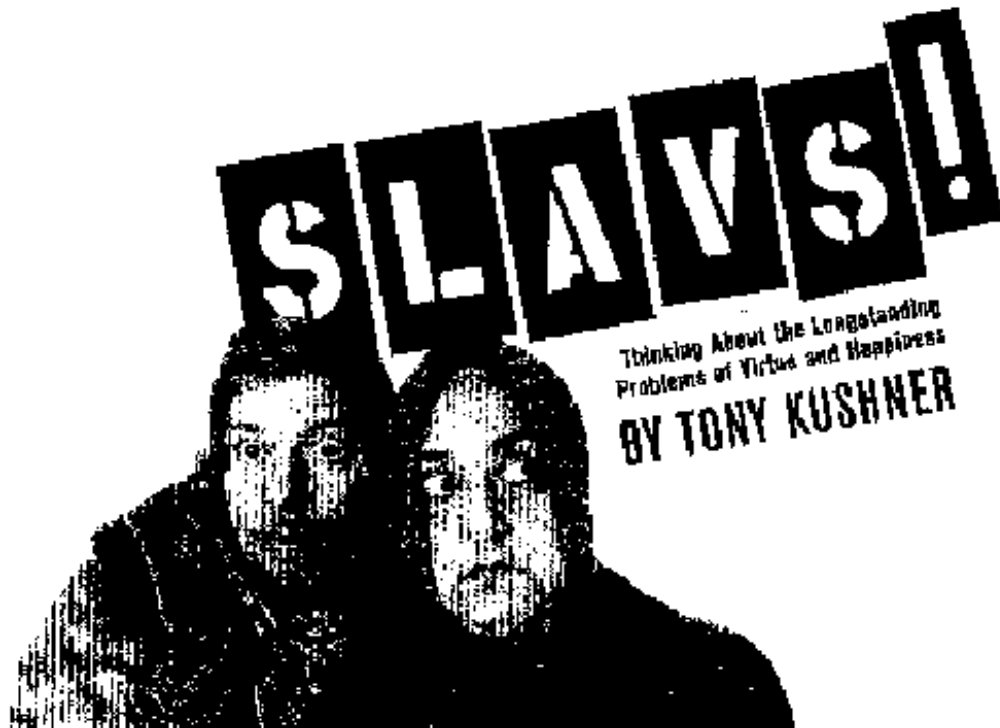


# TARRAGON THEATRE

**Study guide for educators and students**



**Starring**

**Adanya Dunn, Kelli Fox, Randy Hughson, Brenda Robins,  
Maria Vacratsis, Ashley Wright**

**Directed by Dennis Garnhum**

**Set & costumes designed by John Jenkins**

**Lighting designed by Andrea Lundy**

**Original Music composed by Gregg Coffin**

**Stage manager: Nan Shepherd**

**November 8 to December 17, 2000**

## Discussions for Slavs!

Slavs! which the playwright describes as “a short play in a prologue, three acts and an epilogue”—with the subtitle Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness—is set in Moscow in 1985, both outside and inside the Kremlin as well as in a Pan-Soviet Archive where the brains of the great are stored; and in Siberia in 1992; as well as a coda in Heaven.

Tarragon Theatre’s production of Tony Kushner’s Slavs! stars Adanya Dunn, Kelli Fox, Randy Hughson, Brenda Robins, Maria Vaccratsis and Ashley Wright. The director, making his Tarragon debut is Dennis Garnhum, whose work has been seen at the Shaw Festival, The Manitoba Theatre Centre, Theatre New Brunswick and the Citadel Theatre. John Jenkins (sets and costumes), Andrea Lundy (lighting), and Gregg Coffin (music) will help create Slavs!’s world. Nan Shepherd is the stage manager, Daryl Cloran the assistant director, and Tatiana Chouljenko the advisor on Russian matters.

Slavs! has been described as, “*part buffonish burlesque and part tragic satire*”. Similarly, director Dennis Garnhum says Slavs! is “*a political satire or event rather than a play* “. Therefore, Tarragon’s production, directed by Dennis Garnhum and designed by John Jenkins, includes elements non-naturalistic in style.

The following sections not only analyze Slavs! but also ask questions for students who would be a Tarragon production of Slavs!

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### In what ways was Slavs! produced in an un-naturalistic style?

#### Theatre in the Round

It is rare when plays are performed in the round (when the performance is the middle of the theatre space and the audience forms a full circle around). Like any artistic choice, the decision to produce a show in the round evokes certain connotations about the play.

Theatre in the round immediately invokes a certain “*Kind of theatre,*” says Slavs! designer John Jenkins. It is reminiscent of Vaudevillian way of telling a story. Theatre in the round reinforces that the show the audience is witnessing *is* theatre. For instance, many theatrical productions today use the proscenium stage. The proscenium stage creates a separation between the *world of the play* and the *world of the people who come to see it*. The proscenium stage helps creates the illusion and concept of the *4<sup>th</sup> wall*. Therefore, theatre in the round, where audience members are able to look across and past the stage to see other audience members reinforces the non-naturalistic approach to Slavs!.

Also, producing theatre in the round means that set cannot be used as backdrop. This adds to the un-naturalistic approach of Slavs! and puts additional emphasis on the actors.

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#### Possible Questions:

*How else is the break of the fourth wall accomplished during Slavs!?*

- characters running in from the outside and leaving again
  - shouting the placement and movement of set pieces
  - during the Politburo speech the actor uses Tarragon’s audience for his presentation in the play
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*Plays are not normally produced in the round. Why?*

Many plays are written in such a way that you need to have the *world of the play* (i.e. proscenium style shows). For instance shows written by Chekov or Ibsen are in a style called naturalism and lean towards using a proscenium stage.

Because of the way most plays are written, technical problems arise when a choice is made to do theatre in the round; such as *blocking the actors, working with sight lines, and size and placement of furniture*. The designer must ensure that the audience can see over elements of the scenery (for Slavs! these include the risers and the desk).

Furthermore, during theatre in the round performances, audience members are very aware of each other's presence. This awareness may be distracting in some cases, but helps shows such as comedies where laughter is contagious.

### **Several sketches instead of a linear narrative**

Tony Kushner's writing of Slavs! helps invoke its un-naturalistic style. In a 90 minute play there are three acts as well as a prologue and an epilogue. Each scene takes place in a different location; from outside the Kremlin in Moscow to inside a doctor's office in Siberia. The unlikely settings of Slavs! such as the epilogue in heaven and the second act in the guards' chamber of the Pan-Soviet Archives for the study of cerebro-cephalological historico-biological material reinforces the vaudevillian un-naturalistic side of Slavs!

As well, not all the characters seem at first to be connected. It is only in the epilogue that the little girl (Vodya) meets up with the dead politburo members and thus brings some cohesion to the narrative.

### **Cross gendering of roles**

In order to heighten a satire, male characters are played by female characters and vice versa. This cross gendering makes us laugh (*how silly it looks to see a man wearing a skirt*) and prevents us from engaging in the story as a reality and therefore reinforces to us the idea that we are watching a play. For instance, during Slavs! the highest ranking officials are aging politburo members played by female actors.

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### **Theatre design reinforces some themes of Slavs!**

*Levels of Society:*

During the prologue elderly babushkas are sweeping snow on the street level outside the Kremlin. The entrance to the Kremlin is represented by risers. The different *set* levels represent the different levels of *society* that exist in Russia (ex. the contrast is witnessed between the babushkas and the politburo members).

Designer John Jenkins emphasized the different levels of society image through his costume design. For instance, the higher the status of the Politburo characters the more medals on their clothes whereas the babushkas are wearing old worn in clothing that is pieced together.

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### **Possible Questions:**

*After viewing the show can you think of additional examples of how designer John Jenkins represented different levels of society through costume design?*

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### *Satirical/ Cliched Representation of Russia:*

#### *Images of Snow:*

As part of a satirical representation of Russia the notion that it is always cold and there is always lots of snow images. The first image we see on stage is a giant hammer and sickle made of snow- that is immediately swept away by the two babushkas.

In order to develop a satirical image of Russia during Slavs!, it continually snows on the stage. The continual snow fall reinforces the satirical and un-naturalistic tone of the play. For instance, it even snows during the indoor office scenes. As well, the material used to represent the snow is purposefully NOT fluffy white snow. Instead but pieces of paper are scattered around the stage.

In addition, some of the props used are old clichés such as the samovar used to drink tea- this is no longer used in Russia although maybe 60 years ago it was.

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#### **Possible Questions:**

*What other props, elements of design, costumes may contribute to the satirical representation of Slavs!?*

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#### *Russia; a mirror of ourselves:*

Sometimes it's easier to look at a story whose characters and settings seem foreign (like contemporary Russia as it struggles with ever-changing politics and environmental catastrophes), which end up reminding us that Russia's issues may be a mirror of our own.

There are many countries in the world that are undergoing massive political changes. We too are questioning our own political realities in North America. Similarly, the reality of global warming, polluted drinking water in parts of Ontario and the pollution of the great lakes only bring to light that we, as Canadians, share similar struggles as the characters in Slavs!

Through the scenic design, theatre in the round creates the effect as that everybody is watching Russia and almost examining its issues via a microscope. No matter which way the characters turn the audience (the world) we can see their mistakes, and perhaps by seeing them it will keep us from doing the same.

The final line in Slavs! is, "*What is to be done?*".

#### **What can be done in your community?**

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#### **A Love Story**

Director Dennis Garnhum said that Slavs! was, "Truly a love story".

*What examples can you think of which would bring out the love story within Slavs!?*

- love between Bonfila and Katharina
  - love of Bonfila towards the children in Siberia
  - love of Poppy for Katharina and the party
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## **Slavs!: Character Descriptions**

**FIRST BABUSHKA / SECOND BABUSHKA:** Two old grandmothers who are seen sweeping snow from the steps of a building at the Kremlin. They are of indeterminate, but old, age.

**VASSILY VOROVILICH SMUKOV:** A high-ranking Politburo (the principle policy-making committee of the Communist party) member. He is a pessimistic man in his seventies.

**SERGE ESMERELDOVICH UPGOBKIN:** Also a high-ranking Politburo member. He is an optimistic man in his eighties.

**ALESKII ANTEDILLUVIANOVICH PRELAPSARIANOV:** A Politburo member of indeterminate rank, the world's oldest living Bolshevik (the party that seized power in Russia in the revolution of November 1917). He is much older than ninety, nearly blind and in bad health.

**IPPOLITE IPPOPOLITOVICH POPOLITPOV:** Also known as "Poppy", he is an apparatchik of some importance. He is a sour man in his sixties.

**YEGOR TREMENS RODENT:** Also an apparatchik, but of less importance. He is a companion of Popolitipov and is a nervous man in his fifties.

**KATHERINA SERAFIMA GLEB:** a security guard at the Pan-Soviet Archives for the Study of Cerebro-Cephalognomical Historico-Biological Materialism. She is an inebriated young woman in her twenties.

**BONFILA BEZHUKHOVNA BONCH-BRUEVICH:** A pediatric oncologist, pleasant women in her thirties.

**BIG BABUSHKA:** Yet another old grandmother, yet not connected with the two sweeping the Kremlin. She is larger, unpleasant and sports a mustache.

**MRS. SHASTLIVYI DOMIK:** An unhappy, angry woman in her forties.

**VODYA DOMIK:** A silent girl, dying of cancer, eight years old.

## **Setting**

**Prologue, Act 1:** The Kremlin, Moscow, 1985

**Act 2:** The Pan-Soviet Archives for the Study of Cerebro-Cephalognomical Historico-Biological Materialism, Moscow, 1985

**Act 3:** Talmenka, Siberia, 1992

**Epilogue:** Heaven

## Russian Biographies (In order as introduced in Slavs!)

**Joseph Stalin**, (1879-1953) was a Georgian Marxist revolutionary and leader of the USSR from 1928 to 53. Between 1934 and 1938 he inaugurated a massive purge of the party, government, armed forces, and intelligentsia in which millions of so-called "enemies of the people" were imprisoned, exiled, or shot. From 1945 until his death he conducted foreign policies which contributed to the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West.

**Mikhail Gorbachev**, was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the USSR from 1985-1991 and president of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Gorbachev initiated radical reforms and restructuring (*perestroika*) within the Soviet economic and political system. As a result there were increased civil liberties, public debates, journalistic and cultural freedoms. As well, a reappraisal of Soviet history was allowed under the policy of *glasnost* (*openness of information*). In foreign affairs Gorbachev reduced military spending, pursued a policy of détente and nuclear disarmament with the West, and ended the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan (1989).

Born in Barmen, Germany **Friedrich Engels** (1820 –1895) was a socialist philosopher and founder of "scientific socialism". Engels met Marx in Brussels in 1844 and collaborated with him on the Communist Manifesto (1848).

**Rasputin**, (1871-1916) was introduced into the Russian royal household and quickly gained the confidence of the emperor (Nicholas II) and empress by his ability to control through hypnosis the bleeding of the haemophiliac heir to the throne. He also created a public scandal through his political influence in the appointment of government ministers. He was murdered by a group of aristocrats, led by Prince Felix Yusupov, a distant relative of the Tsar.

**Vyshinsky**, Andrey Yanuaryevich 1883 -- 1954 Russian jurist and politician, born in Odessa, Ukraine. He studied law at Moscow, joined the Communist Party in 1920, and became professor of criminal law and attorney general (1923--5). He was the public prosecutor at the state trials (1936--8) which removed Stalin's rivals, and later became the Soviet delegate to the UN (1945--9, 1953--4), and foreign minister (1949--53).

**Dzerzhinsky**, Felix Edmundovich 1877 -- 1926 Russian revolutionary, born in Vilna. In 1897 he was exiled to Siberia for political agitation, fought in the 1905 revolution, and in 1917 became chairman of the secret police and a member of the Bolshevik central committee. After 1921 he reorganized the railway system, and was chairman of the supreme economic council (1924--6).

**Marx**, Karl (Heinrich) (1818 –1883) born May 5, 1818 in Trier, Rhenish Prussia he was a philosopher, economist, revolutionary leader. Marx lived in many cities across Europe including Paris, Brussels, and Berlin. In 1848 published the Manifesto of the Communist Party (known as The Communist Manifesto) with Engels. Marx published five books during his lifetime. Two books, both on economics, are the ones on which Marx's worldwide reputation rests: Critique of Political Economy and Das Kapital (Capital).

**Lenin**, Vladimir Ilyich (originally Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov) (1870 –1924) was a Marxist revolutionary, born in Ulyanovsk Russia. He studied at Kazan and St Petersburg, graduating in law. After the 1917 revolution, he went to Petrograd from Zürich, and urged the immediate seizure of political power by the proletariat under the slogan "All Power to the Soviets". In October 1917 he led the Bolshevik revolution and became head of the first Soviet government. At the end of the Civil War (1918--21), he introduced the New Economic Policy.

**Brezhnev**, Leonid Ilich (1906 –1982) was a Russian statesman, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, and president of the Supreme Soviet (1977—82). He became a political commissar in the Red Army in World War 2. He was general secretary of the Party Central Committee after Khrushchev, and emerged as the most powerful figure in the Soviet Union as he was the first to hold simultaneously the position of general secretary and president.

**Andropov**, Yuri Vladimirovich (1914 – 1984) was a Russian politician. He was ambassador in Budapest, in 1967 was appointed KGB chief, and in 1973 became a full member of the Politburo. He had a reputation of having a firm handling of dissident movements. He was chosen as Brezhnev's successor in 1983, but he died after less than 15 months in office.

**Chernenko**, Konstantin Ustinovich (1911 –1985) was Soviet statesman and president (1984--5). He became a member of the Politburo in 1978. Chernenko was a rival of Andropov in the Party leadership contest of 1982, and became Party general secretary and head of state after Andropov's death in 1984.

**Yeltsin**, Boris (Nikolayevich) 1931 -- Russian president, born in Bukta, Russia. He was inducted into the Central Committee in 1981 by Gorbachev and was appointed Moscow party chief in 1985. In 1989 Yeltsin was elected to the new Congress of USSR People's Deputies, and in June 1991 he was elected president of the Russian Federation. Following the attempted coup to oust Gorbachev in August 1991, Yeltsin's political standing greatly increased when he led the protestors who defeated the coup, and following the break-up of the Soviet Union in December 1991 he remained in power as president of the Russian Federation. In 1993 he called for a referendum to measure his support, received a firm vote of confidence, and proposed a new constitution for Russia.

**Peter the Great**, (1672 –1725) was Russian czar. When Peter was King, Russia was culturally underdeveloped and isolated from the more modern Western Europe. Peter the Great introduced reforms to help reestablish Russia (developing the navy, sciences, the government etc). In 1712, Peter established the city of St. Petersburg on the Neva River and moved the capital there from its former location in Moscow. However, high taxes that often accompanied his reforms led to revolts among citizens.

Born Barfolomei Kirillovich in 1314, **St. Sergius of Radonezh** was a priest. He established the monastery of the Holy Trinity, created several monastery schools and taught farmers better methods of farming. In 1380, he urged Prince/ St. Dimitri Donskoi to fight the Tartars, whom Donskoi defeated at Kulikovo. Of all Russian saints, Saint Sergius is perhaps the most inaccessible and mysterious. His life was so simple, so transparent that one can only observe it: he loved God from his childhood with simple and undivided love.

## Specific Terminology used in Slavs!

**Chernobyl:**

**Dictatorship of**

**the proleteriati:** in marxist theory, the ideal of proletarian supremacy following the overthrow of capitalism and preceding the classless state

**Gradualism:** the principle or method of gradual as opposed to immediate or abrupt change especially in politics, belief in gradual change.

**Menshevik:** a member of a wing of the Russian Social Democratic party before and during the Russian revolution believing in the gradual achievement of socialism by parliamentary methods in opposition to the Bolsheviks.

**Perestroika:** Developed by Mikhail Gorbachev for economic, political, and social restructuring. As a result, Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan, democratic governments overturned Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, Germany was reunited, the Warsaw Pact withered away, and the Cold War came to an abrupt end. Gorbachev introduced policies designed to begin establishing a market economy by encouraging limited private ownership and profitability in Soviet industry and agriculture.

**Petite**

**Bourgeoisie:** the middle class including small shopkeepers and artisans

**Politburo:** the principle policy-making members and executive committee of a Communist party.

**Proletariat:** the lowest class of citizens. The lowest class of any community especially when regarded as uncultured. Wage earners collectively, especially those without capital and dependent on daily labour for subsistence.

**Reformism:** A policy of social, political or religious reform, especially advocacy of reform rather than revolution.

**Samovar:** an urn with a spigot at its base used especially in Russia to boil water for tea

**Sisyphus:** In greek mythology a King was condemned eternally to repeat the cycle of rolling a heavy boulder up a hill in Hades only to have it roll down again as soon as he reached the top

**Socialism:** Term designating differing systems of public ownership and management of production and distribution of goods.

## **Slavs!: Selected Theatre Terms**

When interviewed about his creative process, designer John Jenkins said, “*this play is both burlesque and Brechtian*”.

### **Burlesque Theatre:**

A theatre form that parodies well-known people, events, historical conflicts and stories. This type of theatre first appeared in London in the 1730's, and the finest practitioner of the art was Henry Fielding who wrote Tom Thumb, or the Tragedy of Tragedies in 1730. The title of this burlesque is much like the entire title of Slavs! Thinking About the Longstanding Problem of Virtue and Happiness. Satire is at the base of most burlesque pieces, taking serious situations or problems and turning them into a farcical story. The Licensing Act of 1737 in London effectively ended this form of theatre, since government began censoring all plays

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### **Possible Questions:**

*What aspects of Slavs! can be considered burlesque?*

*What, if any, situations or topics are satirized in this play?*

*Do you believe that satire and parody are acceptable ways of analyzing or dealing with a serious situation? Do you find it disrespectful, or humanizing?*

*Why do you think Tony Kushner chose to use burlesque techniques in his play?*

*Can you think of any other plays you've seen or studied which have elements of burlesque theatre in them?*

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### **Brechtian Theatre:**

German director and playwright Bertolt Brecht was one of the most influential theoreticians of the theatre. He strongly disliked conventional, realistic theatre. One of his most influential directorial beliefs was that the audience needed to be distanced from the life of the play, not drawn into the world the actors are building for them. His concept of audience non-participation was vastly different than other directors of the day (early 1900s), yet Brecht's Berliner Theatre became wildly popular in Germany. He directed shows at his theatre in such a way that the audience was well aware they were watching a play; there was no “suspension of disbelief” on the part of the audience, because the spectacle onstage was so unbelievable. Believing that audiences would be more able to critically judge what they are viewing onstage by presenting such an obviously unrealistic performance, Brecht delivered rich staging imagery designed to surprise the audience with unexpected reflections of its own world.

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### **Possible Questions:**

*What qualifies Slavs! as Brechtian?*

*Did you feel distanced (or alienated) from the world of the play?*

*What impact, if any, did the choice of staging this show in the round have on the meaning of the script?*

*Did you as an audience member feel that you were watching was in fact a work of fiction?*

*Did you feel any aspects of the play were real?*

*Were you able to make any parallels from events onstage to your own life?*

*Discuss the German drama themes mentioned above of public guilt and responsibility as they relate to Slavs!*

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## **Pre show Lesson Plan 1** **Costume Design for Slavs!**

### **Objectives:**

Able to evaluate each of the steps, beginning with costume design, taken in the process of creating and presenting their dramatic pieces, using appropriate dramatic arts terminology.  
Dramatic Arts Curriculum

### **Materials:**

- Attached costume design sketches
- Russian clothing and design research
- Paper, coloured pencils, paints,
- Fabric swatches of all colours, textures, weaves, etc.

### **Activity:**

1. Working individually, students will research the clothing styles and fashions in Russia during the mid 1980's to early 1990's.
2. Using their research from books, magazines, films, the Internet, etc., each student will produce a design notebook. This notebook will include sketches or clippings of what the student has determined the fashion of Russia to be during the stated time period. They will need to have examples of men, women, and children's clothing from various economic classes.
3. Working from their design notebook, the students create two costume renderings of characters from differing social classes in *Slavs!*, using the included character descriptions as a guide.
4. Attached will be fabric swatches chosen by the student to show what kinds of fabrics and colours they see the character wearing.

### **Post Activity:**

- Students present their work to the class (including his/her design notebook)
- Following each presentation may be a question and answer period where the class can ask why specific choices were made.
- After all presentations are finished, the class will discuss the similarities and differences between representations of the same social class. They can also discuss which they feel would be best for *Slavs!*
- The teacher then distributes designer John Jenkins' costume sketches (please find attached) and discuss the differences and similarities the class held with the costume designer for this play.

## Pre show Lesson Plan 2

### Script Analysis as a tool for Monologue Development

#### Objectives:

Interpret a variety of roles/characters. Using techniques of character development;  
Create the inner and outer life of a character, using a variety of strategies e.g.,... research, textual analysis  
Develop the background of a character, using appropriate techniques (e.g., writing in role..)  
Demonstrate the ability to take responsibility, both as an individual and as a member of a group, when working in a theatre ensemble (e.g., make artistic decisions, give support to others)  
Dramatic Arts Curriculum

#### Materials:

- Slavs! scene excerpt.

#### Pre-activity:

- distribute the Slavs! scene to each student
- read through the scene as a class to familiarize students with the text
- you may want to discuss the following points:

*What is the conflict within the scene?*

*Why is Bonfila frustrated?*

*How is Rodent's character portrayed? Does he care about the situation?*

*Why or why not?*

*Have you heard of similar situations where people are sick from pollution? Have you witnessed effects of pollution on the public health within your community (allergies, asthma etc.)?*

#### Activity:

- divide the students into groups of four (or 5 in a class where one student could act as director)
- assign each student a specific character
- within each group the students read through and eventually perform the scene

#### Part 1 Understanding the text:

- breakdown the text terminology in order to understand what the actors are saying:
- In this scene terminology includes **geographic regions** of Russia (*Moscow, Kazakhstan, Semiplatinsk, Chelyabinsk, Altograd, Chernobyl, Dneiper*) and **medical terminology**.
- Students work through the new information in their groups and discuss together the terminology to make sure all understand the scene

#### Part 2 Character Development:

- students work on their individual character development through
  - a) textual information
  - b) inherent (self discovered information)

Character information may include:

- age
- profession
- background
- social status (an element that is highlighted in this play)
- physical appearance (height, weight)
- interests/hobbies
- objectives

### **Part 3 Monologue Development:**

- each student writes a 1 minute internal monologue for their character in the selected Slavs! scene
- working in their groups the students collectively discuss at what point in the scene each character will step out and deliver an *internal monologue* (the other characters freeze at this point)
- the internal monologues can be delivered in an immediate sequence, be interspersed throughout the scene, or occur at the beginning or end of the scene
- students make the artistic choice of when to deliver the monologue and provide reasons to support their choices

### **Monologues and Character Development:**

- the monologues should be used as an extension method to help students interpret and understand their character
- the internal monologue helps the actor communicate to the audience by exposing their feelings and objectives
- it allows for the students to think more deeply about their character's inner life, how multi-faceted and three dimensional they are and provides an opportunity for reflection and analysis

### **Post Activity:**

#### **In class:**

- From doing a textual analysis and internal monologue, what did you learn about your character that surprised you?
- Do you feel that you now have a better understanding of the script?

#### **After seeing the play:**

- discuss the different choices made between Tarragon's production and the students' interpretation of the Slavs! scene (or the possible *similarities*)
- why do you think the actors made those character choices (physical, vocal, tone of voice) in the overall context of the play
- did the scene you worked on in class stand out in how you understand the characters and the rest of Slavs!

## Post show Lesson Plan 1

### Set Design for *Slavs!*

#### Objectives:

Assist students in identifying the artistic choices made by the designer in a dramatic production, as well as assessing the effectiveness of these choices.

Dramatic Arts Curriculum

#### Materials:

- Research materials on 20<sup>th</sup> century Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky. If possible, include photocopies of different pieces of his work.
- If you have access to the Internet, go to **www.artchive.com** for research help. Click **art archive**, and then choose Kandinsky from the menu on the left of the screen.
- Enclosed interview with designer John Jenkins, as well as Play Synopsis.
- Sketching materials

#### Activities:

1. Students should spend some time researching Kandinsky – his life, his art history, the inspiration for his work, etc. This research should be included in their design notebook.
2. The class will be split up into 5 groups, with each group assigned either the Prologue, Act I, Act II, Act III or the Epilogue to design a basic set for. Students will each choose at least one piece of art by Kandinsky that they feel is inspirational to the set necessary for their section of the play.
3. Using the chosen artwork, each group will sketch ideas for a set design. These sketches don't necessarily need to be complete, but they should show the effect of the Kandinsky pieces and they should also incorporate props, set pieces, costumes that would be needed in the Act, as outlined in the enclosed Play Synopsis.

#### Post Activity:

- When the sketches are complete, each group presents their work to the class. They should also show the Kandinsky work, and discuss why the pieces were chosen.
- After seeing the performance, discuss what influence of Kandinsky's work the students recognized. *Was the emphasis obvious after their study of his work, or was it overshadowed by other factors of the set design? What act or scene was Kandinsky's influence seen most clearly?*

## **Slavs! Interview with Designer John Jenkins**

### **Artistic Process:**

John Jenkins is the Set and Costume designer for Slavs! During the design overview meeting, John went through his *individual* artistic process while designing shows for the theatre.

For each show he designs (previous Tarragon work includes Sled by Judith Thompson during the 1996-1997 season) John keeps all his notes, sketches, photographs of the mini set and relevant research in a hard covered black sketch book.

John began working on Slavs! 8 months before its November opening in March of 2000. In the first pages of sketch book John scribbles notes as he reads through each act and scene, breaking down necessary scene changes. Afterwards, John produces a series of brainstorming sketches for each scene in the play.

Before rehearsals begins the designer meets the designer 3 or 4 times for 4 to 8 hours (Slavs! is being directed Dennis Garnhum) to discuss the play, to ensure both share the same vision of the play, and explore how this vision will be represented through scenic design. For instance, it was a collaborative decision between John and Dennis to have the stage setting of Slavs! as theatre in the round.

### **Kandinsky:**

John uses influences of Kandinsky (20<sup>th</sup> century Russian Artist).. For instance John incorporated triangles in the set.

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### **Possible questions:**

*What other shapes from Kandinsky could you put in the set?*

*What sort of colours would you use from Kandinsky's work?*

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### **Metal / Environment:**

John used a lot of metal in the creation of the set. John says, "*the set is red but in fact it is supposed to be a rusty metal, metallic, the industrial feel to Russia*"

In reference to designing he states,

*"you have to be able to let go of ideas or else you'll never find new ideas... you can't limit yourself from the beginning..."*

## **Slavs!** Play Synopsis

### **Prologue:**

**Who:** First Babushka, Second Babushka, Smukov, Uggobkin

**Where:** Entrance steps the Kremlin, Moscow. March 1985.

**Summary:** The audience is greeted with two old babushkas discussing the history of Russian politics, as well as what changes to the political landscape of Russia would accomplish. Their talk is very sophisticated, yet when Smukov and Uggobkin, both Politburo members, arrive at the steps the babushkas turn into simple, toothless, smiling old ladies, sweeping snow that will never stop falling.

### **ACT I**

#### **Scene 1:**

**Who:** Smukov, Uggobkin

**Where:** Outside of the Politburo Chamber in the Kremlin. March 1985.

**Summary:** The two policy-makers discuss the upcoming speech by the world's oldest living Bolshevik, while debating the impacts of Democracy upon their society. Are the Russian people capable or accepting of change?

#### **Scene 2:**

**Who:** Aleskii Antedilluvianovich Prelapsarianov

**Where:** the Chamber of Deputies

**Summary:** Prelapsarianov delivers his speech to the governing body in Moscow. He talks of the past, of the theories upon which the current society was built and challenges those who would choose Democracy to show him the theory they subscribe to. It is an impassioned speech, and shows the passion Prelapsarianov feels toward the past's theories and convictions.

#### **Scene 3:**

**Who:** Ippolite Ippovolitovich Popolitipov, Yegor Tremens Rodent, Prelapsarianov, Uggobkin

**Where:** Outside the Chamber of Deputies

**Summary:** Popolitipov and Rodent are discussing the debate in the Chamber of Deputies following Prelapsarianov's speech – Popolitipov is angry over the policy-makers inability to understand what he holds true, that the human heart is not capable of change. Rodent is simply afraid of all the uproar and unrest, and speaks of fantastical things. Prelapsarianov is exhausted by the un-ending debate raging in the next chamber, and is suffering from an aneurysm. At the end of the scene, Prelapsarianov is struck by a revelation, stating that God is a Menshevik, therefore hating the progressive people of Russia. He becomes so caught up in this revelation that he collapses and dies.

#### **Scene 4:**

**Who:** All in Scene 3, along with Smukov

**Where:** Outside the Chamber of Deputies

**Summary:** The men discuss Prelapsarianov's death; Popolitipov insists that the heart and the mind are in constant battle, and that Prelapsarianov's death was a result of his heart taking revenge on his forward-thinking mind. As they discuss this possibility, Uggobkin decides to "follow him into oblivion"(pg 15) and begins leaping into the air over and over, claiming to be leaping toward the new. As the others beg with him to stop, Uggobkin continues to leap higher and higher until a burst of light falls from above upon his upturned smiling face, and he dies.

## ACT II

### Scene 1:

**Who:**

Popolitipov, Katherina Serafima Gleb, Dr. Bonfila Bezhukhovna Bonch-Bruevich  
**Where:** A Guardroom at The Pan-Soviet Archives for the Study of Cerebro-Cephalognomical Historico-Biological materialism (also known as "Pasovacercephhibimat")

**Summary:**

Popolitipov is desperately trying to convince Katherina of his love. Katherina is a lesbian and admits that she only tolerates Popolitipov's advances because he supplies her with cigarettes. They discuss the contents of this strange Archive: the brains of some of the great political and scientific officials of the Communist party. Popolitipov begins to play his guitar, while they both drink vodka. As they become more inebriated they discuss the current unrest in their country, the power that the old Communist Party held in Russia, and the possibility of love in this corrupt and seemingly loveless world. Suddenly Katherina's lover Bonfila enters the room and tension rises as Popolitipov is a government official and homosexuality is perceived as a crime in this society. He becomes very sad and says that he is going to kill himself.

### Scene 2:

**Who:**

Katherina, Bonfila, Big Babushka

**Where:**

The Guardroom

**Summary:**

Still drinking vodka, the two lovers discuss their relationship. Bonfila is angry with Katherina for showing her affection in front of a government official, while Katherina, being much more inebriated than Bonfila, simply wants to show her more affection. Bonfila has brought an icon of St. Sergius of Radonezh, with Lenin's face painted on it. St. Sergius is said to have been a worker of miracles, and when Katherina hears this, she prays to him for more vodka. As soon as she finishes her prayer, a big babushka covered in snow enters and through a string of chaotic events gives them a bottle of vodka. Katherina and Bonfila are speechless.

### Scene 3:

**Who:**

Katherina, Bonfila, little girl

**Where:**

The Guardroom

**Summary:**

The women have almost finished the second bottle of vodka, and Katherina is asleep in Bonfila's lap. Bonfila speaks to the icon, asking Lenin to come back and repair the suffering the Russian people have been living through. She begs with him to come back and explain how they went wrong so that they may arrive at Paradise. Suddenly red candlelights blink around them and a little girl enters, staring at Bonfila. She is silent, terrifying both of the women.

## ACT III

### Scene 1:

**Who:**

Rodent, Vodya Domik, Mrs. Domik, Bonfila, Katherina

**Where:**

A white room in a medical facility, Talmenka, Siberia, 1992

**Summary:**

Rodent arrives to report to Yeltsin on the work done at a medical facility in Siberia. He meets Vodya Domik, an eight-year-old girl and her mother. We discover that Vodya cannot speak and suffers from a numerous medical problems. Bonfila runs the medical facility where they take care of children like Vodya who are described as "nuclear mutants". Bonfila explains that the causes are genetic from when a nuclear warhead was detonated nearby in 1949 and no one in the area was evacuated. Katherina also appears and we see that she has followed Bonfila to be with her in Siberia.

## **EPILOGUE**

**Who:** Upgobkin, Prelapsarianov, Vodya

**Where:** Heaven, resembling a city after an earthquake

**Summary:** Upgobkin and Prelapsarianov discuss what they expected of Heaven, and how this experience is very different from their assumptions. They consider looking down on Earth to see how Russia is developing, but decide not to due to the depressing events occurring everywhere. Vodya enters and the characters discuss how they died, with Vodya describing in adult-like detail how her cancer killed her and the failure of the communist economic experiences. Upgobkin tells her a story of death and poses the question to all of them, "what is to be done?"

## Post show Lesson Plan 2

### Adaptation, using media

#### Objectives:

Develop a background of a character, using appropriate techniques (e.g., writing in role)  
How dramatic arts represent, influence, and contribute to culture and society  
How the study of dramatic arts can foster self-development and global awareness  
Analyse, through journal writing, discussion, and questioning, the significance of what they have gained from their artistic experiences  
Dramatic Arts Curriculum

#### Materials:

- *Greenpeace* photograph of Russian child
- Los Angeles Times Article "A Nuclear Nightmare. The lethal legacy of the Soviets' atomic obsession." (In the author's notes playwright Tony Kushner states, "I am indebted primarily to a series of articles by John-Thor Dahlburg which ran in the Los Angeles Times")

#### Pre Activity ONE:

- lead a brainstorming session touching on environmental issues such as the water in Walkerton, acid rain and its affect on our forests, Toronto's garbage going to northern Ontario
- students think of how the environmental issues affect the whole community (drawing from examples that they are familiar with)

#### Activity:

- distribute a copy of the LA Times article to students
- students work in small groups
- after reading the article each group selects a paragraph which stands out for them
- the group develops a tableau to best represent their chosen paragraph
- each group presents their piece while one member acts as narrator and reads the text

#### Post Activity:

- debriefing each piece

#### Activity Number Two:

- distribute Greenpeace photograph
- after a series of character development questions (How old are you? What do you do in your free time?) and studying the photograph, students work independently and write a diary entry from the point of view of the child in the photograph
- Students reread their diary entries and pick one sentence that they feel best represents their character
- Sitting in a circle, one after the other, each student reads a sentence
- This creates a rich soundscape and helps with the development of the internal monologue



September 2000 Bashakul, 13 Km from the Mayak nuclear complex, Ural mountains, Russia

Ludmila with her daughter Nastasya and grandson Kostya (R) harvesting potatoes in their small garden.

As a child, Ludmila during the 1950's and 1960's swam in Techa River not knowing it was highly contaminated with radioactive waste. Kostya is born with Down's syndrome.

Ludmila gets an allowance of 125 roubles per month as compensation.

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