward playing Dickie. In the introduction to his collected plays Coward says that the Mountbattens saw the play, but didn't realize that they were its subjects.

In a letter to Noël Coward from 1968 (more than 30 years after the play was written), Lord Mountbatten wrote:

My dear Noël,

On going through my library I have just come across a copy inscribed by you of your plays *Tonight at 8:30*.

Looking through them I suddenly remembered that you had told Edwina and me that *Hands Across the Sea* was a skit on ourselves, and on reading it this seems only too probable.

Can you confirm that it was written with malice aforethought, or did it just turn into a Naval couple because you had so many Naval friends? Did you play Commander Gilpin and did Gertie play Lady Maureen, "Piggie"?

Lord Mountbatten, a naval commander, also provided the inspiration for Coward's 1942 British war film, *In Which We Serve*.

Mountbatten was well-known for being a playboy but less conspicuously diligent as a brilliant naval officer. Twice during WWII he brought his badly damaged destroyer, Kelly, home safely. The third time, off Crete, the Kelly went down. The film *In Which We Serve* is the story of the Kelly with Noël Coward playing the commander.



GLOSSARY

Still Life

jaunty	having a buoyant or self-confident air
effulgence	a brilliant radiance
rock cake	a small cake with a hard surface said to resemble a rock
dust-up	a fight or argument
bath buns	a rich, sweet yeast dough shaped round with a lump of sugar baked in the bottom and more crushed sugar sprinkled on top
countenance	the look on a person's face that shows one's nature or feelings
neuritis	inflammation of a nerve or group of nerves, characterized by pain, loss of reflexes, and atrophy of the affected muscles
trench feet	a condition of the foot resembling frostbite, caused by prolonged exposure to cold and dampness, often affecting soldiers in trenches
carbolic acid	a toxic substance used in manufacturing and as a disinfectant and antiseptic; poisonous if taken internally.
upstart	self-important; presumptuous

Hands Across the Sea

rajah	an Indian king or prince
mews	a street lined with building originally used as stables that have been converted into dwellings
quince	a sour fruit, closely related to the apple

We Were Dancing

belligerent	exhibiting behavior that is assertive, hostile or combative
cataclysm	a violent upheaval that causes great destruction or brings about a fundamental change
bosun's mate	a warrant officer or petty officer in charge of a ship's rigging, anchors, cables, and deck crew
blood-letting	bloodshed
Tricoteuse	translates from the French as a female knitter. It refers to the old women who used to sit around the guillotine knitting during the 18th century Reign of Terror in France. Decisions on executions had to be made in public, so these women were paid to be in attendance and give their opinion.

BOOKS & ARTICLES

One-Act Play

Straczynski, Michael J. (1996). *The Complete Book of Scriptwriting. Writer's Digest Books*

The Interwar Years

Lahr, John. (1982). *Coward the Playwright*. New York: Avon Books

Roebuck, Janet. (1973). *The Making of Modern English Society from 1850 Routledge and Kegan Paul*.

Newton, C. (2008). Director's Notes: 2008 House Program. Niagara-on-the-Lake, The Shaw Festival.

Manners

Lahr, John. (1982). *Coward the Playwright*. New York: Avon Books

The Mountbattens

From The Letters of Noël Coward (p 185)

WEBSITES

Classroom Activities

<http://pdc.avc.edu/Faculty/etrow/playex2.html>

www.dsb.edu.on.ca/SCHOOLS/EDEN/ENGLISH/MAIOLO/EWC4UC

www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~joy/fun/jokes/storyjokes.html

Elements of a Play

<http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/Virtualit/fiction/elements.asp?e=1>

http://www.saskschools.ca/curr_content/drama30/teacher/4playstructure.html

British Colonialism:

Maphttp://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:The_British_Empire.png

<http://www.britishempire.co.uk>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Empire

Manners

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/362554/comedy-of-manners>

Brief Encounters

Pre- and Post-Show Activities

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES TABLE OF CONTENTS

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play	Page
Pre-Show	
Teacher Background & Preparation	21
Warm-Up: Creative Writing	21
Main Activity: Exploring the One-Act Play	22
Classroom Discussion	23
Post-Show	
Teacher Background & Preparation	24
Classroom Discussion	24
Warm-Up: Creative Writing	25
Main Activity: Exploring the One-Act Play	25-26
Theme 2: Exploring Character	
Pre-Show	
Teacher Background & Preparation	27
Warm-Up: Power Stance	27
Main Activity: Weak and Strong Characters	28
Post-Show	
Teacher Background & Preparation	29
Class Discussion	29
Warm-Up: “Whatever”	30
Main Activity: Subtext	30
Black Line Masters	
Black Line Master #1	31
Black Line Master #2	32-35
Black Line Master #3	36

Brief Encounters - Pre-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7-12

Pedagogical Intent: The following activities provide opportunities for students to explore the structure of the one-act play through developing playwriting techniques and skills. Beginning with creative writing warm-ups, students will create their own personal one-act play using a joke as the basis for their individual plays.

Grade: Grades 7 - 12

Subjects: Drama and Language Arts

Objectives and Competencies: In these activities, students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of subtext, motivation, and status in the development of a character
- demonstrate an understanding of the function of the playwright in the development of an original scene or dramatic presentation
- create an original or adapted dramatic presentation
- identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies

Materials: access to computers, paper, pens

Teacher Preparation

Review with students the structure of the one-act play (see p. 15)

Creative Writing Warm Up #1

Obsessions

Students gather in a circle with paper and pens/pencils. Instruct students to write a list of obsessions (things they are currently obsessing about in their minds). Allow 3-4 minutes. Each student reads their list of obsessions out loud. Instruct students to choose one obsession and write it on a separate piece of paper. Pass the paper two people to the left. Instruct each student to write a monologue or short scene with the word appearing in the first line. All students share what they have written out loud. Allow class to comment on one thing they liked and/or ask one question.

Creative Writing Warm Up #2

Time Lock Exercise

1. Write a scene with two characters in which one character must get the red box from the other character before a certain time is up (i.e., the bus stops, the game is over, someone dies, the paint dries, he marries her, the ice cream melts, a baby is born, etc.).
2. Keep the action in the same place (no change of scene).
3. Keep stage directions to a minimum.
4. Write a scene that ends when the character either succeeds or fails to obtain the red box.

Brief Encounters - Pre-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7-12

Main Activity

Explain: Every story/play, even the one-act play is comprised of three parts. The three parts may be defined as:

Part 1

The setup, the conflict is established; characters, symbol(s), theme, setting are introduced

Part 2

The complication, rising action, character development (turning point occurs in the middle)

Part 3

Resolution, the outcomes after the turning point, the conflict is resolved (climax occurs close to end)

A joke is an example of a story with three parts:

Part 1: A kid is in court and the judge is trying to determine who will get custody (introduction of conflict).

Part 2: The judge asks, "How about your mother?" "No," says the kid, "she beats me." "How about your dad?" "No, he beats me too." "How about your grandparents?" "No, even they beat me ." "Well then, who do you want to live with?" (turning point).

Part 3: "The Toronto Maple Leafs; they never beat anyone." (punch line/resolution).

Instruct: In partners, instruct students to choose a story joke from:
www.dcs.gla.ac.uk/~joy/fun/jokes/storyjokes.html.

Instruct: Using the joke as a foundation, partners write a one-act play using the following four steps as a guideline:

1. Decide what your play will be about
2. Make an outline of the action
3. Write short descriptions of your characters
4. Think up a great ending - know where you're going

Ten Things to Remember

1. Character speech should be interesting, not everyday ordinary speech. Make sure each character has a distinct voice - you should be able to "hear" each character.
2. Your characters all need interesting actions: plays are about action, not people standing around talking.
3. There must be growth in your characters over the course of the play: what have they learned, how have they changed, how has the plot affected them.
4. Your play needs a conflict: is there a compelling problem?
5. Every single scene should add new information about the plot or characters, and each scene should build on the one that came before.
6. Keep ahead of the reader. Don't let them figure out your ending before you get there.
7. If the reader/audience can see it, don't say it.
8. Give yourself enough time to write the play.
9. Never use a stage direction when you should have a scene - your story needs to be told through the events and actions of the scenes.
10. Be original: don't do something you've already seen (on TV or in the movies).

Brief Encounters - Pre-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7-12

Main Activity - cont'd

Instruct: Partners create a draft version of their one-act play. Allow students the option to change the joke punch-line ending to an ending that is more dramatic or poignant. Students exchange their draft versions with other partners. Allow time for students to either read silently or out loud the draft versions. Teacher guides students to provide constructive comments and suggestions.

Instruct: Allow time for partners to make changes/edits to their draft versions working to complete a second draft. If time allows, choose 2-3 scripts to rehearse and present.

Discuss: Students should provide feedback on the presentations.

Classroom Discussion

- What did you find challenging when writing a one-act play?
- Why is it important to include a problem/conflict in a play?
- What does each character want?
- What is preventing the characters from getting what he/she wants?
- What are the positive/negative aspects of writing a one-act play?
- Discuss the positive/negative aspects performing a one-act play.

Pre-Show Classroom Discussions

Actor/playwright/composer Noël Coward stated: "A short play, having a great advantage over a long one in that it can sustain a mood without technical creaking or overpadding, deserves a better fate, and if by careful writing, acting, and producing I can do a little towards reinstating it in its rightful pride, I shall have achieved one of more sentimental ambitions."

Ask: Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

Noël Coward also stated: "I wrote the *Tonight at 8:30* plays as acting, singing, and dancing vehicles for both Gertrude Lawrence [Coward's acting partner] and myself."

Discuss: Do you agree with Coward's belief that three one-act plays provide the opportunity to showcase the talents of performers? In what way?

Ask: What other areas of the theatre might also be featured by presenting an evening of three one-act plays?

Explain: *Brief Encounters* includes three different one-act plays (see p. 4-5).

Ask: From the audience's point of view - what might be the advantages/disadvantages of watching three one-act plays as opposed to a three-act play?

Ask: From the actor's point of view - what might be the challenges/frustrations/rewards of performing in three different one-act plays?

Ask: From the director's point of view - what might be the challenges/frustrations/joys of directing three very different plays that will be presented in one evening?

Explain: You have been hired as the set designer and are responsible for designing three different sets for three different plays that will make up an evening of theatre.

Discuss: What challenges do you foresee designing three different sets that will share the same stage?

Ask: Why, as an artist, might you choose this project over designing a three-act play?

Ask: What methods might you incorporate to link the three plays?

Brief Encounters - Post-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7 -12

Pedagogical Intent: Students will further explore the one-act play by beginning with a creative writing exercise in which students create quick scenes with partners to develop the technique of writing dialogue. This activity leads towards students creating well-developed characters based on magazine and photographic images.

Grade: Grades 7 - 12

Subjects: Creative Writing, Drama, English

Objectives and Competencies: In these activities, students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of subtext, motivation, and status in the development of a character
- demonstrate an understanding of the function of the playwright in the development of an original scene or dramatic presentation
- create an original or adapted dramatic presentation
- identify, sort, and order main ideas and supporting details for writing tasks, using a variety of strategies

Class Discussion

Explain: For each of the three one-act plays discuss the following questions:

1. Who is this play about?
2. What does each character want?
3. What is preventing the characters from getting what they want?
4. Did the characters change?
5. What initiated the change?
6. What is the major conflict in the play?
7. Why is it important to have conflict?

Discuss: In each of the three one-act plays, find example of characters displaying good manners. Find examples of characters who displayed bad manners.

Ask: If Coward was indeed holding up a mirror to the manners of his day, what were his attitudes towards the use of manners in the upper/middle/lower classes of England during the 1930's?

Ask: Have manners changed? Have attitudes towards manners and their usage and importance changed? In what way?

Brief Encounters- Post-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7 -12

Creative Writing Warm-Up Activity

Divide students into pairs. Students choose who is "A" and who is "B". Student "A" writes a first line to a scene on the top of a blank sheet of paper. Make sure the first line is an "inciting" line - any line that implies a conflict. Examples of inciting first lines would be:

Where are you going with that?
She's not who she says she is.
Stop, thief!
Don't lie to me.

"B" then responds on paper, gives the sheet back to "A" and "A" writes a reply, and so on. This exercise should be done silently. The resulting dialogue will have an spontaneity and dramatic reality that planned writing does not have.

When explaining this exercise, ask students to refrain from name-calling, one-word answers, and contrariness. The students are working together to craft a scene, they are not in competition with each other.

Extend:

Instead of one line each, "A" writes an impassioned letter to "B" asking for something he or she desperately needs. "B" writes a letter back, denying it. "A" responds, "B" answers until "A" has made such a strong case that "B" agrees. This exercise usually produces very good dramatic writing because the stakes are high and the speeches are longer than one or two sentences. It's also a good way to make the point that on stage, every single word counts.

Extend thematically:

If you want your students to explore a particular part of a curriculum, you can direct their explorations by providing specific details. Give students WHO and WHAT, then ask them to use either technique listed above to write dialogue.

Here are some possible WHO/WHAT combinations for an immigration curriculum:

WHO: An African slave and an Irish laborer

WHAT: Aboard a large ship bound for Boston, the Irish laborer confides his dreams of riches to an enslaved African prince in the bunk next to him.

WHO: Korean brothers

WHAT: The younger brother has just arrived in Canada ready to work at his older brother's restaurant so that he can send money home to support his family; when he arrives he learns the restaurant has gone out of business and his brother is unemployed.

Main Activity

Creating Characters from Photographs

Instruct: Break the class into groups. Each group appoints one person to act as secretary to record information generated. Pass out one photograph or magazine picture, containing two to four people, to each group. Students examine the photograph looking for 'clues' as to what type of characters these people are and what type of situation they find themselves in.

Brief Encounters- Post-Show

Theme 1: Exploring the One-Act Play

Grades 7 -12

Main Activity - cont'd

Instruct: Working together as a group, give each character in the photograph or magazine picture a:

- A. Name
- B. Age
- C. Occupation
- D. Short family biography
- E. Distinguishing characteristics (physical or personality)

Instruct: Once the characters have been established, briefly describe the relationship between the characters.

Instruct: In one or two sentences describe what is happening in the photo/picture.

Instruct: Note how each character perceives the situation and what they want out of it. Write at least one paragraph for each character.

Explain: Remind students that each character will have his or her own point of view about what is happening and will think that she or he knows best. Make each conflict specific to the character.

Instruct: Break the groups up, making sure each group member has a copy of the character information.

Instruct: Each student writes a story in narrative form, three paragraphs in length and including all the characters in some way.

Instruct: Students transform the story into a one-act play with dialogue.

Extend: Choose one script from each group to rehearse and present.

Discuss: Students should provide feedback on the presentations.

Guidelines for Playwriting in the Classroom

1. Create a safe environment where the students feel free to comment on each others work in a constructive way. Remember, as playwrights they are accessing their own experiences and their own humanity.

2. Create a foundation so the students have something to refer to when they are having difficulties or are stuck. Review the Classic Five Act Dramatic Structure: Introduction; Development; Climax; Denouement; Resolution.

3. Establish freedom of speech by creating an environment where the students are safe to express themselves but make it clear that the words they choose must be justified in the writing.

Main Activity - Variations

Instruct: In the first scene have the characters reveal what they are thinking, but have one of them lie. Not only must the conflict be solved, but also the lie must be revealed within the one-act structure.

Instruct: In the first part of the one-act play all the characters are present simultaneously, and we learn the problem. The middle of the one-act has one of the characters delivering a monologue in which she or he relays to the audience a plan to address the problem. The end of the play will be the implementation of that plan, and its success or failure.

Brief Encounters - Pre-Show

Theme 2: Exploring Character

Grades 7 -12

Pedagogical Intent: The exercises and activities look at the physical, emotional and societal aspects of characters who exhibit strong or weak traits. Through physically exploring the various body levels associated with 'power', students then apply the physical characteristics associated with both strong and weak personalities to selected lines.

Grade: Grades 7 - 12

Subjects: Drama, English, Creative Movement, Physical Education

Objectives and Competencies: In these activities, students will:

- demonstrate an understanding of methods of developing roles that express a range of feelings, attitudes, and beliefs
- demonstrate an understanding of how role is communicated through language and gesture
- demonstrate an understanding of how roles may be developed
- describe how movement and non-verbal communication can be used to portray character, define relationships among characters, and to communicate dramatic tension
- identify and describe sources of conflict in a play

Materials: drum, photocopies of Black Line Master #1, photocopies of scripts Black Line Master #2

Warm-up Activity - Power Stance

The purpose of this activity is to allow students to physically explore gestures and postures of power and powerlessness.

Instruct: Students stand in a neutral position, expressing no emotion, gesture, or facial expression. Label this position #4.

Instruct: Students get into smallest position close to the floor without lifting their feet. Label this position #1.

Instruct: To a drumbeat, students move their bodies from #1 to #4 positions. Students then explore body positions at #2 and #3 levels. On a drumbeat, students move through the various postures, ending in #4.

Ask: What emotions might a person be feeling if they were feeling like a #1?

Instruct: Standing #4 position, students demonstrate with their bodies and faces, the emotions of a #1.

Instruct: Students begin in #4 or neutral position. To a drumbeat, students move their bodies as large as possible. Label this position #7. Students explore all postures from #4 to #5 to #6 to #7.

Ask: What emotions might a person be feeling if they were feeling like a #7?

Instruct: In a #4 position, students demonstrate with body and face expressions, the emotions of a #7.

Instruct: To a regular drumbeat, students walk around room practicing moving their bodies in the #4, #1, and #7 positions.

Instruct: Students imagine they are on a hot and crowded street, and they have lost their wallets and money. Students select a power stance - either #1, #4, or #7. Without using voice, students search for their lost items demonstrating their chosen power stance. On a signal from the teacher, everyone's power stance changes abruptly as they continue to look for their money. They change once more. Everyone freezes on a final position.

Instruct: Divide class into two groups. Repeat the above scenario with one group acting as audience. Switch.

Discuss: Were the various power stances easy to recognize? Why or why not? What distinguished the various power stances?

Brief Encounters - Pre-Show

Theme 2: Exploring Character

Grades 7 -12

Main Activity: Weak and Strong Characters

Explain: In the three plays that make up the trilogy of *Brief Encounters*, playwright Noel Coward has satirized Britain's upper class through creating high-born characters that have supposedly been taught proper manners and etiquette, but end up behaving badly. The following exercises provide students opportunities to explore characteristics and mannerisms of both strong and weak characters.

Instruct: Based on the warm-up activity, create two lists:

1. adjectives describing a person who is a #7
2. adjectives describing a person who is a #1

Instruct: In pairs, students choose who is "A" and "B". Refer to Black Line Master #1 containing list of lines. Assign the same line to each pair. Student "A" delivers the line as a #7 character. Student "B" delivers the line as a "1" character. Refer to list of adjectives.

Instruct: Students choose a setting for each of their characters. The setting can be the same or different for both characters. Each character must enter the scene, deliver their line, then exit. Allow time for each pair to rehearse. Students present their lines, in-role as their characters.

Discuss: Were you able to distinguish who was a #7 character and who was a #1 character? How?

Expand: Repeat exercise with different lines.

Instruct: Student "A" delivers line as a character with good manners. Student "B" delivers line as a character with bad manners. Allow time for students to rehearse and present.

Ask: Were the characters who exhibited good manners strong or weak characters? Were the characters who exhibited bad manners strong or weak characters?

Discuss: Is it possible for a person with good manners to behave badly? Explain.

Discuss: Is it possible for a person with bad manners to behave well? Explain.

Extension: Distribute two-person script excerpts from *Still Life*, *We Were Dancing*, and *Hands Across the Sea* (see Black Line Master #2) to each partner.

Instruct: Students select a character and read through scripts a few times together.

Instruct: After having discussed a possible setting for the scene, students decide which character will be portrayed as a #7 and which character will be a #1. Also, students choose to portray their characters displaying either good or bad manners.

Allow time for students to rehearse and present their scenes. It is not necessary for students to memorize the lines. The focus should be on developing characters that exhibit either strong or weak characteristics and exploring how the inclusion of manners influences the development of a character.

Expand: Repeat exercise with students selecting appropriate dialects or accents for their characters.

Discuss: Following the presentation of the scenes, discuss the various ways in which the body and voice help to create characters for the stage.

Discuss: In *Brief Encounters* actors portray three different roles in three different plays. What methods or tools might an actor use to create different characters that are distinct for the audience?

Brief Encounters - Post-Show

Theme 2: Exploring Character

Grades 7 -12

Pedagogical Intent: The post-show activities and exercises are designed to allow students to explore the idea of subtext. In understanding more about innuendo or subtext, students will be provided the tools towards creating more meaningful and insightful characters.

Grade: Grades 7 - 12

Subjects: Music, Drama, Dance, Social Studies, and Language Arts

Objectives and Competencies: In these activities, students will:

- describe the process of creating a character
- create the inner and outer life of a character, using a variety of strategies, e.g., textual analysis
- reinterpret roles, demonstrating commitment and insight into character
- demonstrate an understanding of how roles may be developed
- demonstrate an understanding of how role is communicated through language, gesture and symbol
- analyse various roles to gain a deeper understanding of the personal and social beliefs inherent in a drama

Materials: photocopies of two–person scenes from *Brief Encounters* - (Black Line Master #2), relationship cards - (Black Line Master #3), a container such as a hat or box

Class Discussion

Discuss: In each of the three one-act plays, *Still Life*, *We Were Dancing*, and *Hands Across the Sea*, playwright Noël Coward has created situations and characters that typify the era of the "Bright Young Things" (see p. 11). Cite examples from each of the three plays in which characters demonstrated:

1. Grand hopes for a new social order
2. A whirl of wild pleasure-seeking as an affirmation that they were glad to be alive
3. A nagging sense of guilt because they had survived while many good friends and comrades lay dead and on their way to being forgotten
4. Drinking and socializing as a lifestyle . Enthusiasm for anything serious was frowned upon

Explain: Coward has also created situations in which manners play an important role in the behaviour and development of characters. (see p. 12)

Discuss: In each of the three plays, find examples of characters displaying both good and bad manners.

Ask: In *Still Life*, how do social mores influence the behaviour of the main characters?

Ask: In *We Were Dancing*, how might the characters reflect Coward's attitude towards manners displayed by the British upper class?

Ask: In *Hands Across the Sea*, in what ways does the influence of social manners result in creating a farcical situation?

Ask: What do manners mean to you? When did you learn manners? What is the point of manners?

Ask: In your opinion, have manners changed from the time of Noël Coward or have they stayed the same?

Discuss: Do you feel manners are important in today's society? Why or why not?

Discuss: What does a display of good manners indicate about a person? What does a display of bad manners say about a person?

Discuss: Is there an instance in which manners could be used to civilize human conduct? Corrupt? Oppress?

Brief Encounters - Post-Show

Theme 2: Exploring Character

Grades 7 -12

Warm-up Activity - "Whatever"

Instruct: As a class, come up with five different ways of saying the word "whatever".

Instruct: Choose two students to begin the activity. Student 'A' says "whatever" with the student 'B' immediately responding with what is actually being said (i.e. "whatever" = "it's not going to happen", or "sure, it's okay with me"). This can be presented with the rest of the class observing, or with the whole class in pairs.

Instruct: Students create a list of short colloquial phrases that are used in daily life. Repeat above exercise allowing students to investigate the way we use language to mean different things.

Extension: Students are in groups of four - students select 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D'. Student 'A' will begin a conversation with student 'B' to create a scene (i.e. a teacher discusses lateness with a student). Student 'C' will speak under student 'A', vocalizing the subtext. Likewise, student 'D' will speak under student 'B', vocalizing subtext. Other scenarios suggestions: blind date, parental conflict, reunion, funeral.

Explain: Scenes can be improvised or lightly scripted.

Extension: Subtext can also be found in body language. Redo any of the above exercises encouraging students to use exaggerated poses, facial gestures and movements in order to underscore the intention of what is being said.

Main Activity - Subtext

Instruct: Teacher distributes edited scenes from *Brief Encounters* (see Black Line Master #2) to student partners. Student partners choose characters and read through the scene together.

Instruct: Each pair picks a relationship card from a container (see Black Line Master #3).

Instruct: With their partners, students answer the following questions:

- Where are the characters when the conversation occurs?
- Why are they there?
- Who might be the other characters mentioned in the scene? What is your relationship to the other characters?
- What has happened just before the conversation?
- What does each character want?
- What is standing in their way of getting what they want?
- What does each character want from the other character?

Instruct: Students compose a subtext script for each of their character lines to indicate what their character is thinking and/or feeling at that exact moment.

Extension: On a large piece of paper, students draw a silhouette of their character. Draw a line extending from the outside of the silhouette and write words describing what the character looks like. Draw a line extending to the inside of the silhouette and write words describing the inner qualities of the character. Draw a line extending around the outside of the silhouette and write words describing the outside factors that have influenced the character to become who he/she is today.

Instruct: Students block the script, using their positioning and movements to reveal the characters' relationship and subtexts. Allow time for students to rehearse their scenes several times, communicating relationships and subtext through vocal tone, timing, eye focus, and rhythm.

Instruct: Allow time for student pairs to perform their scene for the class. Audience discusses the characters' relationships and what might be the subtext of each character.

Black Line Master #1

Lines for Strong/Weak Character Exploration

1. Well hi! I didn't know you were coming to the party.
2. I wish she'd invite me just once.
3. Get out of here...and don't come back, do you hear me.
4. I told you to go to your room. Now will you do as you are told.
5. Who is it? Who's there? Don't come near me...don't. Don't.
6. What's this about? What's she up to anyway? I don't understand.
7. Be quiet. I don't think they can hear us, but we'd better be sure.
8. You mean it's my turn now.
9. I didn't mean to do it. She's my best friend.
10. I won. I won. First prize....I won.
11. I just love dancing with you. Really I do.
12. We're going to get caught, I tell you. Let's get out of here.
13. Yes, I did eat her candy. I admit it.
14. You know what I think.
15. What did you say.
16. I can't believe you said such a thing.
17. You mean you were fired – just for missing one day.
18. You mean you let that kid talk back to you, and did nothing about it.

Black Line Master #2

Still Life -2 actors

MYRTLE: Albert Godby, how dare you!

ALBERT: I couldn't resist it.

MYRTLE: I'll trouble you to keep your hands to yourself.

ALBERT: You're blushing – you look wonderful when you're angry, like an avenging angel.

MYRTLE: I'll give you avenging angel – coming in here taking liberties -

ALBERT: I didn't think after what you said last Monday you'd object to a friendly little slap.

MYRTLE: Never you mind about last Monday – I'm on duty now. A nice thing if Mr. Saunders had happened to be looking through the window.

ALBERT: If Mr. Saunders is in the 'abit of looking through windows, it's time he saw something worth looking at.

MYRTLE: You ought to be ashamed of yourself!

ALBERT: It's just high spirits – don't be mad at me.

MYRTLE [*retiring behind the counter*]: High spirits indeed!

Still Life -2 actors

STANLEY: Hallo!

BERYL: You made me jump.

STANLEY: Are you walking home?

BERYL: Maybe.

STANLEY: Do you want me to wait?

BERYL: I've got to go straight back.

STANLEY: Why?

BERYL: Mother'll be waiting up.

STANLEY: Can't you say you've been kept late?

BERYL: I said that last time.

STANLEY: Say it again – say there's been a rush on.

BERYL: Don't be silly – Mother's not that much of a fool.

STANLEY: Be a sport, Beryl – shut down five minutes early and say you was kept ten minutes late – that gives us a quarter of an hour.

BERYL: What happens if Mrs. Bagot comes back?

STANLEY: She won't – she's out having a bit of a slap and tickle with our Albert.

BERYL: Stan, you are awful!

STANLEY: I'll wait for you in the yard.

BERYL: Oh, all right.

Black Line Master #2 - cont'd

Still Life - 2 actors

ALEC: Don't, dearest – don't talk like that, please –

LAURA *[bitterly]*: I suppose he laughed, didn't he – after he got over being annoyed? I suppose you spoke of me together as men of the world.

ALEC: We didn't speak of you – we spoke of a nameless creature who had no reality at all.

LAURA *[wildly]*: Why didn't you tell him the truth? Why didn't you say who I was and that we were lovers – shameful secret lovers – using his flat like a bad house because we had nowhere else to go, and were afraid of being found out! Why didn't you tell him we were cheap and low and without courage – why didn't you –

ALEC: Stop it, Laura – Pull yourself together!

LAURA: It's true – Don't you see, it's true!

ALEC: It's nothing of the sort. I know you feel horrible, and I'm deeply, desperately sorry. I feel horrible, too, but it doesn't matter really – this – this unfortunate, damnable incident – it was just bad luck. It couldn't affect us really, you and me – we know the truth – we know we really love each other – that's all that matters.

LAURA: It isn't all that matters – other things matter, too, self-respect matters, and decency – I can't go on any longer.

ALEC: Could you really – say good-bye – not see me any more?

LAURA: Yes – if you'd help me.

We Were Dancing - 2 actors

CLARA: Please be quiet and let me speak.

LOUISE: Hubert, do make Clara shut up.

CLARA: You must be insane. And you must be insane, too, I'm ashamed of you, Hubert.

LOUISIE: It's no use railing and roaring, Clara. Hubert's much wiser than you. He's keeping calm and trying to understand and I'm deeply grateful to him –

CLARA: Grateful indeed!

LOUISE: Yes, if he behaved as you seem to think he ought to behave, it would only make everything far worse. I supposed you want him to knock Mr. – *[To Karl.]* What is your first name?

KARL: Karl.

LOUISE: – Karl in the jaw?

CLARA: I don't want anything of the sort. I want him to treat the situation as it should be treated, as nothing but a joke, a stupid joke in extremely bad taste.

LOUISE: It's more than that, Clara, and you know it is, that's why you're scared.

CLARA: I'm not in the least scared.

Black Line Master #2 - cont'd

We Were Dancing - 2 actors

LOUISE [*hurriedly – to HUBERT*]: We'd better go away – he and I – as soon as possible.

HUBERT: Where to?

LOUISE: I don't know – anywhere –

HUBERT: For God's sake be reasonable. How can you? How can I let you?

LOUISE: How much do you mind – really?

HUBERT: That obviously has nothing to do with it.

LOUISE: I want to know.

HUBERT: I want to know, too. I can't possibly tell. You've made this up, this magic that he talked about, you've conjured it out of the air and now it's smeared over everything – over me, too – none of it seems real but it has to be treated as if it were. You ask me how much I mind – you want that as well, don't you, in addition to your new love?

LOUISE: Want what? What do you mean?

HUBERT [*almost losing control*]: You want me to mind – don't you – don't you?

LOUISE: Oh Hubert – Please don't look like that –

HUBERT: You want everything – everything in the world, you always have.

LOUISE: You're pitying yourself. How beastly of you to be so weak, how contemptible of you!

Hands Across the Sea - 2 actors

PETER: You know perfectly well I haven't time to take mothers and fathers and daughters with bad legs round the dockyard –

PIGGIE: It wouldn't take a minute, they took us all over their rubber plantation.

PETER: It probably served you right.

PIGGIE: You're so disobliging, darling, you really should try to conquer it – it's something to do with being English, I think – as a race I'm ashamed of us – no sense of hospitality – the least we can do when people are kind to us in far-off places is to be a little gracious in return.

PETER: They weren't kind to me in far-off places.

PIGGIE: You know there's a certain grudging, sullen streak in your character – I've been very worried about it lately – it's spreading like forest fire –

PETER: Why don't you have them down for the week-end?

PIGGIE: Don't be so idiotic, how can I possibly? There's no room to start with and even if there were they'd be utterly wretched –

PETER: I don't see why.

PIGGIE: They wouldn't know anybody – they probably wouldn't have the right clothes – they'd keep on huddling about in uneasy little groups –

PETER: The amount of uneasy little groups that three people can huddle in is negligible.

Black Line Master #2 - cont'd

Hands Across the Sea - 2 actors

MRS. WADHURST: I must say they have very nice things – oh, dear, how lovely to be well off – I must write to the Brostows by the next mail and tell them all about it.

MR. WADHURST: Yes, you must.

MRS. WADHURST: Don't you think we'd better sit down?

MR. WADHURST: Why not?

MRS. WADHURST: You sit in the chair and I'll sit on the sofa.

MR. WADHURST: Yes, dear.

MRS. WADHURST: I wish you wouldn't look quite so uncomfortable, Fred, there's nothing to be uncomfortable about.

MR. WADHURST: She does expect us, doesn't she?

MRS. WADHURST: Of course, I talked to her myself on the telephone last Wednesday, she was perfectly charming and said that we were to come without fail and that it would be divine.

MR. WADHURST: I still feel we should have telephoned again just to remind her. People are always awfully busy in London.

Black Line Master #3
Relationship Cards

Parent and Child	Husband and Wife close to divorce	Engaged Couple planning their wedding
Infatuated Man and Disinterested Woman	Infatuated Woman and Disinterested Man	Divorced Couple at a family function
Spies on opposite sides	Spies on the same side	Bank Robbers before a job
Bank Robbers after a job that has gone wrong	Prisoners planning an escape	Boss and Secretary